

## Forever Accepted

Good Friday, March 31, 2024

### The Via Dolorosa

It's called the Via Dolorosa—the Way of Suffering, and it's not a street, rather it's a route covering, depending on where you start, from a little over half a kilometer to almost two kilometers through the city of Jerusalem. For centuries pilgrims have traveled there, especially at this time of the year, to follow in Jesus' footsteps symbolically recreating the route taken by Him on his way to be crucified. It's changed over the years. Originally there were no stops along the way from the Garden of Gethsemane, outside the old city, to the church of the Holy Sepulcher, but later, the stations of the cross were added, sometimes with dramatizations of the events which were said to have taken place on those particular sites.

Of course, no one knows for sure exactly where any of the events marked in Scripture actually took place, but we know that they did. We know that Jesus was arrested in Gethsemane, after praying for the strength to endure all that He knew to be coming in obedience to the will of the Father.

We know that from there, He was taken to the house of Caiaphas, the High Priest, where He was questioned by the priests and the Sanhedrin, and

<sup>67</sup> ...they spit in his face and struck him. And some slapped him...

They spit on, and slapped the Lord of Glory, from whom, for whom and to whom are all things, and they said to Him,

<sup>68</sup> ...“Prophecy to us, you Christ! Who is it that struck you?” Matthew 26:67–68 ESV

We know that late that night, as morning approached, Peter, as prophesied, denied His Lord, and according to Luke, Jesus heard it, and turned to look at him. I have to think that even though He knew it was coming, that must have been one of the more difficult moments, seeing one of His own, one who had boasted that he would be faithful even if he had to die, deny even knowing his friend and Lord.

We know that when it was day, after beating and cruelly mocking Him, they took Him to Pilate, the Roman governor, who tried to pass Him off to Herod for judgment, but Herod passed Him back, cementing a friendship between the governor and the puppet king.

### The Place of the Skull

We know that when Pilate seemed determined to punish and release Jesus, the crowd

<sup>21</sup> ...kept shouting, “Crucify, crucify him!” Luke 23:21 ESV

until finally, Pilate delivered Jesus over to their will and they led Him away to be crucified, and we know that

<sup>25</sup> And it was the third hour...

(9 o'clock in the morning)

...when they crucified him. <sup>26</sup> And the inscription of the charge against him read, "The King of the Jews." Mark 15:25–26 ESV

In First Corinthians, Paul wrote that

<sup>8</sup> None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. 1 Corinthians 2:8 ESV

But they did. The Word who spoke the world into existence and upholds the universe by that same power, was stripped, and beaten, nailed to a Roman cross, and lifted up to the scornful wonder of a world that refused to recognize that God had come near with mercy and grace to save to the uttermost those who would draw near to Him in repentance and faith,

We know that even as He labored to breath, and His blood was poured out that day long ago,

<sup>29</sup> ...those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, <sup>30</sup> save yourself, and come down from the cross!" Mark 15:29–30 ESV

So, they chided the One who just hours before had reproved an over-zealous disciple, saying,

<sup>52</sup> ..."Put your sword back into its place... <sup>53</sup> Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? Matthew 26:52–53 ESV

But,

<sup>7</sup> ...he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. Isaiah 53:7 ESV

Then,

<sup>31</sup> ...the chief priests with the scribes...

(the very ones who had delivered Him up out of envy)

...mocked him to one another, saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. <sup>32</sup> Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe."

And even

Those who were crucified with him also reviled him. Mark 15:31–32 ESV

### Once Forsaken

We know that even when the sixth hour had come, and there was darkness over the whole land at high noon, even then they refused to see the judgment that loomed with the clouds that hid the Sun. Even in that unnatural darkness they refused to see what was unfolding before their very eyes. Yes, He was

<sup>23</sup> ...delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God... Acts 2:23 ESV

as Peter would later say, and

<sup>4</sup> ...we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.

as if, somehow, He deserved all this.

<sup>5</sup> But he was pierced for **our** transgressions...

Do we understand this? Do we really understand and believe that

**he** was crushed for **our** iniquities...

In truth, He had been nailed to the cross, but the hymn writer got it right when he said, "It was my sin," (it was our sin), "that held Him there." Every drop of that precious blood that fell that day on the parched soil of this broken, sin-ravaged planet is on us, because

upon **him** was the chastisement that brought **us** peace, and with **his** wounds **we** are healed. Isaiah 53:4-5 ESV

"Amazing grace," indeed. "Amazing love, how can it be, that Thou, my Lord, should die for me?" For,

<sup>6</sup> All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on **him** the iniquity of us **all**. Isaiah 53:6 ESV

All this for us men, and for our salvation. But, as if all of this were not enough,

<sup>33</sup> ...there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. <sup>34</sup> And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Mark 15:33-34 ESV

An old movie that many of us have seen spoke of the sound of ultimate suffering. It was a comedy, but this is not. This truly is the sound of ultimate suffering, when the very Son of God drug His bloody and torn flesh up the rough timbers of the cross, gasping for enough breath to cry out, "My God," (not "My Father, not here), "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

<sup>35</sup> ...some of the bystanders hearing it said, "Behold, he is calling Elijah."

And, mocking still,

<sup>36</sup> ...someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink, saying, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down." Mark 15:35-36 ESV

Earlier in the week, when Jesus had cried out, "Father, glorify your name, a voice spoke from Heaven saying, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." But there in the preternatural darkness, on a hill called the place of the skull, when Jesus cried, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" the heaven's remained dark, and no answer was given from that quarter.

The thing is, we think that we know this. We think that we know what it's like to be forsaken, abandoned, betrayed by friends and family. We think that we have felt this pain and so, have some small understanding of what this was all about, but we don't, especially if you are in Christ—if you belong to Him, if you are saved by grace through faith—because if that is true, then God has promised,

<sup>5</sup> ...“I will never leave you nor forsake you.” Hebrews 13:5 ESV

and Jesus Himself has said,

<sup>20</sup> ...behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” Matthew 28:20 ESV

And none of us who are alive and breathing here today know what this is, because this is hell. The Heidelberg Catechism teaches us that

That during his whole life on earth, but especially at the end, Christ sustained in body and soul the anger of God against the sin of the whole human race.

And that's so easy for us to say, but understand,

<sup>21</sup> For our sake [God] made him to be sin who knew no sin... 2 Corinthians 5:21 ESV

Jesus Christ, the Son of God was made to be sin. I don't believe that we can ever understand what this means. Maybe we have at some point in our lives been overwhelmed with a sense of our sinfulness and unworthiness. Maybe, we have gone through what the mystics called “the dark night of the soul” because we had some sense of the darkness in our own hearts. Well, imagine taking that—your sin, your shame, your guilt—together with the sin, shame, and guilt of all for whom Christ died, and concentrating it into one, single toxic cup. That's the cup that Jesus drank for us on the cross.

He became a curse for us. He humbled himself on the cross to hell's deep agony, and it was that which wrung from him the cry, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

### For Us, and For Our Salvation

So, even though the heavens were silent in response to that cry, we know the answer to Jesus' plaintive lament. I read it a few moments ago.

<sup>5</sup> ...he was pierced for **our** transgressions; he was crushed for **our** iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought **us** peace, and with his wounds **we** are healed. Isaiah 53:5–5  
ESV

Or, as it says in our liturgy for the Lord's Supper,

...we bear witness that our Lord Jesus was sent by the Father into the world, that he took upon himself our flesh and blood, and that he bore the wrath of God on the cross for us.

We also confess that he came to earth to bring us to heaven, that he was condemned to die that we might be pardoned, that he endured the suffering and death of the cross that

we might live through him, **and that he was once forsaken by God that we might forever be accepted by him.**

That's the answer, and although He asked the question, Jesus knew it too. He said,

<sup>27</sup> "Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? But for this purpose I have come to this hour." John 12:27 ESV

He said,

<sup>24</sup> Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." John 12:24 ESV

He said,

<sup>31</sup> Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. <sup>32</sup> And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." John 12:31-32 ESV

So, in the end, His lament from the cross simply reflects the price that had to be paid for us, and for our salvation, and Jesus paid it all. He drank the cup to its bitter dregs.

<sup>22</sup> He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. <sup>23</sup> When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. <sup>24</sup> He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. <sup>25</sup> For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls. 1 Peter 2:22-25 ESV

If, indeed, we have; if we have acknowledged and repented of our sin; if we have turned to God through faith in Jesus Christ alone, and been born of His Spirit; if we have been saved by grace through faith, and discovered that in Him is life, and the life is the light of men, the light that overcomes and dispels the darkness of our hearts, the light that cleanses us of our secret shame and guilt. Because

<sup>11</sup> He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.

(in fact, they crucified Him).

<sup>12</sup> But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, <sup>13</sup> who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. John 1:11-13 ESV

And if you have trusted in Christ, then

<sup>1</sup> See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. 1 John 3:1 ESV

Hallelujah! Amen!

<sup>2</sup> Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. <sup>1 John</sup>  
3:2 ESV

So, now,

<sup>23</sup> 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! <sup>24</sup> For he has not despised or abhorred the affliction of the afflicted, and he has not hidden his face from him, but has heard, when he cried to him.

He was once forsaken by God that we might forever be accepted by him. Even so,

<sup>26</sup> The afflicted shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek him shall praise the LORD! <sup>Psalms</sup>  
22:23–26 ESV