

Good Friday

The Greatest Battle Ever Fought

Sermon Text: Matthew 27:45-50

From noon until three in the afternoon darkness came over all the land. About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “*Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?*” (which means “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”). When some of those standing there heard this, they said, “He’s calling Elijah.” Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge. He filled it with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink. The rest said, “Now leave him alone. Let’s see if Elijah comes to save him.” And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit.

Even if they didn’t know him, no one there could have denied that his death was significant. Right when the sun was at its highest point, it turned dark. The darkness came because of a crucifixion—an ugly way to put people to death. It could sometimes take a couple of days to die, and every minute of it was agony. A person dies on a cross because of asphyxiation, when the breaths get shallower and shallower and begin to fill with fluid.

Jesus was with two others on their crosses outside of Jerusalem. Less than a week before, thousands had called him their Savior. A few hours before this, in front of Pilate, Jesus acknowledged he was the King of the kingdom of truth.

But here he is, this special warrior, fighting the final battle, and dying. From the time he was a baby wrapped in cloths and held by his mother, his whole life on earth was to prepare for this. Your future, my future, and the future of everyone who has ever lived was hanging on the outcome of this battle:

It is not an overestimation to say that this is The Greatest Battle Ever Fought.

There was a YouTube channel I discovered a few years ago called, BazBattles. It’s a terrible name. But a fascinating study on the great battles that have shaped our world. He dives in and explains the great battles of history from the Ancient Greeks, to the Crusaders, to WWII. He breaks down troop movements, and logistics, and the rationale of generals with the decisions they made sometimes

out of wisdom, and sometimes out of folly. He even comments on deeper meaning of these battles and what would have happened had it gone the other way, sometimes with incredible consequences that would effect the way we look at the world today.

But the world doesn't look at the cross as a battle in the same way that we do. The life of Jesus is the most significant life in all of history. What happened on the cross at his death changed the entire world and everyone who has ever lived.

Every battle has two sides. Jesus was only one fighting it on his side. But Satan and the world were working together to relentlessly attack Jesus from the other side.

At 3pm, Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Physically, the agony that Jesus suffered was horrendous. Start counting on the night before in the Garden of Gethsemane. There was no sleep that night because of the trials. Then came special punishment: the crown of thorns, the constant mocking, the blows to his face, the humiliation of having his clothes stripped off, the cruel scourging that dug into his skin and muscles and down to the bone. In this beaten and weakened state, they made him carry the instrument of his death. And then after the grueling march, he drove long nails through his wrists and feet and hoisted up the cross to being his crucifixion. And all the while, the Jewish leaders are there smiling at the sight, mocking him. How can anyone do such things to another human being? How can anyone do such things to the Son of God? It's hard to read this account.

I think you and I more innately understand the physical suffering. But perhaps that physical suffering was like an insect sting compared to the spiritual suffering. The darkness creeps in. That darkness shows us how much God hates sin, that terrible thing that obscures our sight and our understanding of him. That darkness is both God's reaction to the judicial murder of his Son, and God's dreadful judgment upon sin as suffered by his Son."

When that darkness rolled in, I'm sure that it shut the mouths of those mockers. It was not ordinary. Jesus was not ordinary. This battle was not ordinary. The Son of God taking on the sins of the world, and my sins as well. So much darkness! All the genocides and massacres, all the abortions, all the divorces, all the lies, all the horrible things you and I have ever said and done and thought. And Jesus is fighting that darkness alone, pure, holy, and faithful, still loving us, still praying for

those who did this to him, still preaching the gospel to the thief next to him, still holding his ground.

But his suffering wasn't done yet. No, his Father's white-hot anger still needed to burn against him. Because that anger was for sin. And Jesus was taking all sin on his shoulders. You can hear it in Jesus' voice as his tone changes. An awful and loud cry came from those lungs, struggling to breath, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?"

The Old Testament prophet Isaiah explains what is happening, "Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted" (Isaiah 53:4).

All this is because of us. Jesus remained perfect and holy in himself this entire time. Yet our sin was charged to him and he was willingly paying for it. We are each of us aware that something is broken inside us. Often we think that we will just work harder to break that anger habit, that laziness habit, that lust habit, that greed habit, that overeating habit, and all the other sins we find ourselves falling back to. But the truth is that our problem is bigger. We cannot simply work hard enough. It's the most important battle in history, and we think we can fight it and win? We need a warrior bigger than our problem who can win that forgiveness for us all. We need God's grace in all its sweat and blood.

The end was near. I don't know how long that darkness stuck around. Maybe it was already retreating. Things happened very quickly then. Jesus was thirsty. "When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished" (John 19:30). "And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit" (Matthew 27:50).

In Mark's gospel, he records that the thick temple curtain was torn in two from top to bottom (Mark 15:38). Someone once said that was God's way of saying "Amen" to Jesus' words "It is finished." An amen to the need for more sacrifices. An amen to the sheep, goats, and bulls that needed to be killed year after year. An amen to the need for priests, and high priests, of imperfect intercessors to go to God for you. An amen to all the restrictions that were in place. An amen to all the reminders of the separation between God and man.

As predicted so long ago, Satan struck his heel, but Jesus crushed his head. The battle was won and the victory cry has echoed out for generations until now,

where you and I hear it still. Our holy Jesus, who remained unspotted and unblemished as he experienced our hell, now offers his pure and perfect life as the final, once-and-for-all sacrifice.

There is nothing more you or I, or even God, has to do for our guilt and sin. It is a Good Friday. It is finished. Amen.