

The Death Of Jesus.

Text: Luke 23:46-48

Suggested Hymns:

48, 80, 66, 61, 54

1) How Jesus died

2) The Effect Of His Death

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Luke 23:46-48, *⁴⁶ And when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said, "Father, 'into Your hands I commit My spirit.'" Having said this, He breathed His last. ⁴⁷ So when the centurion saw what had happened, he glorified God, saying, "Certainly this was a righteous Man!" ⁴⁸ And the whole crowd who came together to that sight, seeing what had been done, beat their breasts and returned.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

What shall we do? Shall we weep, or shall we rejoice?

Today we must sing,¹

Alas, and did my Saviour bleed,

And did my Sovereign die?

And surely, if ever there was an occasion for shedding tears, it is the memorial day of Jesus' death, who died for us all and gave His life as a sacrifice to atone for our sins.

But again we know, had Jesus not died for us, we would all be lost and suffer eternal misery in the world to come; and it was the death of our divine Lord that rescued us from this terrible doom and opened to us the gates of paradise, that we might live in happiness and bliss which words cannot describe.

Must not Good Friday, viewed from such a point, be to us all a day of great rejoicing, since this day we were rescued from hell, and the gates of heaven were thrown open before us?

If ever a minister of the Gospel, whose sacred duty it is to proclaim the divine truth, must feel his own inability, it is on this day, when he is confronted with the most important event in the history of the world, when he is to dwell upon that which came to pass on Mount Calvary.

That spot is the centre of all things. The streams of ancient history converge here, and here the river of modern history takes its rise. The eyes of patriarchs and prophets strained forward to Calvary, and now the eyes of all generations and of all races look back to it.

The person who seeks after the truth and who has explored the realms of knowledge comes to Calvary, and finds at last that he has reached the centre. The weary heart of man that has wandered the world over, in search of perfect sympathy and love, at last arrives here and finds rest.

Still, although the theme be too high for human thought, we will venture forward, and occupy our minds with it, and receive into our hearts as much as we can of the truth that has a breadth and length, a height and depth which surpass understanding.

With the help of God's Holy Spirit let us consider, *The Death Of Jesus*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. How Jesus Died

Jesus died on the cross. His last suffering began the night before in the garden Gethsemane, where He felt the approach of this last terrible struggle, and in consequence thereof, His agony became so intense that drops of sweat intermingled with blood fell from His face upon the ground.

During that sleepless night He was abused in various ways. He was taken captive, and led from one place to another; and in the morning He was delivered to the Roman governor Pontius Pilate. Then He was scourged, and crowned with thorns, and ill-treated until He was almost exhausted from pain and fatigue. At last He was affixed to the cross, His hands and feet being pierced with nails.

But how did Jesus die on the cross? What was the cause of His death? Did He die from exhaustion? Did He hold on to life as long as He could, and did He grow weaker and weaker while hanging on the cross, until His strength failed

Him and life passed away? Did life ebb away and vanish slowly and finally disappear, like a stream that is lost in the sands of the desert?

St. Luke says, He *cried out with a loud voice*. His voice rang out loudly through the darkness that accompanied His death on Mount Calvary.

A man dying from exhaustion can scarcely utter a faint whisper in his last moments, and his attendants must strain their ears to catch his last words. Jesus, therefore, did not die from exhaustion. He was in full possession of His strength to the last minute. This is one of the most remarkable features connected with His death.

It was so surprising to all who witnessed the death of the divine Sufferer, that they did not know what to make of it. We are told, "*They feared greatly*,"² and even Pilate marvelled when he was informed that Jesus was already dead.

The crucified generally lingered from twelve to forty-eight and even to seventy-two hours. And to see a crucified man die shouting with a loud voice, this was something unheard of.

Perhaps someone will say, What is the difference? Is it not sufficient simply to know that Jesus died for us? What does it concern us whether He died from exhaustion or in full strength?

My friends, that is not a matter of indifference. Had Jesus died from exhaustion, had He held on to life until He had to give up His soul, then it would be apparent that He was not God but a mere man. Then the old serpent really would have conquered Him in this great struggle.

But this crying with a loud voice shows that Jesus did not die because He had to yield to the inevitable, that His death was not an irresistible doom, but an act of His will. Jesus certainly suffered and endured all the pains of a dying man. But while mortal man dies because he must, Jesus, the Son of God, died because He could.

He certainly could have more than outlived the thieves that were crucified with Him. But He died voluntarily. Jesus said to the Jews in John 10:17-18, *I lay down My life that I may take it again. ¹⁸ No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again.*

Voluntarily Jesus surrendered Himself to His enemies. Never would they have been able to apprehend Him, or to do Him any harm, had He resisted. But it was of His own will that He submitted to their ill treatment, to the scourging, crucifixion, and all the sufferings. It was of His own will that He brought the great sacrifice of His life and gave up His Spirit.

We are also told which were His last words. The last words of a dying friend or relative are dear to us, especially if they are words of Scripture. Christ's last words were a quotation from that most precious of all the books in the Old Testament, from Psalm 31:5a, ⁵ *Into Your hand I commit my spirit*. And *Having said this, He breathed His last*.

Satan, who tempted the divine Sufferer in the wilderness, certainly was close at hand when Jesus was dying, and eager to seize His departing soul. But Jesus plucked His spirit away from these hostile hands and securely placed it in the hands of the Father.

His spirit was now in paradise, while His lifeless body was in the hands of men, and was afterwards taken to the grave. The terrible struggle was ended and the Man of Sorrows was beyond the reach of all the enemies, visible and invisible, by whom He had been beset.

2. What Is The Effect Of His Death

And what is the effect of His death? Two most remarkable incidents are recorded in our text, as a direct result of Jesus' death, that of the centurion glorifying God, and that of the people beating their breasts.

We read, ⁴⁷ *So when the centurion saw what had happened, he glorified God, saying, "Certainly this was a righteous Man!"* How wonderful! The centurion was a heathen and his soldiers had abused the divine Sufferer, had mocked Him, spat on Him, crowned Him with thorns, and ill-treated Him from the moment that He fell into their hands until the very last.

The centurion himself may have taken an active part in these proceedings, or at least he did not interfere. But what a change in this man as soon as the head of the Man upon the cross drops upon His chest and life departs!

The centurion was standing opposite the cross and watching the dying victim. Perhaps it had been dawning on his mind for some time that this Man must be,

after all, what He claimed to be. He had heard each of Christ's remarkable words on the cross. He had witnessed the wonderful conversion of the robber and the inexplicable signs of the revolting nature, the darkening of the sun and the earthquake.

Now that Jesus' eyelids close in death he cannot keep his peace. He bursts forth in praise of the dying Saviour and calls Him the Son of God, as the holy Evangelists report. Tradition says that this centurion's name was Longinus, that afterwards he became bishop of Cappadocia, and ultimately died a martyr.

The other incident illustrating the effect of Jesus' death is recorded in the words, "⁴⁸ *And the whole crowd who came together to that sight, seeing what had been done, beat their breasts and returned.*" What a wonderful change Jesus' death produced in the hearts of the people!

Misled by the elders and chief priests, persuaded and moved by the heads of the Jewish nation, they had been crowding around Pilate's judgement seat like a pack of hungry wolves, shouting until they were hoarse, "*Crucify Him! Crucify Him!*"

When Pilate finally consented to grant them their bloodthirsty wish, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, "*I am innocent of the blood of this just Person. You see to it,*"³ they all cried of one accord, "*His blood be on us and on our children.*"

And even while Jesus was hanging on the cross the people who passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads and saying, "*You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross.*"⁴

But what is it we hear of these same people when they see the lifeless body of their victim? Their lips are sealed. They dare not say anything any more. But they smite their breasts, thereby indicating their sorrow and remorse for what they had been doing.

Recall that the tax-collector in the temple *beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!'*⁵

And this, my friends, is the effect of Jesus' death to this day. When you fix your eyes upon the dying Lord, when you look at Him nailed on the cursed tree

and pouring out His soul in death amid heartrending agonies and suffering, what will be the effect on your soul, if you do not wilfully resist and harden your own heart, as did the chief priests and elders?

The first effect will be extreme sorrow, sorrow for your sins which have caused the innocent suffering and painful death of your divine Saviour. You will be moved to smite your breast and to say, *Oh, what have I done? I have nailed the Son of God to the cross! It was my sin which made Him suffer and die.*

And the second effect of Jesus' suffering and death is that you will glorify God, as did the centurion. You will praise God and His wonderful grace and mercy, the great love with which He so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son to die that we might live. You will feel assured now, since Jesus died for you, that your sins are all wiped out, and that the penalty is fully paid for all your transgressions.

May the death of our dear Saviour produce in us all, this double effect; and in this way we shall see the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Hymn 61

² Matthew 27:54

³ Matthew 27:24

⁴ Matthew 27:40

⁵ Luke 18:13