

Theme: The Actions of Christ's Passion – “Suffered”

Text: Matthew 27:35-49

Then they crucified Him, and divided His garments, casting lots, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet: "They divided My garments among them, And for My clothing they cast lots." 36 Sitting down, they kept watch over Him there. 37 And they put up over His head the accusation written against Him: THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS. 38 Then two robbers were crucified with Him, one on the right and another on the left. 39 And those who passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads 40 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." 41 Likewise the chief priests also, mocking with the scribes and elders, said, 42 "He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him. 43 "He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now if He will have Him; for He said, 'I am the Son of God.' " 44 Even the robbers who were crucified with Him reviled Him with the same thing. 45 Now from the sixth hour until the ninth hour there was darkness over all the land. 46 And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" that is, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" 47 Some of those who stood there, when they heard *that*, said, "This Man is calling for Elijah!" 48 Immediately one of them ran and took a sponge, filled *it* with sour wine and put *it* on a reed, and offered it to Him to drink. 49 The rest said, "Let Him alone; let us see if Elijah will come to save Him."

During the season of Lent we have been considering some of "***The Actions of Christ's Passion.***" We've considered how Jesus was "**distressed,**" "**betrayed,**" "**denied,**" and "**accused.**" Today we come to one of the actions that we might think of the most when it comes to the season of Lent: He **suffered**. But doesn't that seem to be a gross understatement? That's it, He "**suffered**"? This verb hardly seems to adequately describe all that Jesus went through on our behalf on Good Friday. And yet that is how plainly, and simply we confess it each Sunday in the Apostle's Creed: "*He suffered under Pontius Pilate.*"

Historians tell us just how badly prisoners **suffered** at the hands of these Roman soldiers during a crucifixion. We're told horrifying details about the whippings the prisoners **suffered** before they were crucified. The scourges they used to whip the prisoners were wooden handles with a number of leather straps attached to them and at the end of each of these straps were torturing devices such as lead balls, pieces of sharp bone, or even nails. These torture devices would dig in and rip and tear away the skin with each whipping. While Jewish law restricted the number of lashings to "forty save one," the Roman law had no restrictions. The soldiers would whip the condemned with these scourges until they saw fit. Josephus, the most famous historian of that day, says that the prisoners were "Whipped till the bones were laid bare" (Wenzel, p. 747). Many times the prisoners died from their scourging, or were left near the brink of death. This was seen as "mercy" from the Romans since it meant that it would lessen the length of time it took for them to die when they were crucified on the cross, which was without a doubt one of the most torturous methods of execution ever invented.

All this—the beatings, the scourging, the mocking, and the crucifixion—were all very vividly portrayed in the well known movie *The Passion of the Christ*, which came out back in 2004. If you've seen the movie you probably remember just how brutal the scourging scenes were. I've seen the movie once, and there's a reason I've only seen it once: Those scenes were so brutal and cruel I could hardly stand to *watch* it. I can not even imagine what it felt like for Jesus to go through it. You'd think the writers of the Apostle's Creed could have come up with a better description of all this than just the phrase: "*He suffered under Pontius Pilate.*"

Well, obviously the Apostle's Creed wasn't written for the purpose of graphically portraying the sufferings and death of Christ. Neither was the Bible, for that matter. The main purpose of the Scripture's accounts of Christ's suffering and death is to lead us to know and believe that Christ suffered all this and died to pay for the sins of each and every individual sinner who's ever lived on this earth—including you and me. That is why I am here to tell you today that our text records a portion of Jesus suffering that was so intense, so agonizing that if we could imagine it, or even portray it on a movie screen, it would have made the scourging scenes depicted in *The Passion of the Christ* seem like "play time." **Verses 45 and 46** of our text tell us, **Now from the sixth hour until the ninth hour there was darkness over all the land. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" that is, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"**

Remember, Jesus had kept silent through all the physical beatings, mocking, and scourging. We aren't even told that He said a word when they nailed Him to the cross, but what He **suffered** during the three hours of darkness on the cross caused Him to cry out the anguished words of David in **Psalm 22, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"** This is when Jesus really **suffered**: He **suffered** under God, His Father. There, in the midst of the miraculous darkness that lasted from noon until 3:00pm—which apparently even covered the whole earth—all of history's sins were laid on the soul of God's Son Jesus. Those sins stirred up God's wrath and earned Christ the punishment of eternal death in hell in our place. The Father had condemned the Son. God had forsaken God. That is true **suffering**. It is too horrifying for us humans to even imagine experiencing the utter hell of being forsaken by God. Try to imagine what it must have been like for Jesus, God's Son, true God Himself, who from eternity had enjoyed perfect unity and fellowship with God the Father and the God the Holy Spirit, now being forsaken and punished by God for sins, which He didn't even, commit! It's unimaginable—in fact, it's all too much for our minds to even comprehend.

How could Christ have suffered the eternal torments of hell for our sins in just three hours? How could God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, perfectly three-in-one from eternity still be perfectly three-in-one while Jesus was forsaken and suffering hell for the world's sins on the cross? Why did Jesus, who knew exactly why He was enduring the punishment of death on the cross, cry out to God the Father in agony, **"Why have you forsaken me?" (v. 46)**. We may never fully know or fully be able to comprehend the answers to all these questions this side of heaven. The truth is we don't know exactly what occurred during those three hours of darkness and anguish on the cross. When I think about this I am reminded of the words of a children's hymn that I learned when I was younger,

*We may not know, we cannot tell what pains He had to bear,
But we believe it was for us He hung and suffered there!*

The Gospel accounts simply don't answer all of our curious questions. What we DO know is that when all of this unimaginable suffering was finally ended there was not one sin left to be paid for; not one soul's sins were left unforgiven. Jesus said, **"It is finished!" And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit (John 19:30)**.

Jesus willingly **suffered** all this for us because He knew it was going to be worth it. The book of **Hebrews** tells us, **"Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." (Hebrews 12:2 NIV).**

As followers of Christ, God has called each one of us to bear our own crosses and **suffer** for Christ as well. Some of us will be called to suffer more than others. What should our attitude be towards these **sufferings**? Like the writer of **Hebrews** says we should **"look unto Jesus"** (**Hebrews 12:2**). First of all, to see how much He **suffered** for us—the physical pains, the emotional distress, and the spiritual anguish of God-forsakenness in hell. Suddenly our sufferings don't seem so bad, and our crosses don't seem so heavy.

Secondly, God invites us to “**look unto Jesus**” and cast all our sufferings on Him. What are you **suffering** right now? Emotional pains, stresses, physical pain, or sickness? Difficulties in your relationships, mistreatment, or temptations? Cast all these sufferings on the cross of Christ. God has promised to help us bear up under all our burdens, and wants to use these earthly **sufferings** to refine our faith like gold and strengthen us so that we walk more closely to Him and cling more tightly to Christ’s cross. Finally, God wants us to “**look unto Jesus**” and see that because of what He suffered for us, whatever we are called upon to **suffer** in this life is going to be more than “worth it.” Paul tells us in **Romans** chapter 8, “**The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs -- heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him*, that we may also be glorified together. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy *to be* compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Romans 8:16-18). He was forsaken that we would be forgiven. He **suffered** eternally that we would have joy *for* eternity. Amen.**