

John 19:28-30

The death of Jesus is covered in all of three verses in John. I'm a very normal, average reader when it comes to speed. I timed myself reading the section that's specifically about Jesus' death. Guess how long it took me? 10 seconds. The section is literally that short. So let's read the verses and move on to our next project, right? Onwards and upwards with our day.

If it were only that simple. We're not like computers where you input information and there it stays in the hard-drive. God made us creatures that need to take time to think, to process, and to be impressed by the meaning of events. That's true of Christian faith too. It's interesting that in the Old Testament God outlined a practical way for the Holy Spirit to work faith and obedience in their hearts through the Word. He said, "Talk about faith in your leisure time at home; talk about faith before you go to bed; talk about faith as you travel; and talk about faith first thing in the morning." I want you to make an observation with me. What did all of those scenarios for faith building have in common? They were all *time* slots when the heart and the mind were free to think, feel, and believe. All that's required aside from the Word is what some argue is a human being's most valuable commodity: time.

It's true. It only takes 10 seconds to read the specific historical account of Jesus' death in John. But 10 seconds isn't going to cut it. Today, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we're interested in spending time remembering Christ's death to deepen our faith. Listen to John's account of Jesus' death.

Later, knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I am thirsty." A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips. When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

I wouldn't have known this five years ago, but I do know it now. Life had to school me for a while. I've sat at quite a few deathbeds now. I know what it's like. I know what a person who is minutes away from dying can and cannot do. And I can tell you very confidently that they don't act like this. They don't have a higher awareness, "that all was now completed," like Jesus did. And they certainly don't come to that realization, and think, "I memorized Psalm 69 and I remember that it says that that I'm supposed to have a drink now." But Jesus does. That's why he says, "I'm thirsty."

And then he takes a drink! So like I told you before, count the ways this is different from the average person moments from death. There's higher critical thinking going on here. There's a verbal request and there's a drink that he takes. These are all things that are impossible for someone minutes away from death. I know it. I've been there. I've seen

it. And then Jesus again verbalized, "It is finished." We're going to come back to that. For now, just notice that he again spoke moments before he died. And then we get this simple report from John: "**He bowed his head and gave up his spirit.**" (v. 30) Again it's important to notice how different this is from everything we know about how death comes to people. In our culture, we use the metaphor of the Grim Reaper. He's dressed in black. He hunts you down with his scythe. He takes you whether you're ready or not. There's none of that here. Jesus put his chin to his chest to prepare for his body to suddenly slump in death. That tells us that he was in full control of his faculties. Then and only then he gave up his spirit. And you have to notice the language there. John very carefully says that Jesus gave up his spirit. It wasn't taken.

That's important. We are not to think that Jesus' body was too tattered, too dehydrated, too exhausted, or too oxygen deprived to continue on. He was still thinking clearly! He still was talking! He was still drinking! I'm not saying he wasn't tired, exhausted, beaten up horribly, etc. I'm not saying that at all! I'm simply pointing out that the Grim Reaper didn't take Jesus. That's not how it went down. Jesus was in full possession of himself. He willingly walked right into his casket. The church fathers made a big deal of this. They said, "He went to death. Death did not come to him."

We need to take the time to remember that for the sake of our souls. This was not a taking from Jesus. This was a giving by Jesus. That's how Jesus lived and that's how he died. Jesus' life was about giving. So was his death. But why? Why did Jesus hand himself over to death? For the entire world, yes, but the Holy Spirit is especially interested in making it personally about you and for you. Martin Luther once quipped, "I'm glad that God didn't say that Jesus died for Martin Luther in the Bible. Otherwise I might think that God was talking about a different Martin Luther." Just like someone in China who shares a name with about a hundred other people, or a Behnke in Brillion could be afraid that God meant to die for someone else by that same name. But no. He gave his life for you. You.

Think of what that means. It means you're one nasty, nasty criminal. That's the only conclusion you can come to. There's no papering it over anymore or trying to wear a facade of goodness. Today the body of the Son of God hangs motionless, inanimate, and in the throes of rigor mortis right before our eyes. So it must be bad. Really bad. Before you tune me out and say, "Ok. Here's the part where pastor tells me how bad I am. Somebody poke me when he gets to the good stuff," please let me explain something about Good Friday. On Good Friday, what you believe about yourself is as important as what you believe about Jesus.

Good Friday is a day to come to grips with what I'm going to call a terrible, supernatural self-knowledge. We were born as the devil's lap dogs, turned inward, and bent on destroying God. The proof is in the pudding. Look inside. Even though God gave you a powerful and glorious new nature at your baptism, you still see the power of your original nature in you. Now I can say that. I can encourage you to believe it. And I am. But only God the Holy Spirit can rip the scales off our eyes to show us each how terrible and deep and wide our personal corruption is. That's why I called it a terrible, *supernatural* self-

knowledge.

Good Friday is the day to talk about it, deal with it, and come to grips with it in our own souls. It's the day to finally stop noticing how evil and bad and hurtful everybody else is around me and to me and realize, "I'm the worst one." It's the day to finally stop sitting smugly and securely in the pew thinking, "Boy, I sure understand why the Son of God had to die for that guy," and time to say with all Christians everywhere around the globe as sincerely as the Apostle Paul did, "I am the worst of sinners. Me!" And you know why and how you can do that so sincerely? Because only you know your deepest crimes against God. Only you see how frequent and heinous they are. You can't see them in anyone else. You can only see them, feel them, and know them in you. Good Friday is a day to stop, take the time you need, and come to this Holy Spirit given conviction: "I only know one person whose sin and corruption created a chasm so deep, so wide, and so complete that only the death of the Son of God could fill that chasm. That person is me."

The paradox in coming to that terrible, supernatural self-knowledge is that it's the path that ends in joy. In fact, the greater our terrible, supernatural self-knowledge is, the greater our joy will be. And, yes, I did use the word joy. Nobody has ever told me how to feel on Good Friday. I took cues growing up from the people around me at church. They were somber. They looked sad. I always believed growing up that Good Friday was mostly about feeling bad about ourselves. But that's only half of the story. Ancient Christians called it Good Friday because it's a good day. It's a joy-producing day. And like I said before, the greater our terrible self-knowledge the greater our joy. Jesus told a story about that once. He said there were two guys who owed a loan shark money. One owed about \$100,000. The other about 3 or \$4,000. Which guy was happier when their debts were canceled? Today, I'm telling you how to feel on Good Friday. Choose quiet joy.

John tells you why. Yes, the debt was huge that we wracked up with God, but we're told that someone other than me deals with debt. In his three short verses on Jesus' death, John used the word, "finished," three times. He commented in verse 18, "Later, knowing all was finished." He went on to say, "so that the Scripture would be finished." And then reported, "Jesus said, 'It is finished.'" He used the exact same word three times in three verses. Think John had something on his mind that he wanted you to know about Jesus' death? Uh, yeah! Finished. Done. Or in the words of a loan shark, "Paid in full."

Finished. Done. Accomplished. Paid in full. Think about it however you'd like. That's what it is. But you know what the best part of that message is? The messenger is. It was Jesus who said, "It is finished." John just reported it. Jesus was the one who actually said it. And Jesus would know. As a person in the Godhead, as someone who dialogued with his Father, Jesus knew what it would take to make a full payment. He knew that all was now accomplished. And he resolved that before he would die, he would make it known. He wouldn't leave it to a middleman. Good Friday's newsmaker would also deliver the day's headline. It's finished. Paid. Done. That's pure joy.

I started this sermon talking how Good Friday is about strategically taking time to remember the Lord's death for us. We agreed that taking the ten seconds it takes to read

the account of Jesus' death in John's Gospel is not enough. So we spent this sermon and we'll spend this service remembering the Lord's death. But I don't want it to stop there. After I watch *Are You Amazed?* I'm going to leave this church without talking to anybody. I'm going to go to my office; I'm going to shut the door; and I'm going to do two things. First, I will be honest with God about my terrible, supernatural self-knowledge. Then I'm going to rejoice in my heart about my payment in Jesus Christ. Mine. Today I want to empower you to do something similar. That's why today I'm playing the pastor card. I've never done it before, but I am today. As a leader of this church family, I'm asking for a new church family tradition to start today. Do this: Watch *Are You Amazed?*; be ushered out of the church in silence; leave the narthex without talking to anybody. Then climb into your car with your family; turn the radio off; and drive home in silence. Use the quiet. Use the time. Be honest with God about your terrible, supernatural self-knowledge. Then quietly rejoice. Call it an inner smile if you'd like. Be confirmed. Be strengthened. On your ride home, choose quiet joy because today you are remembering this truth: I've been bought and paid for in full." Amen.