

January 3, 2015
Sunday Morning Service
Series: John
Community Baptist Church
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Greer, SC 29650
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GOD'S PROMISES FULFILLED AT THE MOST HORRIBLE PRICE

John 19:17-27

Much has been said, discussed, argued, and written about the crucifixion of the man from Nazareth named Jesus. It is doubtful that we can grasp the horribleness of that event even on the surface. Many people over the years have tried to capture the human agony Jesus endured and the varied responses of other people involved in the grand catastrophe (as they would see it).

A few years ago many critics and experts proclaimed that Mel Gibson had captured the full and deep agony of the Christ's suffering better than anyone ever had in his movie titled, *The Passion of the Christ*. No doubt that movie depicts the incredibly gruesome torture a victim experienced as he succumbed to slow, inhumane execution.

But the crucifixion was not just about inhumane suffering. That was certainly an inescapable part of the event. But we cannot help but notice that the writers of the gospels spent little time on the details of suffering. John simply wrote, *They crucified Him*. What makes the suffering even more astonishing than it appears to be from the human perspective is the fact that this was God's plan . . . in detail. God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit had determined that this is how God would pay the penalty for sin. God the Son was not surprised by anything that happened on that wonderfully-horrible day. God the Son knew what awaited Him when He laid aside His glory in heaven to be made like us humans.

In fact, if the sinful humans would have paid attention to God, they also would have understood that all of this suffering was part of God's plan. The Old Testament in particular is full of promises that apply to many aspects of the Son's ministry. There are several

statements from the Old Testament prophets that pictured the details of the crucifixion event. There are also statements made throughout the Gospels that either Jesus or others made along the way that revealed details of these last events of His ministry.

Since God went on record to foretell what Christ would endure, Christ had to endure the promises. Moses taught a very important principle about such promises. He said, "*God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?*" (Numbers 23:19).

The crucifixion was a tragedy indeed from every human perspective. However, it was also a phenomenal expression of God's faithfulness to His promises. Hebert Lockyer has identified nineteen specific Old Testament prophecies that Christ fulfilled during the crucifixion. That does not include the various promises that Jesus and others made or insinuated during His short life on this earth.

John's record of our Lord's crucifixion is virtually a series of promises fulfilled. It is a wonderful record verifying the fact that God will keep His word even if it is painful to Himself. The record is a great definition of love. Was the crucifixion a horrible event? In every way human, yes, it was. But it was also an event that God kept under complete and perfect control. One by one through the hours of the ordeal, God ticked off promise after promise because God is not like man that He should lie.

This should be such an encouragement to us to trust God and take Him at His word. Sometimes it seems impossible for God to carry out what the Bible promises. But God will keep His word just like He did in our Lord's suffering.

The King of the Jews Was Crucified Among Thieves (vv.17-22).

God promised that Jesus would suffer among thieves. He made the promises many years ago that wicked men would pierce His hands and feet. Psalm 22:16 states, "*For dogs encompass me; a company of evildoers encircles me; they have pierced my hands and feet*" (Psalm 22:16). David penned Psalm 22 about 1,000 before Christ was born. In this psalm, David wrote of his own trial with wicked enemies. He agonized at the idea that he could not sense

God's presence. But he was also being born along by the Holy Spirit as he wrote.

Therefore, many of the griefs David wrote about were the griefs Jesus Christ would experience on the cross. For example, in this brief writing God promised that He would forsake His beloved Son while He hung on the cross (v.1). God promised that people would gather around Him to mock Him (v.7). He promised that the mockers would be like bulls and dogs who surrounded Him (vv.12,16). He promised that the Son's bones would be out of joint (v.14). All of this happened.

Furthermore, God promised through Isaiah that the rulers would crucify Him along with common criminals. Isaiah declared, *And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth (Isaiah 53:9)*. A couple of verses later we read, *Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors (Isaiah 53:12)*.

Isaiah spoke the messages God gave him through visions, intuitive knowledge, or some other form of supernatural communication. He revealed many things about Christ's ministry from birth, through life, death, and future kingdom. Seven hundred years before God the Son became one of us, Isaiah promised that He would be associated with the wicked and with a rich man in His death (53:9). He would also be numbered with the criminals, the transgressors.

Did all that kind of stuff actually take place? John recorded the fulfillment of God's promises. He wrote concerning Jesus, *He went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called the place of a skull, which in Aramaic is called Golgotha. There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, and Jesus between them (vv.17-18)*. Every word in this statement is important. *He went out*. Jesus went outside the gate, outside of town where the soldiers administered the gruesome punishment. Because they crucified Him, He was outside the bounds of acceptable religion in Israel.

This was all a perfect fulfillment of the picture the law drew when it required the priests to take the carcass of the sacrifice outside

the camp and outside the city. The law required, *And the bull for the sin offering and the goat for the sin offering, whose blood was brought in to make atonement in the Holy Place, shall be carried outside the camp (Leviticus 16:27)*.

The writer to the Hebrew Christians saw the significant fulfillment of this principle. He wrote concerning Christ: *For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy places by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp. So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood (Hebrews 13:11-12)*. When Jesus "went out," He perfectly fulfilled God's law and promise. The religionists never saw it. They completely missed the Lamb of God taking His cross outside the city to offer the sacrifice for sin.

John pointed out that Jesus went outside the city *bearing His own cross*. That too is fulfillment. Jesus had taught months earlier, *"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (Luke 9:23)*. Surely at the time Jesus gave that challenge, His followers were clueless about its meaning. Now He completed the picture of what it means to be fully identified with the instrument of shame.

In that place of shame, they hung Jesus between two common criminals. The whole affair was unquestionably a travesty of justice. To execute an innocent man in such an inhumane way defies the conscience. To treat our Creator with such disdain defies comprehension. What in the world were those people thinking? But these people had to do these things because the sovereign God had predetermined that it would be so.

Second, God promised that Jesus is King. That promise from God is most obvious in the way the angel messenger revealed to Mary. He said of Jesus, *"He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end" (Luke 1:32-33)*.

There are multiple important points in the angel's promise. First is the fact that Jesus would inherit the throne of His father David. This promise goes back to the original promise God made to David. God told David through the prophet Nathan, *"When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your*

offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever” (2 Samuel 7:12-13). Neither Solomon nor any of David’s posterity did nor could fulfill that promise. Therefore, the Israelites looked forward to this promised king. They still do.

The angel revealed that the promised King would reign over the house of Jacob. The Israelites long for the king who will come and reign over their nation. The house of Jacob has not been a great nation since Solomon died.

But this cannot be an ordinary king. The angel also revealed that the promised King’s kingdom would never end. If we interpret God’s promise to David literally, we too expect Jesus to reign forever. No wonder the debate swirled about Jesus—whether or not He was a legitimate king.

God had somehow revealed the same truth about the kingship of Jesus to the Magi who asked Herod, *“Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him” (Matthew 2:2)?* They came specifically to Jerusalem, the capital of Israel, where they would expect to find a king. They came specifically looking for the king who would reign over the house of Jacob. We do not know how deep was the faith of these wise men. But it is obvious that they trusted God’s revelation that the King was born.

God had pointed to this reality hundreds of years earlier when He inspired the psalmist to write, *Say among the nations, “The LORD reigns! Yes, the world is established; it shall never be moved; he will judge the peoples with equity” (Psalm 96:10).* In this statement also, God promised that Jesus, the man, the Son of Mary, who is Christ, equal with God, the Son of God would be the King.

John recorded the fulfillment of God’s promise. God, controlling Pilate, caused him to identify Jesus correctly. *Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It read, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews” (v.19).* No doubt Pilate did this to spite the Jews who he hated. On one hand, he pointed out that Jesus was from the back hills of Galilee in the little city of Nazareth (a hillbilly, a nobody). On the other hand, he identified this “hillbilly” as the Jew’s king. It was an expression of Pilate’s anger and hatred.

But God used Pilate’s sin to proclaim the truth He had promised for hundreds of years. In fact, the Jewish masses had fulfilled this same promise a few days earlier when Jesus had ridden into Jerusalem on a colt. John also recorded about that event, *So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, crying out, “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!” (John 12:13).*

On the sign Pilate told the people who came to the crucifixion that Jesus of Nazareth is the promised King. And also through Pilate, God proclaimed the truth in the common tongues of the world. *Many of the Jews read this inscription, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and it was written in Aramaic, in Latin, and in Greek (v.20).* Many of the Jews read the fulfillment of God’s promise that He had sent them their King. In fact, Gentiles and Jews alike who were in the city from many foreign lands were able to read the same message. These three languages pretty much covered every tongue or dialect spoken in Palestine. The Jews generally spoke Aramaic. The Romans spoke Latin or at least were most familiar with it. Greek was the universal language like English is today.

Again, this sign Pilate ordered was a perfect fulfillment of God’s promise: *Say among the nations, “The LORD reigns! Yes, the world is established; it shall never be moved; he will judge the peoples with equity” (Psalm 96:10).*

The religious rulers didn’t like the sign. Maybe they knew in their hearts that this was God’s declaration of truth. So, once again the rulers took counsel against God and resisted the truth (Psalm 2:2). *So the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, “Do not write, ‘The King of the Jews,’ but rather, ‘This man said, I am King of the Jews’” (v.21).* It was obvious that Pilate’s intent to offend succeeded. It was also obvious that the Jews rejected their King just like Jesus had promised they would.

Finally, in response to this case of Sanhedrin whining, the governor stood up to the Jews and exercised the authority God had given him. *Pilate answered, “What I have written I have written” (v.22).* Some hours earlier, when Pilate bragged to Jesus about his authority, Jesus reminded him that all authority comes from God. *Jesus answered him, “You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above. Therefore he who delivered*

me over to you has the greater sin” (John 19:11). Up to this point, Pilate had conceded his authority because he feared the Jewish leaders.

God promised that the coming Christ would suffer among criminals and He did. God promised that Christ is the King and Pilate acknowledged that promise. We should rejoice to be the people of the God who is true to His word and able to keep His promises. But there were more promises of God fulfilled at the crucifixion.

At the King’s Crucifixion, Some Played While Others Grieved (vv.23-27).

God promised that men would gamble for Jesus’ meager earthly possession (vv.23-24). That promise from God is again in Psalm 22. David wrote, *They divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots (Psalm 22:18).* To read this statement in the context of David’s complaint does not make much sense. We can understand how he felt like he was at the end of his rope. We sympathize with his concern that it seemed like God had forsaken him. But the idea of his enemies gambling to take his clothes did not make sense.

However, centuries later, when Roman authorities executed criminals, it was common for the executors to divide up the few possessions the criminal had. Typically, there were four soldiers appointed by the centurion to carry out the execution. Therefore, they would divide the possessions four ways.

John wrote down the fulfillment of God’s promise. *When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his garments and divided them into four parts, one part for each soldier; also his tunic. But the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom, so they said to one another, “Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be.” This was to fulfill the Scripture which says, “They divided my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.” So the soldiers did these things (John 19:23-24).*

God left no doubt that this action was the fulfillment of the promise He made through David. The Holy Spirit inspired John to write by way of explanation, *This was to fulfill Scripture (v.24a).* Practically speaking, the soldiers did this kind of thing regularly. We

might expect that they would have divided to each one Jesus’ outer robe, sandals, belt, and head covering. But the inner robe, the tunic, was unique. It was seamless, having been woven in one piece. Therefore, the soldiers gambled for it. How amazing that God arranged the smallest details to fulfill His promises from hundreds of years earlier.

Furthermore, God promised that the few who were faithful to follow Jesus to the cross would grieve (vv.25-27). Consider God’s promises about this part of the event. God promised that the disciples would abandon Jesus. He said, *“Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, against the man who stands next to me,” declares the LORD of hosts. “Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered; I will turn my hand against the little ones” (Zechariah 13:7).* Here we see that God promised through Zechariah that the Good Shepherd’s (John 10) sheep would scatter when the authorities attacked Him. Zechariah wrote this down 500 years before Christ became one of us.

Again, God promised that the friends who observed the Savior’s suffering would look on from a distance. David wrote, *My friends and companions stand aloof from my plague, and my nearest kin stand far off (Psalm 38:11).* Again this statement aptly described David’s pain as he confessed his awful sin in the Bathsheba situation. But this would also be the experience of Christ. The Savior would have to endure the punishment for sin alone.

Isaiah also prophesied how alone the Savior would be. He wrote, *“I have trodden the winepress alone, and from the peoples no one was with me; I trod them in my anger and trampled them in my wrath; their lifeblood spattered on my garments, and stained all my apparel” (Isaiah 63:3).* The first part of this promise describes our Lord’s suffering alone on the cross. The second part of the promise reminds us that the suffering of Christ was how He gained the victory of sin and the enemy.

Furthermore, God warned ahead of time that Mary’s heart would be pierced with grief. *And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, “Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed” (Luke 2:34), (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed” (Luke 2:35).* Where did that come from? When Jesus was eight days old, Simeon, a devout

worshiper of God, met Him when His parents took Him to the temple for dedication. God inspired the man to make this promise. He promised Mary and Joseph that the Christ child would be responsible for the eternal success and eternal failure of many. The blessing of heaven and the horrors of hell meet in Jesus. Only through Him can we escape the one to enjoy the other. But this promise also included the pain Mary would feel in her heart because of her Son.

The crucifixion fulfilled God's promise. John wrote, *(25) but standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. (26) When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" (27) Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.*

Jesus' friends and relatives stood at a distance just as God had promised would be the case. Luke was even more precise in his description. *And all his acquaintances and the women who had followed him from Galilee stood at a distance watching these things (Luke 23:49)*. No doubt His mother's heart was crushed, pierced by the nails that pierced His hands and feet. Jesus acknowledged this pain that fulfilled God's promise by committing her to her nephew John.

There is little doubt that as the execution of Jesus Christ proceeded, the religious authorities and the Roman authorities thought, "This is what we determined should happen, what we have ordered, and good, bad, or ugly, this is what we accomplished."

Surely there were many people who observed this gruesome scene who were not able to explain it all. People like that would say, "Well, it is what it is."

Then there were the disciples, the friends of Jesus, and His mother and relatives. They must have thought, "How could this have happened? This doesn't make any sense at all. It wasn't supposed to turn out this way!"

But God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit endured the execution of the God-man and concluded: "This is exactly the way We planned the redemption of the creation. In every detail, this is what We promised would happen."

Is it not a comfort for us who love God because of this work that Jesus accomplished, to know that He is the blessed Controller of all things? Ancient promises from God being fulfilled in such perfect detail should increase our faith in God immensely. We should ponder this story and then lean on God alone in implicit trust. The person who has never confessed his or her sins and trusted in Jesus Christ alone for salvation should read this story and conclude that God has provided all the proof possible that He alone is to be trusted for eternal life.