

What the cross teaches us - radio

(Lessons from the cross)

(Matthew 27:27-31)

In our sermon today, I want to try to distill what God teaches sinners by the death on the cross of His only begotten Son, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Without a doubt, the sufferings of Christ leading up to the cross, and His death on the cross, is the central theme of all of scripture. Scripture is the revelation of the offering up of the Lamb of God. When Adam sinned in the garden, God clothed him and Eve with coats of skin (Gen. 3:21). Abel offered for his sin a lamb to God (Gen. 4:4). Noah offered to the LORD a sacrifice of every clean animal (Gen. 8:20). God provided Abraham a ram to offer in the place his son Isaac. In the law God gave to Moses, He required animal sacrifices be offered for sins during all the years until Christ was crucified on the cross. Scripture is clear on this point. The Lamb of God is the subject of scripture. Christ crucified is the message God commanded His servants to preach throughout the world. By His death on the cross, the Lord Jesus Christ put away all of the sins of all of His people (Heb. 1:3; 9:26-28; 1 Cor. 15:1-4). He overcame the death we deserve. He destroyed the works of the devil. He bound the devil and He now delivers His people from the kingdom of darkness. Most importantly, by His obedience in His suffering and death on the cross, the Lord Jesus Christ made full satisfaction to God's justice and in fulfillment of God's holy law. Christ honored God's law that His people broke. By His obedience, He might them righteousness before God (Rom. 5:9, 19; 1 Cor. 1:30; 2 Cor. 5:21). Therefore, in heaven, Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, now rules as absolute sovereign over all things in heaven and earth to the glory of God. The Lamb of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, reigns on the throne of His Father (Rev. 3:21).

In all of this, we clearly see that the cross of Jesus Christ is the revelation of the eternal will of God. **The cross of Christ is the center stake in the tent of God's eternal purpose and work throughout all of human history.** What we believe of

Christ and His glorious achievements on the cross reveals whether God has saved us in His sovereign mercy, because saving faith is the gift of God's sovereign grace. God Himself has commissioned His servants to preach Jesus Christ and Him crucified throughout the world until the end of time (Matt. 28:18-20; 1 Cor. 1:17-24; 2:2). The cross of Christ is **the** one subject of utmost importance to men, because Christ and Him crucified is of utmost importance to God!

Now, before I begin to distill what God teaches us in the cross, let me first underscore this: I know that I am nothing but an unworthy, sinful man. In myself, I am the most unworthy and feel myself the least capable to speak on this greatest of all subjects because I am a great sinner (1 Tim. 1:15; Rom. 7:24; Luke 18:13). I must take my place with the worst of men. I know that in me, that is in my flesh, there is no good thing (Rom. 7:18). When we learn the lesson of the cross, this is what we will know about ourselves. I want to drive this point home at the outset to remove any barriers that might arise in your mind because you are able to perceive self-righteousness and sin in me. I am ashamed to admit it, but I am all that and more. I have no reason in myself to think that God would favor me. I only deserve His wrath. As a sinner, I have only one cause for hope. I have what you have: the word of God. When we hear the message of the cross from scripture, remember this: God determined this. God said this. God did this. And God tells sinners like me and you of His wonderful grace in Christ and Him crucified, that we might honor Him for His goodness and rejoice in His salvation (Ps. 116:12-13; Isa. 25:9).

Let's begin, then, by reading a portion of scripture from Matthew 27. Though we will only read a small portion at this time, I will mention many things from the Gospel accounts of Jesus' death, things which you have no doubt heard, and which you will soon remember as soon as I make mention of them. But for time's sake, I must leave to you to read the account of Christ's sufferings and death for yourself from Matthew chapters 26 and 27, Mark chapter 14 and 15, Luke chapter 22 and 23, and John chapter 18 and 19. Those scriptures give many details of the death of Christ. But we will pick up the account after Judas betrayed Jesus to the Jews. The Jews arrested Christ under the cover of night. They took Him to Annas first, the father-in-law to Caiaphas. Then they led Him to Caiaphas, who was high priest that

year. Caiaphas and the entire Jewish council examined Jesus. Without any evidence, they concluded He was guilty and worthy to die. But the only witness against Him was His own testimony that He was the Son of God, the Christ of God. Caiaphas and the Jews, before any trial, determined to kill Jesus. Therefore, His death was a murder committed by the Jewish authorities, acting in treachery, but acting according to the exact predetermined counsel of God (Acts 2:23; 4:27-28). Beginning from this introduction, let's read Matt. 27:27-31.

“27 Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the common hall, and gathered unto him the whole band of soldiers. 28 And they stripped him, and put on him a scarlet robe. 29 And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand: and they bowed the knee before him, and mocked him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews! 30 And they spit upon him, and took the reed, and smote him on the head. 31 And after that they had mocked him, they took the robe off from him, and put his own raiment on him, and led him away to crucify him” (Matt. 27:27-31).

The subject of the cross is very wide and deep. I do not pretend to understand every lesson God teaches sinners in the death of Christ. Nor do I have time to cover every lesson that I do see. But let me list eleven things we learn from the cross.

1. The first we learn is that **the cross was the will of God**. All that happened was done precisely according to God's predetermined purpose. Scripture says to those who crucified Christ: *“Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain”* (Acts 2:23; 4:28). Remember what Jesus prayed in the garden of Gethsemane, before Judas betrayed Him and before the Jews arrested Him? He prayed, *“Not my will, but thine be done”* (Luke 22:42). If and I could see into the heart of Christ, we would find that the one purpose for all that He did was to do the will of God (Luke 2:49; John 4:34; 17:4; 19:30). No matter what it cost Him, the Lord Jesus set Himself to do the will of His Father. What was the will that His Father gave Him to do? It was this: to save His people from their sins, to defeat every enemy, all to the glory of

God alone. How did the Lord Jesus Christ accomplish this salvation? What did God require His Son to do to fulfill His will? He required Him to make atonement for the sins of His people by offering Himself as a sin offering, bearing both the guilt and punishment for the sins of His people, answering justice, fulfilling His law, accomplishing all of this by His own suffering and death in their place. Christ did the will of God. That will was to redeem God's elect people from sin and death and the devil. On the cross, Jesus Christ overcame every enemy of His people in glorious triumph.

2. The second lesson of the cross is this. **The Lord Jesus gave Himself willingly to shame and suffering and death.** He was not a victim. He was not helpless. He **gave Himself** to do the will of God. He gave Himself to shame and suffering and death (Isa. 50:5-6). His death was obedience to God. It was voluntary. Men may choose to die. But only Christ had power to give His life. No man could take it from Him. He laid it down and He took it up again (John 10:18). This was His Father's commandment, to lay down His life for His people, His sheep. Christ is the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd gave His life for His sheep according to the will of God (John 10:11, 15-18; Eph. 5:25). Christ gave Himself to shame and death willingly.
3. The third thing we learn from the cross is that **Christ suffered as the Substitute for the sins of His people.** The terrible things that happened to Him, were not for crimes that He did. It was not for sins that He committed. Nor did He suffer and die for the sins of every person in the entire world throughout history. He died for the sins of His people. God laid their sins on Him. He substituted Himself to take their sins and the punishment they deserved. "*All we like sheep have gone astray. The LORD hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all*" (Isa. 53:6). And the "us all" whose iniquities were laid on Him is given two verses later in Isaiah 53. God said, "*For the transgression of my people was He stricken*" (Isa. 53:8). Jesus suffered shame and pain and died, not for Himself, but **as a Substitute for His people**. As the OT high priest confessed the sins of Israel over the head of the goat on the day of atonement, symbolically transferring those sins to the goat, Jesus Himself actually owned the specific sins of a particular people. And they are called His elect, His sheep, His brethren, the Church, His

children, the spiritual seed of Abraham. He suffered for them in exact proportion to what God's strict justice demanded for their sins: no more and no less. Christ died as a Substitute for the sins of His people. When He died, by His one offering, He delivered them from their sins (Titus 2:14; Gal. 1:4; 1 Pet. 2:24; Rom. 4:25; 5:9). He purged their sins from them (Heb. 1:3). He cleansed them, washing them of their sins (John 13:10; Rev. 1:5). He made them holy (Heb. 10:10). He perfected them forever (Heb. 10:14). Thus,

- a. When the soldiers stripped Him...
- b. When they put a scarlet robe upon Him...
- c. When they braided a crown of thorns and pressed it onto His head...
- d. When they took a reed and put it in His hand as a scepter to mock Him, as if He was a weak, pretend king, not holding the scepter of righteousness, not ruling in absolute sovereignty...
- e. When they spit in His face..
- f. When they took the reed of that mock scepter from His hand and hit Him on the head with it, driving thorny crown of cursing more deeply into Him...
- g. They did all these things to Him because as our Substitute, He must suffer all that His people deserved to suffer.
 - i. He was stripped before men because before God He was laid bare with the sins of His people. Adam, by sinning, made himself and his children naked in their sin before God. But Christ, by owning and confessing our sins as His, by bearing the shame and suffering and death our sins deserved, clothed the nakedness of our guilt and shame and condemnation before God with the robe of His spotless righteousness (Ps. 132:9; Rev. 19:8; Isa. 61:10; Ps. 71:16; 1 Cor. 1:30; Rom. 5:19; 10:4)!
 - ii. The soldiers put a scarlet robe on Him. Scripture says our sins are as scarlet (Isa. 1:18); they are blood-red as crimson. We are scarlet and crimson in our sins because we are guilty and worthy to die. But Christ was robed in scarlet, the color of our sins. He poured out His blood, the color of the punishment we

deserved, that we might be robed in the clean, white fine linen of His righteousness (Rev. 19:8; Isa. 61:10; Ps. 132:9).

- iii. He was crowned with thorns because the curse of God's law that was upon us was put upon Him (Gen. 3:17-18; Heb. 6:8). In obedience to His Father, Christ willingly wore the crown of shame and cursing from God as Substitute for His people, for their salvation. The crown of cursing was put on Him that the crown of righteousness and eternal life might be put on every believing sinner (1 Pet. 5:4; 2 Tim. 4:8)! He was crowned with the curse that we might be crowned with glory, righteousness and eternal life! "*When the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away*" (1 Pet. 5:4). The apostle Paul said, "*There is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing*" (2 Tim. 4:8).
- iv. Christ willingly took hold of the reed of weakness and shame that He might glorify His Father, defeat our enemies, and take the scepter of God's righteous rule to save His people from sin and death. "*Unto the Son He saith, Thy throne O God, is forever and ever. A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Thy kingdom*" (Heb. 1:8)!
- v. He willingly submitted to the beatings of that mock scepter on His head, the whip on His back, and the fists and slaps in His face because God's law demanded that I be beaten for my sins, and as my Substitute, He was chastised with the beatings my sins deserved (Isa. 53:5)!
- vi. They spit in His face. Isaiah prophesied of Christ. He said, "*The Lord GOD hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back. 6 I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting*" (Isa. 50:5-6). They spit in His face to shame Him. But that was by the will of God that God might

receive His redeemed without shame, in the full favor, because Christ's righteousness is made theirs (2 Cor. 5:21; Jer. 23:5-6; Isa. 61:10; Psa. 132:9; Rev. 19:8). He did not hide His face from shame and spitting that we might see the glory of God in His face (2 Cor. 4:6; Rev. 22:4).

4. The fourth thing we see in the cross, is the horrible wickedness that is in the heart of man (Mark 7:21-23; Gen. 6:5; Jer. 17:9-10; Rom. 3:9-19). In the account of the cross, men premeditatively purposed and plotted the murder of the Son of God. They killed the Prince of Life (Acts 3:15). They crucified the Lord and King of Glory (1 Cor. 2:8; Isa. 6:5; John 12:37-41; Ps. 24). They murdered the Just One (Acts 7:52). Man's crime in the cross was of indescribable proportion because of the sinlessness and dignity of Christ whom they crucified. It was a crime of envy and hate. It was deliberate. It was unprovoked. Their crime was all the greater because they were driven to murder Christ -- not for His sin -- but for His goodness! The goodness and kindness and truth of the Lord Jesus Christ came into contact with their sinful hearts, and for all the good that Jesus said and did, they envied and hated and murdered Him in shameful, painful death (Prov. 27:4). This is what men do when they are left by God to their own will (Luke 23:25)! Therefore, the cross shows us the exceeding great wickedness of our own hearts!
5. The fifth lesson we learn from the cross is the terrifying consequences our sins brings upon us unless Christ bears our sins in our place. Judas and the unbelieving religious Jewish leaders and the Jewish people, together with the Gentile governors and soldiers, brought upon themselves the guilt of the blood of the Son of God (Matt. 27:25). That is unspeakably terrifying. But Jesus said that because Judas did what he did, it would have been good (for Judas) if he had never been born (Matt. 26:24)! The Jewish leaders and the people demanded Pilate crucify Jesus. They were like the demon possessed pigs, who rushed to the cliffs of eternal doom by calling for Jesus' blood to be charged on them and their children! Judas was so tormented by his own conscience, that he loved death more than life. But his death could not

extinguish the pain in his conscience, because in hell, *“their worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched”* (Mark 9:43-48)!

6. The sixth lesson we learn from the cross is that when God has given man up to do all of the evil that is in his heart, nothing can stop the violence of his own torrential will. Pilate could not turn the opinion of the Jewish crowd. He offered to release Jesus and keep Barabbas, a notable prisoner, who was a thief and committed murder. But the people demanded in unison, *“Crucify, Crucify Him”* (Luke 23:21)! Oh! How you and I need to be delivered from the evil that is within us, in our very nature! No wonder Jesus taught His disciples to pray, *“Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil”* (Matt. 6:13)!
7. The seventh lesson we learn from the cross is the utter spiritual weakness of the Christ’s most favored disciples. Peter denied Jesus three times within a few hours after insisting he would not do so. Though Jesus told Peter he would most surely deny Him that very night, Peter argued against Jesus. In his self-conceit, he claimed that though his fellow disciples might, he would never deny Christ. And Peter was not the only one who failed. All of the disciples forsook Jesus and fled in fear. Therefore, we see the utter lack of spiritual strength in the best of men. The cross teaches us our horrid sinfulness and spiritual weakness. And it teaches us that Christ is the only One who did not fail. He is the only One able to do the will of God, able to save to the uttermost all who come to God by Him alone (Heb. 7:25)!
8. The eighth lesson we learn from the cross is that God alone makes the difference between those who believe and are saved, and those who receive the due rewards of their sins and unbelief! The only difference between those in heaven and those in hell, is the difference that God makes by His sovereign grace (1 Cor. 4:7; Rom. 11:5; 3:24; Eph. 2:4)! We see this truth prominently in Judas. Though Jesus chose twelve disciples, He said He did not choose Judas to salvation (John 13:18). He did not shed His blood for Judas. He told His disciples that they were washed from their sins. He said, *“ye are clean, but not all”* (John 13:10). Jesus did not choose Judas to eternal life nor wash Judas from his sins! God made the difference between Israel and the Egyptians. God made the difference between Israel and the

Canaanites. God always makes the difference between His people and the world. The lesson of sovereign grace is strongly taught in the cross. Christ made the difference between Peter and Judas, between the eleven and that one betrayer. He made the difference between the believing thief (Acts 18:27; 13:48) and the unbelieving thief (Rom. 11:32; 2 Thess. 3:2; Eph. 2:8-9; Acts 3:16; 1 Pet. 1:21-23; John 3:8-15). He made the difference between the centurion who, on hearing Jesus cry with a loud voice, “It is finished!” said, “*Truly, this was the Son of God*” (Matt. 27:54)! And God made the difference after the resurrection of Christ. He called some to life and faith, and left others in their willful unbelief (Acts 2:39, 47). **Salvation is God making the difference by His grace!** “*At this present time also, there is a remnant according to the election of grace*” (Rom. 11:5). “*Being justified freely, by His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus*” (Rom. 3:24). “*But God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Him; (by grace ye are saved)*” (Eph. 2:4-5)! God makes the difference by His electing grace, by His redeeming grace and by His life-giving grace! He said, “*I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy*” (Rom. 9:15). The cross teaches us that out of this world of wicked and spiritually impotent men, God alone makes the difference to salvation by choosing some, by redeeming them by Christ’s blood, and by raising them to life. And He leaves others in the madness of their unbelief (Rom. 11:32).

9. Given the universal wickedness and failure of all men, the ninth lesson from the cross is very plain. Only Jesus Christ did the will of God. The disciples all forsook Him and fled. When all men failed, Christ alone obeyed. Though He is Lord of all, He was obedient as a Servant! The all-important lesson we learn from this is that salvation is by the work of Christ alone. Salvation is entirely apart from anything from man. The only contribution of man in the cross is his sin and wickedness. Christ did all by Himself to save His people from their sins. He did not even have the comfort of His friends and family (Ps. 69:20). Therefore, He alone gets all of the glory (1 Cor. 1:31)!
10. The tenth lesson we must learn from the cross is the love of the Lord Jesus Christ for His people. Everything that caused Him shame and everything

that caused Him pain, and especially when He bowed His head and died, were all the tokens of His love for His own! When they mocked and reviled Him, and He did not answer back; when He gave His back to the smiters; when He did not hide His face from shame and spitting; when He took the reed and held it in His hand; when He submissively bore the crown of thorns; when He stretched out His hands and feet for them to drive the nails through Him into the cursed cross; when they taunted Him to prove He was the Son of God by saving Himself from the cross; when they said His God and Father would not have Him, and that He trusted God in vain; all these things in particular, and all of them together show His great love for His people and for His Father. Everything that he did was done out of love for His Father and His sinful people (John 13:1; 15:13; Gal. 2:20; Eph. 5:25; 1 John 3:16)!

Finally, from all of this, the cross teaches us that the only hope any sinner has is found in the One we hated, the whose murder men plotted carried out on the cross! The cross cries out to sinners, “Why will you die?!” Turn from your indifference! Abandon your self-righteousness! Put down your arms of rebellion! Look upon Christ crucified! Find Him to be your only hope and all the glory of God! Come as a sinner to Christ! He fulfilled the will of God. He saved His people from their sins, and from every enemy. See the love of Christ that passes knowledge in His cross! Will we harden our hearts against God’s word?! Or will we honor God by coming as sinners and looking to Christ as all of our righteousness?! The Gospel demands from us the obedience of faith in Christ (Acts 16:31; Rom. 1:5; 10:16; 16:26). But God must also give this to us. Faith is not a work. It is the God-given persuasion that Christ is my all. Faith sees that He is my sin offering. He is my answer to God in judgment. He is my obedience. He is all my confidence. He is all my hope. God’s gift of faith enables me to come to Christ, to rejoice in Him in glad submission, because on the cross, He saved me by Himself from all my sins! Isaiah said that to those God gives saving faith would say of Christ and Him crucified, “*Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the LORD; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation*” (Isa.

25:9). I have told you what Jesus did, what He did all by Himself to the glory of God! May God give you this precious faith to look to look to Christ alone!