

Matthew 27:45-50 - *From the sixth hour until the ninth hour, there was darkness over all the land. About the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" which means "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" When some of those standing there heard this, they said, "This fellow is calling for Elijah." Immediately one of them ran, took a sponge, and soaked it with sour wine. Then he put it on a stick and gave him a drink. The rest said, "Leave him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to save him." After Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, he gave up his spirit.* (EHV)

It was 12:00 **noon** - the **brightest** part of the day - and everything went **black - pitch** black. It was **so** dark that there was no sunlight at all - no moon - no stars. Just darkness. Everything came to a **stop**. And it was no eclipse. Historians tell us that as far away as Egypt, **everyone** was experiencing the same mysterious and frightening **darkness**.

We know what that **darkness** was all about. It came because of a **crucifixion** - the most **horrible** way for anyone to be put to death. It would often take **days** for a person to die from crucifixion, with their diaphragm working slower and slower, until finally the person wouldn't be strong enough to take in another breath at all.

On the day that we call **Good Friday**, Jesus was being crucified with two other men just outside of Jerusalem. During His 33 years here on the earth, thousands and thousands of people had **followed** Jesus. They had listened intently to His words, and they had sung **praises** to Him. Just 5 days earlier the crowds of people had called Him their **Savior**. Jesus was a special **warrior** who had been sent from God. But now that warrior was **dying**.

This battle would be the **final** battle. Everything Jesus had experienced up to this point helped to **prepare** Him for this battle. This was a battle that Jesus **had** to **win**, because the future of everyone who has ever lived was hanging in the balance. This would be **The Greatest Battle Ever Fought**.

Let's take a look at what **happened** when Jesus battled against His enemy, Satan, on the **cross**. We read, "*From the sixth hour until the ninth hour, there was **darkness** over all the land. About the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, 'Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?' which means 'My **God**, my **God**, why have you **forsaken** me?'*"

We certainly don't want to **minimize** the **physical** agony which Jesus endured for us. It was **horrendous**. It had already **started** the night **before** in the Garden of Gethsemane. That was where Jesus was **arrested**, and then was led away to be put on **trial**. Even though He was totally **innocent** of all the charges which were brought against Him, Jesus was forced to wear a crown of **thorns** - but that was just the **beginning**. All through the night Jesus endured **mocking** and **humiliation** - with soldiers **pulling hair** out of His beard, **slapping** Him in the face, and **spitting** on Him. Jesus was **stripped** of His clothes, and was **whipped** with a **scourge** which ripped out chunks of skin and flesh right down to the bone. After He was condemned to **die** Jesus was forced to carry the heavy **crossbeam** for His cross until He **collapsed** with exhaustion. And then finally Jesus was **nailed** to the cross through His **wrists** and **feet**, and the cross was hoisted up and dropped into place. The **soldiers**, the Jewish **leaders**, and even the people who were **passing by**, continued to **mock** Him. As I said, it was **horrendous**.

But Jesus **endured** that pain and agony without **complaining**. In fact, He spoke some **amazing** words while He was hanging on the cross. First of all, Jesus offered a **prayer** asking the Father to **forgive** all those who were involved in **mocking** and **crucifying** Him. Then Jesus answered the desperate prayer of one of the **thieves** who was also being crucified - giving him the promise of eternal life in **heaven**. And with tender concern for His **mother**, Jesus told His disciple, **John**, to take care of her.

Through it all, there was **darkness** - thick, black darkness - darkness which shows us how much our God hates **sin**. Jesus endured all the internal **pain** and **pressure** of paying for the sins of the **world**, knowing that He hadn't committed **any** of those sins. But He was the **only one** who could bear the weight of the sins of **billions** and **billions** of people - sins which included all the **massacres**, all the **abortions**, all the **divorces**, and all the **other** horrible things which you and I have ever **thought**, **said**, and **done**. This was **The Greatest Battle Ever Fought**, and Jesus fought this battle **alone**.

But then comes the **worst** part. Not only did Jesus bear the burden of the **sins** of the whole **world**, but He also bore the white-hot **anger** of His heavenly Father, **burning** against Him because of those sins. We can hear it in Jesus' voice as His **tone** changes. An gut-wrenching cry came from His tortured body. We're told, "*About the ninth hour, Jesus cried out with a loud voice saying, 'Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?' which means 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'*"

Now, we know that the **three persons** of the Trinity - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - are **one eternal God**. So it seems to be **impossible** that the **Son** could actually be **forsaken** by the **Father**. How can the Father, who is the source of **all** true love in this world, turn His **back** on the **Son** whom He so clearly declared, both at His baptism and on the Mount of Transfiguration, to be "*The son whom I love?*" But that's what **happened**.

On Good Friday, the Father **suspended** His relationship with His Son so that Jesus could pay for the **sins** of the entire world. It must have **torn** at the Father's heart to allow this separation. But His **wrath** was focused on the **evil** that Jesus carried to the cross, because God **hates** the malignant tumor of **sin**, which causes the human race, which He created, to **rot**.

I'd like you to **note** something here. At the beginning of His time on the cross, Jesus called out, "*Father, forgive them.*" There is a certain **intimacy** in those words - a **closeness** between Father and Son. But as the minutes ticked away, Jesus' words changed to, "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*" It's obvious that the relationship between Jesus and the Father has **changed** - in fact, it's **broken**. But Jesus' faith is still **strong**, even as He is **forsaken** by His Father. This is a moment of sheer **horror** for our Savior - it's the **worst** moment of His life. Jesus' suffering has reached its **peak**, so while this is the **worst** moment in His life, it is also the **greatest**. This is the point in the battle against Satan, which will determine whether the battle will be **won** or **lost**.

Seven hundred years earlier the Prophet **Isaiah** explained what was happening in that battle. He wrote, "*Surely he was taking up **our** weaknesses, and he was carrying **our** sufferings. We thought it was because of **God** that he was stricken, smitten, and afflicted, but it was because of **our** rebellion that he was pierced. He was crushed for the guilt **our** sins deserved. The **punishment** that brought us **peace** was upon **him**, and by his **wounds** we are **healed**.*"

It was all because of **us**. Jesus Himself remained **perfect** and **holy** this entire time. But **our sins** were **charged** to Him, and Jesus was willing to pay for those sins with His **life**. It doesn't matter who we **are** - you and I are not always **aware** of how **much** we sin. But we **are** aware that we are **broken**. We know that our sins are too big for **us** to handle. We need a **warrior** who can **provide** forgiveness for us. And we **have** that warrior in **Jesus**.

Let's go back to our text once again. We're told that Jesus was **thirsty**. "*They put a sponge soaked in sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his*

mouth. When Jesus had **received** the sour wine, he said, “It is **finished!**” Then, **bowing** his head, he **gave up** his spirit.”

In Mark’s Gospel he tells us that at that time the temple curtain was “*torn in two from top to bottom.*” All the things which had kept God and His people **apart**, had been **removed** - the physical **curtain** in the temple, as well as the **sins** of the people. Because of Jesus, God and His people were **reunited**, and there was free and complete **access** to God for **everyone**,

Just one final note. Notice how the final words of Jesus show that His relationship with God has also been **restored**. In His very last words from the cross Luke tell us, “*Jesus cried out with a loud voice, ‘Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!’ When he had said this, he breathed his last.*” The battle was **over**. Every last sin had been **paid** for, and God’s plan of salvation was **complete**. So, the beautiful and intimate Father-Son relationship **returned** again. God’s anger had been **appeased**. That loud cry, “*It is finished*” says it all. In **The Greatest Battle Ever Fought**, Jesus delivered the **knockout**. He **crushed** Satan’s head. Oh, Satan is still walking around - he rattles his **saber**, and he makes his **threats** - but it’s all just a big **show**. He no longer has **any power** over us, because “*It is finished.*” Jesus’ work is **done**, and we are **forgiven**. Amen.