

On the cross we see Jesus as our scapegoat. All the sins of His people are laid on Him and He is led outside the royal city to be crucified on a hill shaped like a skull. We are here tonight to look at that cross. I want us to consider some of the various ways our Lord suffered there.

First, our Lord suffered physically. His body, like our own, was severely limited in its powers of endurance and just as highly sensitive to pain as ours. Like all of us he suffered in that body, hunger, thirst, weariness and exhaustion during His lifetime. But beyond that He suffered the physical agony of the cross; the whipping, the impaling of hands and feet and side, the many hours suspension fully conscious on the cross. These experiences were imprinted indelibly upon His memory so that today not even the most excruciating pain is beyond the Saviour's personal understanding. As the Psalmist wrote, "He knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust" (Ps. 104: 14).

Secondly, our Lord suffered emotionally. He had an ordinary human emotional life. He experienced the full range of emotions that we experience with the exception that he expressed all of his feelings without sinning. He knew many hours of joy and contentment. He enjoyed the sensation of pleasure. Yet he also knew the dark side of our emotional

life. He was "the man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." Someone has pointed out that the Scriptures nowhere picture Jesus as smiling, but we do see him weeping on a number of occasions. He was deeply distressed by the spiritual hardness of the covenant people. He was deeply grieved by their opposition and pained by their misery as sheep without a shepherd.

These dark emotions were intensified by the shadow of the cross-- a shadow which hung over Him from the time of His baptism. He repeatedly spoke somberly of his death and betrayal. These dark emotions came to a climax in Gethsemane. He began to be deeply distressed and troubled. His soul was overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. He fell to the ground in the intensity of the agony. What was the cause of this emotional agony? He had a clear vision of what it meant to be the scapegoat, to have the sins of His people laid on Him, to be lead into the wilderness of God's abandonment, to descend into hell. He prays, "Take this cup from me." The experience drains Him emotionally.

Christ still stands beside those of us who are emotionally disturbed and distraught, who find their grief and bewilderment insupportable. Most of us, of course, enjoy so much of God's goodness that joy is the predominant emotion that we feel. But there are some of us who are prone to

experience more severely than others the dark side of our emotions in fear, anxiety, doubt, depression, and despair. There are some who are simply terrified by the unfolding will of God and the uncertainty of the future. Our Lord's suffering in the area of his emotional life is their reminder that the Saviour can enter fully into their fear; and it is also a reminder that such emotional disturbances are not necessarily something to be ashamed of.

Thirdly, our Lord suffered socially. Jesus loved people. He loved his neighbor as Himself. He loved His enemies. He loved the scheming scribes and pharisees who took counsel to put Him to death. He naturally wanted that loved to be reciprocated. It was not easy to be isolated and condemned by the church of His. It was not easy to be deemed an embarrassment to His family and to have crowds calling for His death. The treatment He received from His immediate disciples was even more painful. They were chosen for the very purpose of being with Him. He needed their fellowship. Yet one betrayed Him. Another denied him and all forsook Him. He died as one abandoned by His friends. He died entirely bereft of support, encouragement or appreciation, knowing that those who were closest to Him thought that He was letting them down.

Fourthly, our Lord suffered spiritually. His sufferings climaxed in the severance of fellowship with His Father indicated in the cry of dereliction, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" I'm not sure that any of us can say in depth what those words mean. But he was clearly deprived of all that once comforted Him. For example, He was deprived from the assurance of God's love. He was deprived of any awareness of God's help. He was deprived of the certainty of a triumphant outcome. The fact that He cries, "My God!" rather than the usual "Abba, Father!" suggests that He also suffered the loss of a sense of His own personal identity. The fact that He did not at this time call upon God as His Father suggests that as the weight of sin was laid upon Him the humiliation and suffering was so impenetrable that His sonship was obscured even from Himself. It was of no consolation to Him. On the cross I believe that Jesus descended into Hell and experienced the torments of the damned in his soul.

G.K. Chesterton wrote, "He passed in some superhuman manner through our human horror of pessimism. When the world shook and the sun was wiped out of heaven, it was not at the crucifixion, but at the cry from the cross: the cry which confessed that God was forsaken of God."

From all eternity the Son had enjoyed unbroken communion with His Father. The face of the One was toward the Other in an unclouded reciprocal love. But on the cross the One who had been with God in the beginning is forsaken by God. Like the scapegoat He is sent into the wilderness of God's abandonment. The One who was with God comes to be without God. He becomes an unholy and accursed thing. "He who was without sin, became sin." We see there on the cross a picture of a man in hell, in the outer darkness, forsaken by God. That man should be me. That man could be you.

This evening we are going to celebrate Holy Communion. We have come here this evening in order to remember that the One who was with God came to be without God in order that we should be with God. We have come here this evening to enjoy Holy Communion with Him who for us suffered the loss of all communion with His beloved Father. As the apostle Peter has written, "He died to bring us to God." And finally, we are here to be reminded that at the right hand of God the Father almighty is Someone who is able to sympathise and feel all that we suffer, physically, socially, emotionally, and spiritually... for He has suffered in all ways like we have.

AMEN

Exhortation, Warning, and Invitation

People sometimes ask me, "Who can take communion; Is everyone welcome? Do you have to be a member of this church? Do you have to be a certain age?" Others ask, "What is the meaning of this ceremony? Do you believe that the bread and wine actually become the body and blood of Christ?" It's important that all those who participate in the Lord's Supper know something of the answer to those questions. For that reason I would like to take a few minutes to answer those two basic questions: Who is invited to the Lord's Table? and "What is the meaning of this ceremony?"

First, what is the meaning? The Lord's Supper is the equivalent of the Old Testament sacrament of Passover which commemorated the night in which the angel of death passed over Egypt, sparing the first-born sons of those who had applied the blood of a lamb to their doorposts and lintels, and killing those who were not protected by the blood. The Lord's Supper is therefore the Christian Passover which commemorates the death of Christ, the Lamb of God, who was sacrificed in order that we might have eternal life.

The Lord's Supper was instituted by our Lord on the eve of his betrayal. He commanded that this sacrament be

observed by His covenant people until he should return to judge the world. In this sacrament we remember that Jesus died for the sins of His people. It teaches us that we cannot in anyway atone for our own sins. It teaches us that our sins are not insignificant but that they deserve the wrath and curse of God which Jesus born in his own body on the cross on the behalf of His people.

But the Lord's Supper is not simply a memorial of his death. The apostle Paul called the Lord's Supper the communion of the blood of Christ and the communion of the body of Christ (1 Cor. 10:16). For this reason we call the Lord's Supper, Holy Communion. The body and blood of Christ is not present in a physical way, nevertheless those who have a saving faith in Jesus Christ are made partakers of Christ, and feed upon Him. For this reason Paul tells us that believers share in the body and blood of Christ. That is, we share in the benefits his body and blood provide for believers, even the forgiveness of sins and the life everlasting. In this sacrament Jesus Christ is truly present, not in a physical way, but in such a way that we may enjoy Holy Communion with Him; not that he comes down from heaven but that, through His Holy Spirit he lifts us up spiritually into heaven and into His very presence.

Secondly, who is invited to the Lord's Table? The Lord Jesus and His apostles plainly teach that not all are invited and that there are certain requirements that must be met first. It is for the Lord's people. It is only for those who are in a covenant relationship with Him and who have been baptized into His church. Furthermore He tells us that we must examine ourselves to see if we are covenant with the Lord. This self examination includes realizing that our sins deserve God's wrath and curse and that God has punished the sins of His people in Christ by laying our sins on him. This self examination ~~also~~ requires that we look into our hearts to see if we really do have faith in Jesus Christ and believe that all of our sins are forgiven in Him. Then, again, this self examination requires that we see if we earnestly desire to live a godly life endeavoring to obey all of God's commands, and seeking to live a life in love with God and neighbor.

The scriptures solemnly warn us that those who eat this bread and drink this cup of the Lord unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord, and that they eat and drink damnation to themselves, not discerning the Lord's body. This warning is directed against those who would take the sacrament carelessly, or irreverently, or

as though it were nothing more than an old tradition. In short, to eat or drink unworthily is to come to the Lord's Table in a careless, irreverent spirit, without the intention or desire to commemorate the death of Christ as the sacrifice for our sins, and without desiring to live a godly life.

But having said all that I must hasten to add that the Lord's Table must not be surrounded with an atmosphere of gloom and doom. It is a joyful feast and our Lord invites sinners to it. You may have no assurance of your salvation in Christ. You may be a doubting Christian. You may be painfully aware of sin that remains in your life. But none of these things should keep you from this table. If you are displeased with yourselves because of your sins and if you trust that these sins have been forgiven you and that your remaining weaknesses are covered by the suffering and death of Christ; and if you desire more and more to strengthen your faith and improve your life you are invited and encouraged to eat the bread and drink of the cup.

Our Lord says these comforting words to all those who truly turn to Him. "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and

ye shall find rest unto your souls. I am the Bread of Life: he that cometh to Me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on Me shall never thirst. Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out."

And now let us reverently attend to the words of the Institution of the Holy Supper of our Lord Jesus Christ, as they are delivered by the Apostle Paul:

"For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.' For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself."