



Scripture Reference:

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Delivered by Rev. John Daniel Johnson

Over 20 years ago, a Southern Gospel group recorded a song that really embodies the topic of today's message. That singing group was called 'The McKameys', and I want you to hear the chorus of the song they wrote. The chorus repeats:

You can be close, to the cross, but far, from the blood,
Sitting at, the feet of Jesus, but never changed by His love.
Never cleansed by the fountain, of His precious cleansing flood,
You can be, close to the cross, but far, from the blood.

With that thought in mind this morning, I want to share with you what the LORD has laid on my heart.

"In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace which He lavished on us."

~ Ephesians 1:7-8

"Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot."

~ 1 Peter 1:18-19

"Close to the Cross, but Far From Forgiveness"

Some of my buddies at work were joking with me this week, and said, "I bet I can guess what you're sermon is going to be on this Sunday." Jokingly they said, "I bet your preaching on the resurrection of Jesus."

I know today is Resurrection Sunday, but there could have been no resurrection if there had not been that cruel death on Calvary. To truly appreciate the resurrection, you first have to truly appreciate the cross. I truly love how the Good News Translation of the Bible describes Paul's main topic of ministry. Scripture says,

"For while I was with you, I made up my mind to forget everything except Jesus Christ and especially his death on the cross."

~ 1 Corinthians 2:2

So, if you will today, take your copy of God's Word and turn with me to the 27th Chapter of the Book of Matthew. While the tragedy and cruelty of crucifixion is not detailed in these verses, I want us to focus on the last few hours of this day in which our Savior died for us.

Now from the sixth hour until the ninth hour there was darkness over all the land. ⁴⁶ And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" that is, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" ⁴⁷ Some of those who stood there, when they heard that, said, "This Man is calling for Elijah!" ⁴⁸ Immediately one of them ran and took a sponge, filled it with sour wine and put it on a reed, and offered it to Him to drink. ⁴⁹ The rest said, "Let Him alone; let us see if Elijah will come to save Him." ⁵⁰ And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit. ⁵¹ Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split, ⁵² and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; ⁵³ and coming out of the graves after His resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many. ⁵⁴ So when the centurion and those with him, who were guarding Jesus, saw the earthquake and the things that had happened, they feared greatly, saying, "Truly this was the Son of God!"

~ Matthew 27:45-54

"Close to the Cross, but Far From Forgiveness"

Now, recall what has already happened on this day. Jesus has already been before the mock trials and order to be scourged. The church historian, Eusebius of Caesarea recounts with vivid, horrible detail a scene of scourging. He says, “...the bystanders were struck with amazement when they saw them lacerated with scourges even to the innermost veins and arteries, so that the hidden inward parts of the body, both their bowels and their members, were exposed to view” (Ecclesiastical History, Book 4, chap. 15).

There our Savior had this beating. That is why Scripture tells us in Isaiah 53...

*But He was pierced through for our transgressions,
He was crushed for our iniquities;
The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him,
And by His scourging we are healed.
~ Isaiah 53:5 NASB*

A crown of thorns was pressed upon the head of our Savior, and then sentenced to die by crucifixion. He was paraded through the streets of Jerusalem as a common criminal. Finally reaching the place called Galgotha, there they stripped Him of all His garments, drove spikes through His hands and feet, and raised Him up on that cross for the crowd to stare upon.

Countless people witnessed this public execution. In that crowd, we can vividly see the different reactions had to witnessing what was happening. Some were happy; others were sad. Some were mocking; one was repenting. Many were cursing; others were running away.

Transitional Sentence:

Countless people were Close to the Cross, but Many Were Far From Forgiveness. This morning, my goal is to expose the types of people that were close to the cross, and for you to examine yourself to see with which group of people more align with.

“Close to the Cross, but Far From Forgiveness”

In this morning's passage, I believe that true meaning of the cross; the true purpose of the cross is explained. Those that witnessed were not witnessing a man dying, but seeing first-hand the love that Jesus has for them and for us. It is so easy to think of the horrors of the cross, but what I want us to see this morning is the love displayed from the cross.

I have a stuffed animal at home that I've had since I was a kid. It has been played with. It isn't in the best of shape, but despite all the ugliness of it, I still cherish it. This morning, I want to draw you close to the cross and cherish what was bestowed upon you.

Mark 15:25-26 states...

Now it was the third hour, and they crucified Him. And the inscription of His accusation was written above: THE KING OF THE JEWS.

Matthew 27:45 tells us...

Now from the sixth hour until the ninth hour there was darkness over all the land.

Don't miss this. The third hour is 9 AM, the sixth hour is 12 noon, and the ninth hour is 3 PM. From 9 AM till Noon that Friday, Jesus only said three things. Before the sun was darkened in the sky; only three statements were given.

1. First, Jesus spoke to those who were cursing Him, spitting on Him, hitting Him, hating Him, and killing Him. In Luke 23:34 Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do."
2. Secondly, Jesus spoke to one of the two thieves that was being crucified along with Him. In Luke 23:43 Jesus said, "'Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.'"
3. The last morning statement before the lights went out; Jesus speaks to His mother and the disciple John. In John 19:26-27, He says, "He said to His mother, 'Woman, behold your son!' Then He said to the disciple, 'Behold your mother!'"

"Close to the Cross, but Far From Forgiveness"

Three hours; three statements of grace and mercy. Even as Christ was dying, He's giving mercy to those doing these acts to Him, He's giving mercy to a thief, and He's showing compassion to His mother and His disciple. You can still see the love of Jesus even for us as sinners even in death.

Then noon came and darkness fell upon the face of the Earth. This was not an eclipse or a sandstorm. This is a three-hour complete stoppage of the sun from shining. Do you know why the sun was darkened? I've heard people say it was because God could not stand to look upon what the people were doing to Jesus. I've heard other reasons that it was God's way of punishing the earth for killing Jesus. However, I see something different.

Throughout the Bible, when God affects the sun, it is always in response to a judgment. In Exodus 10, God sends a series of 10 plagues upon Egypt because the Pharaoh refused to release the Israelites from captivity. Each plague was more severe than the previous one, but the ninth plague was complete darkness. The Bible says, that it was so dark that they felt the effects of it. Not only was it complete darkness, but the people were in the dark three days. Three day! Remember what the last plague was? The death of the every Egyptian's first son. It is a reference to judgment.

In Revelation 6, in the End Times, God will again cause the sun to be darkened in judgment. After that 6th Seal Judgment is opened, a great earthquake will occur, the sun will be black as a sackcloth, and the moon will be turned blood red. Then as the 7th Seal Judgment is broken, there is silence in Heaven for 30 minutes.

Darkness, throughout the Bible, has always been seen as a sign of judgement. And when the darkness came upon the land and the cross that day, God was pronouncing judgment. Judgment, but not judgement on the people. Christ had already asked for forgiveness for what they were doing. God was passing judgment on the most sinful person there that day. God was judging Jesus who was on the cross.

"For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."

"Close to the Cross, but Far From Forgiveness"

~ 2 Corinthians 5:21

“And when you were dead in trespasses and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive with Him and forgave us all our trespasses. ¹⁴He erased the certificate of debt, with its obligations, that was against us and opposed to us, and has taken it out of the way by nailing it to the cross.”

Colossians 2:13-14

God pronounces judgment on sin and accepts the Sacrifice of His Only Son so that we can be forgiven of our sin. That is why as soon as the judgment of darkness came, Jesus cried out...

“My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?” — Mark 15:34

“I thirst.” — John 19:28

“It is finished.” — John 19:30

“Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit.” — Luke 23:46

My question to you this morning is which of the people groups do you belong to that was around the cross.

1. Were you like the soldiers, just doing the basic routines of life. Around the cross, but you’ve done it before.
2. Were you like the crowd who sat down and watched? You are entertained by what happening on stage, but there’s no worship or giving up anything.
3. Maybe you’re like the religious elite saying that there’s nothing wrong with you. You’re better than most people out there.
4. Maybe you’re the one who is the enemy of Christ. You curse His name. You mock Him, ridicule Him, and will stop at nothing until Christ is wiped out of history.
5. Or maybe, you’re the sinner who says, “Lord, I need you.”

“Close to the Cross, but Far From Forgiveness”

That Easter morning, as soon as Christ was resurrected, the Bible tells us that graves of those saints were also opened. My friends, this sinner on the cross' grave was opened too.

And there is coming a day, when the dead in Christ shall again be raised. Are you ready for another resurrection? Unless you placed your faith in the One on that cross, you'll never have one.

“Close to the Cross, but Far From Forgiveness”