

A crown of thorns, made of dark, sharp, and intertwined branches, is the central focus of the image. It is set against a dark, textured background that transitions from a deep red on the right to a dark brown on the left. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the sharp points of the thorns and creating a somber, reflective atmosphere.

RON JONES

Cries
from
the Cross

A HOLY WEEK DEVOTIONAL REFLECTION

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CRIES FROM THE CROSS: *A Holy Week Devotional Reflection*

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Introduction

“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

ROMANS 5:8

Located on the traditional site where Jesus delivered His famous Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), a Catholic Franciscan chapel sits beautifully on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. The octagonal-shaped sanctuary was built in 1938, ironically with the Italian fascist dictator Benito Mussolini's support. Pope John Paul II celebrated mass there in the year 2000. Even President George W. Bush visited the Church of the Beatitudes, as it is known, in the last year of his presidency. The shrine is also not far from the ancient city of Capernaum, which was the location of Jesus's ministry headquarters and where He performed some of His miracles.

On a recent trip to the Holy Land, we visited this beautiful and sacred site. As we were leaving, I overheard a conversation between two ladies who were entering the gift shop.

“You like to shop, don’t you?”

“Oh, yes! I love to collect crosses.”

Rarely does a day pass that I do not see somebody wearing a cross as a piece of fine jewelry. In fact, on my right hand, I wear a beautiful sterling silver ring into which a Texas jeweler named James Avery carved a cross. I cherish it because years ago, my kids gave it to me on Father’s Day. However, there is something that I find strange about my ring and the conversation I overheard outside the chapel’s gift shop.


Can you imagine somebody saying, “Oh yes! I collect electric chairs” or “I collect medieval guillotines” or “I collect hangman nooses”? How did the cross, a Roman means of barbaric capital punishment, become a collector’s item, let alone a beloved symbol of faith?

Some people attribute sentimental value to the cross, viewing it merely as a symbol of suffering. However, Christians ascribe a deeper meaning to the cross of Christ, placing their faith in the One who bore the penalty for their sins.

Nothing is more central to the Christian faith than how one understands Jesus’s death upon the cross. The slightest misunderstanding of His crucifixion dilutes what is otherwise the most dynamic event in world history. As important as the cross is to the Christian faith, there remains so much confusion and controversy surrounding the death of Jesus.

Not everyone embraces the cross in the same way. Some people disregard the cross as mere foolishness. They view Jesus’s death as the tragic ending to an otherwise good life that was caught in a tangled web of political and religious gamesmanship. “If Jesus was God,” they scoff, “what was God doing on the cross?”

Some reinterpret the cross for our modern times, giving it an extreme makeover through religious syncretism and sentimentality. Still, others believe the power of God flows through the cross to save them from eternal damnation. In his



first letter to the Corinthians, Paul summarizes, “For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1:18).

How should we interpret the cross of Christ? What is the meaning of Christ’s suffering? From the beginning of the Early Church, followers of Jesus have reflected deeply upon the significance of Jesus’s sacrifice on the cross, some by revisiting the last words He spoke before He gave up His spirit.

Last words are important words. Jesus spoke many words during his three-year ministry on earth. However, His loving cries from the cross are among His most significant. They give us a powerful glimpse inside the meaning of the cross of Christ.

Romans 5:8 says, “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” If you want to see how much God loves you, look at Jesus on the cross; if you want to hear Him say, “I love you!” listen to His cries from the cross. I wrote these brief Holy Week reflections to encourage that purpose and for your enjoyment.

Dr. Ron Jones

Virginia Beach, Virginia

February 2018



Cry 1

“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

LUKE 23:32-38

READ

Only once did Jesus address his earthly mother from the cross. However, He spoke to His heavenly Father three times. The first time He said, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” The middle saying was, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” The final words from His lips were, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.”

All of this indicates that Jesus’s relationship with the Father was rock solid. Nothing could shatter the trust He had placed in His heavenly Father, not even a crucifixion that God the Father had the power to stop.

The three most amazing words that Jesus spoke from the cross were, “Father, forgive them.” His words fulfilled the Old Testament prophecy found in Isaiah 53:12, which reads, “For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.”

Think about it. Centuries before cruel malefactors drove nails into the hands and feet of Jesus and hoisted Him upon a cross between earth and heaven, a prophet of God foretold that the Messiah would pray for them during His agony. Amazingly, the scribes and Pharisees were too busy scheming and plotting against Jesus to make the connection between the rabbi from Nazareth and the Messianic prophecy found in Isaiah, let alone many others in the Old Testament. Truly, they did not know what they were doing.



REFLECT

Is there someone you need to forgive today? Are you harboring bitterness toward someone for what they did to you? What steps will you take to release the toxin in your spirit and mend the broken relationship?



PRAY

Father, I have sinned against you, consciously and unconsciously. But I thank you for forgiving me as completely as you do through the sacrifice of your Son, Jesus, on the cross. Search my heart for any hint of unforgiveness. Help me to extend the same grace toward others that you have extended to me. Amen.

Cry 2

“Today you will be with
me in paradise.”

LUKE 23:35-43

READ

The Romans executed criminals by crucifixion along a major entrance to the city of Jerusalem. They did this publicly to deter crime and rebellion.

Imagine people entering the city to start their workday. They walk by the dying thugs and let loose their slashing tongues, taunting them mercilessly. Hatred spews as they see a rabbi from Nazareth hanging on the cross. Passersby glance at Him. Rulers of the Jews sneer at Him. Roman soldiers mock Him. Criminals on either side of Jesus join in hurling insults at Him until one of them has a change of heart.

Thirteen words changed one thief's life while he was nailed to a cross next to Jesus. They were the most reassuring words he had ever heard. “I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.” No doubt, as shots of pain spiked his nervous system, questions arose in his mind. Today? Paradise? Who are

you? From where this thief's body hanged, paradise sounded too good to be true.

Jesus punctuated His reassuring words with, "Truly, I say to you." How ironic that a few hours earlier Pilate was asking this man—a man the religious leaders charged with blasphemy—an age-old question, "What is truth?" (John 18:38) There is no more important time to hear and believe the truth than when you are dying. But do not wait until then. You might not receive the same opportunity the dying thief did. Now is the accepted time. Today is the day of salvation (2 Corinthians 6:2).



REFLECT

Are you assured of your salvation? If you were to die today, do you know for certain that you would be with Jesus in heaven? Based on 1 John 5:13-14, can we know that we possess eternal life?



PRAY

Father, I thank you for the free gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ, my Lord. Turn any uncertainty I have in my heart about my salvation into certainty as I look to Jesus by faith for the forgiveness of my sins. Guard me, O Lord, from the kind of certainty that leads to presumptuous sins. Amen.

Cry 3

“Woman, behold your son.”

JOHN 19:25-27

READ

“Woman, behold your son.” These words drip with tender emotion. As death approaches, Jesus has the presence of mind and the depth of heart to consider the welfare of His earthy mother, Mary. In doing so, He models for us the fifth commandment that says, “Honor your father and your mother so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you” (Exodus 20:12). Many speculate that Joseph, Jesus’s earthly father, was dead.

Honoring our parents is a life-long responsibility. The New Testament reiterates the fifth commandment by instructing children to “obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ‘Honor your father and mother’—which is the first commandment with a promise—that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth” (Ephesians 6:1-3). Proverbs 23:22 says, “Listen to your father, who gave you life, and do not despise your mother when she is old.” These wise words from the ancient Scriptures still apply to us today.

From the cross, Jesus honored His mother by making arrangements for her care, entrusting Mary to John, the beloved disciple. Reflecting on Jesus's kind gesture toward His mother, Charles Haddon Spurgeon makes this larger application to life and ministry, "He selects those whom He loves best today, and puts His poor people under their wing. Take them gladly, and treat them well."



REFLECT

Are you obeying the fifth commandment? What are some specific ways you can honor your father and mother today? Are there other people around you who need compassion and care?



PRAY

God, I thank you that you are the perfect Father to me. I also thank you for my parents, who birthed me into this world. Show me ways to honor them even though they are imperfect. Make me more sensitive to their needs and to other people around me who need compassion and care. Amen.

Cry 4

“My God, my God,
why have you forsaken me?”

MATTHEW 27:45-50

READ

On the cross, Jesus found himself in a dark and lonely place, forsaken by the Father He loved as He bore the sins of mankind. This particular cry from the cross was painstaking. The feeling of loneliness overwhelmed Jesus.

I believe this was Jesus’s lowest moment during his thirty-three years of life on earth as the Son of Man and the Son of God. He was despised and rejected on earth and now forsaken by heaven. Suspended on a cruel Roman cross between earth and the Father’s house from which He came, Christ could not have been more isolated. For the first time in eternity, the sweet fellowship of the Holy Trinity—Father, Son, and Spirit—was fractured.

Are you in a dark and lonely place? Do you feel forsaken by family and friends? At the risk of sounding trite, Jesus

understands. He has been there and can lead you to a better place. Because the Lord promises, “I will never leave you nor forsake you,” we are truly never alone in this world (Joshua 1:5; Hebrews 13:5; Deuteronomy 31:6).

REFLECT

Are you lonely, or do you experience moments, even seasons, of loneliness? Do you know somebody else who feels forsaken by friends and family? What are some productive ways to use your time alone that draw you closer to the Lord?

PRAY

Father, when I feel lonely, remind me that You will never forsake me. Please comfort me with Your presence. Cultivate in my heart a place where I am okay with being quiet, alone, and still while knowing that You are God. Amen.

Cry 5

“I thirst.”

JOHN 19:28-29

READ

The words “I thirst” prove that Jesus was entirely human and that He is not oblivious to our pain. He was one hundred percent God, but He was no less a man who suffered real agony on the cross. Throughout His life and ministry, Jesus ate, drank, grew tired, and slept. He also wept and felt real physical torment.

Physicians tell us that thirst is one of the most excruciating pains the human body can endure. Every cell in our body requires moisture. When our cells lack water, we grow thirsty. Extreme thirst leads to dehydration and is extremely painful. In response, the body begins to shut down.

Jesus’s body began dehydrating in the Garden of Gethsemane when He sweated drops of blood, a medical condition brought on by stress called hematidrosis. Jesus continued to lose fluids through the bloody beatings and floggings He endured. For six hours, the Savior hung on the cross without replenishing His body fluids. No wonder, He cried out, “I thirst.”

This two-word cry in English (one word in Greek) also fulfilled an Old Testament Messianic prophecy. John tells us that Jesus spoke these last words “to fulfill the Scripture.” Jesus could not and would not die until He fulfilled this lingering detail of prophecy found within three verses in the book of Psalms.

My strength has dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; you lay me in the dust of death. Psalm 22:15

I am worn out calling for help; my throat is parched. Psalm 69:3

They put gall in my food and gave me vinegar for my thirst. Psalm 69:21

How ironic that the Creator of rivers, streams, lakes, and oceans was thirsty for water. How human that the One who causes the rain to fall on the just and the unjust would have a parched tongue. Be comforted by knowing that Jesus feels the pain you are going through right now.

REFLECT

Is your soul parched? Are pain alarms going off in your life? What are some ways you try to quench your thirsty soul apart from God, who is the water of life?

PRAY

God, I am worn out trying to fill the emptiness in my life apart from you. Help me to drink from the water of life that you provide every day and to be completely satisfied in you. Amen.

Cry 6

“It is finished.”

JOHN 19:30

READ

I played enough competitive sports in high school to know that victory is far more pleasant than defeat. Victory is sweet, and defeat is agonizingly distasteful. What is true in sports is also true in business, life, and love. But I have also lived long enough to know that some things are not always as they seem. We can easily snatch defeat from the jaws of victory and victory from the jaws of defeat.

Some say Jesus was doing battle for our souls on the cross. They see a cosmic war where His archenemy and ours, Lucifer, the fallen angel, thought he had won when he killed Jesus the Son of God. The devil did not realize until it was too late, that Jesus went to the cross willingly. From the beginning, the cross was part of God's victory plan (Genesis 3). What looked like a win for hell was actually a triumph for heaven.

When Jesus uttered the words “it is finished” from the cross, it was in every sense a victory cry, not the lament of a loser.

Otherwise, He might have said, "I am finished." Instead, he said, "It is finished." Matthew 27:50 indicates that Jesus spoke His last few words in a "loud voice," ending with a bang, not a whimper.

"O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? ... But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Corinthians 15:55-56). This cry from the cross of Jesus makes me want to sing, "Oh, victory in Jesus!" Be encouraged that as a child of God by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, you are a victor, not a victim.

REFLECT

In what area of your life do you need victory? What sin still enslaves you? List the reasons why the victory Jesus won for you on the cross might not be your present experience?

PRAY

Father, thank you for the victory Jesus won for me on the cross. I ask you to help me live in the present reality of that victory over sin and the fear of death so that in Christ, I am a truly a victor and not a victim. Amen.

Cry 7

“Father, into your hands
I commit my spirit.”

LUKE 23:44-49

READ

People are often curious about what happens at the moment of death. The short answer is our spirit departs from our body. Some spirits enter paradise. According to 2 Corinthians 5:8, they are absent from the body and present with the Lord. Others go to a place of eternal darkness where they experience weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 8:12, 13:41-42). Jesus’s spirit was getting ready to leave His earthly body and return to His Father in heaven. At that moment, He fully yielded Himself to His Father.

Submission to the Father at the moment of death was not difficult for Jesus because He had learned submission throughout His life and ministry. Philippians 2:8 says, “And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!” Hours before He went to the cross, Jesus agonized in prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane,

“Not as I will, but as you will” (Matthew 26:39).

Dallas Willard calls submission a spiritual discipline we must learn as we relate to one another in the body of Christ. In his book *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, he writes, “The highest level of fellowship—involving humility, complete honesty, transparency, and at times confession and restitution—is sustained by the discipline of submission.”

Submission does not come naturally to us. But if we learn submission throughout our lives, like Jesus, we can more easily submit to the Father when He calls us home.

REFLECT

Why is submission difficult for us to practice as a spiritual discipline? How is God asking you to submit to Him today?

PRAY

Father, I am like a wild stallion at heart. I want to run free and on my own. But please help me prepare for death, whenever that moment comes, by learning to submit to You better. Amen.

About the Author



RON JONES is a pastor, author, discipleship coach, and radio Bible teacher. For more than two decades, he has devoted his life to leading and preaching in the local church. He currently serves as lead pastor of Atlantic Shores Baptist Church in Virginia Beach, Virginia, where he delivers his Bible teaching for everyday life.

Ron's ministry extends beyond the local church he serves through a daily radio broadcast heard around the world called Something Good with Dr. Ron Jones. Something Good Radio and Television exists to share the gospel of Jesus Christ, make disciples, and strengthen the body of Christ through life-changing Bible teaching.

A lifelong learner, Dr. Jones earned degrees from Purdue University, Dallas Theological Seminary, and The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He is the author of *Mysteries of the Afterlife: Exploring Its Amazing Secrets* (Harvest House Publishers, Eugene, OR) and multiple eBooks.

Through Something Good Travel, Ron and his wife Cathryn lead spiritual tours to biblical sites in Israel, Italy, Greece, Turkey, Egypt, and Jordan. They have been married for 26 years and live five minutes from their happy place, the beach. They have two adult children.

Last words are important words.

Jesus spoke many words during his three-year ministry on earth. However, His loving cries from the cross are among His most significant. They give us a powerful glimpse inside the meaning of the cross of Christ. In *Cries from the Cross*, Dr. Ron Jones has written a Holy Week devotional that will help you reflect on the passion of the Christ.

CRY 1: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

CRY 2: “Today you will be with me in paradise.”

CRY 3: “Woman, behold your son.”

CRY 4: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

CRY 5: “I thirst.”

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