Good Friday Meditations

Text: Matthew 27:24-60

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Scriptures: Matthew 27:24-60; 1 Corinthians 1:18-25

Songs Chosen: [SttL] 22, 273, 280, 275, ‘The Power of the Cross’, 274, 279, 206

1. **Why Did Jesus Christ Suffer?**

Was it really necessary for Jesus Christ to suffer as he did? **Christ suffered because suffering is inevitable and unavoidable in a fallen world.** When He took on flesh, He became part of this world. He lowered Himself from heights of perfect heaven to the depths of a depraved world. Here on this earth He received the external consequence of the fall of the first Adam because of whose sin, the ground was cursed, the creation was subject to futility and began to groan and suffer. Suffering in this world is the result of sin which may be one’s own, or may be others, or may be general effect of God’s judgement upon this fallen world where injustice, sickness and death abound. Christ did not suffer for His own sins (he had none), but for the sins of others.

**Christ suffered because He was perfectly godly and the godly suffer more that the ungodly in a fallen world.** The world’s response to holiness is hostility. It is like bringing a bright light into a dark and dirty place. The chief priests and elders of the people plotted together to seize Jesus by stealth and kill Him (Matt 26:4). In fulfilment of the prophesy of Isaiah Jesus was “a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief”.

**Christ suffered because of His mission**: to seek and to save the lost. When He came to this earth he came to serve, not be served. He exchanged the love of God which He had known from before the foundation of this world for the hostility of sinful men, women and children. For **p**eople like you and me.

We’ll sing together later of the depth of the love of God.

*Behold the man upon a cross*

*My sin upon His shoulders*

*Ashamed, I hear my mocking voice*

*Call out among the scoffers*

**Why did Jesus Christ suffer? – because of sinners like you and me.** Christ was made poor that we might be rich. Christ was naked that we might be clothed. Christ was hungry that we might be fed. Christ was thirsty that we might have water springing up to eternal life. He suffered so that we might not suffer in eternity because we had all turned aside from God, becoming altogether useless. Christ suffered in being born to poor human parents. He was misunderstood, misquoted and finally betrayed in His earthly ministry. Christ suffered physically and spiritually. We see this very clearly in Gethsemane and at Calvary.

After releasing the notorious prisoner Barabbas, Pilate had Jesus “scourged” -flogged/ whipped with leather thongs having embedded bits of metal/bond. The scourging shredded the skin on the victim’s back. Blood loss and dehydration resulted. Many died after such floggings. Then Christ was mocked by soldiers of the Governor in the Praetorium: before whole Roman Cohort. Stripped, clothed in royal purple, a crown of thorns on his head, a reed as a sceptre (symbol of authority) in right hand. They knelt in feigned homage “Hail, King of the Jews”. They spat on him and beat him on the head. He was dishonoured, humiliated, utterly emptied himself of all his rights and privileges as the highest of all beings...God Himself.

Why Did Jesus Christ Suffer? Because He entered this fallen world and became a part of it. Because He was perfectly righteous and hated because of this. Because His mission could not be fulfilled without suffering. Because His suffering the agonies of hell on the cross was the only way to spare people like us, brothers and sisters, sinners saved by grace, from suffering the agonies of hell for eternity.

1. **Why Was Jesus Christ Crucified?**

Was it really necessary for Jesus Christ to be crucified? Why could He not have been quickly, painlessly, beheaded like John the Baptist? Or even suffered a slower death by stoning – as the Jews in Jerusalem had attempted to do when he confirmed his deity with the words “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30). Being stoned to death can be prolonged and painful, but this is not as brutal as crucifixion - form of execution so traumatic, so cruel that it was illegal to kill Roman citizens by this agonising method.

**Jesus was crucified because this showed that he was accursed by God** (HCLD15Q and A39). We read in Deuteronomy 21:23 "*If a man has committed a sin worthy of death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his corpse shall not hang all night on the tree, but you shall surely bury him on the same day (for he who is hanged is accursed of God), so that you do not defile your land which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance*”.

Hanging in Old Testament times was not the method of execution. but something done to the body of a criminal after death on the same day. The dead body was visibly exposed to insult, injury and shame. The corpse was an ugly spectacle, a fearsome reminder to the world. Being suspended between heaven and earth symbolised abandonment by both – the person who hung there unworthy of either. *Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us-for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree" (Gal 3:13).*

Jesus was hung on the cross, He was crucified, because He bore the curse of God. The curse which was due to sinners like me and like you! Soon we will sing these words together:

*“who was the guilty?*

*Who brought this upon Thee?*

*Alas my treason, Jesus hath undone Thee*

*Twas I, Lord Jesus, I it was denied Thee,*

*I crucified Thee”*

It was God’s curse against me and you, Brothers and Sisters, that put Him there! Jesus was hung on a cross, suspended between heaven and earth, forsaken by both, shamefully separated from God and man. Utterly alone abandoned and cast off. ***“****Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted. 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 53:4)

Christ was cast out that we might be welcomed. Christ was cursed by His Heavenly Father that we might be blessed by God Almighty.

1. **Why Did Jesus Christ Die?**

Could Jesus not have suffered on the shameful cross, but not actually died, would not the loss of consciousness as in a faint be sufficient? Different answers have been given over history:

1. There was an exchange with Satan for the lives of many in return for God’s Son (Origen) portrayed in C.S. Lewis’ book The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe.
2. Christ took Adam’s place and reversed the course of fallen history.. There is some truth in this, but Christ takes OUR place, Brothers and Sisters.
3. A demonstration of God’s love for man (Abelard). This is the ‘moral influence theory’ whereby man is moved by what Christ has done - to get our sympathy.
4. As an example that we must forgive those who wrong us without demanding satisfaction.
5. As a token gesture for the sinfulness of man to show us how seriously God takes rebellion.

The Truth is that Jesus died in order to satisfy the justice of God - a propitiation - turning aside - to appease God’s wrath against sin. Isaiah 53:6 *All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him.* 2 Corinthians 5:21 *He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.* 1 Peter 2:24 *and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.*

Why did Jesus Christ die? Because.

1. God cannot overlook sin (Ex 34:7; Num 14:18; Nah 1:3).
2. Guilt has made man a debtor to the law... a debt which must be paid (1 John 3:4; Rom 3:25,27).
3. Man cannot pay the debt (death) and live.

The atoning death of Christ on behalf of believers, removes the wrath of God from them. He fully satisfied the righteous wrath of God. Christ died that we might be alive.

**John 3:36** *"He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."*

This is Good Friday because Jesus did the ultimate good for people like you and me by suffering as the perfect God-man, being cursed by God and by mankind alone on a cross and dying as a truly innocent man for the crimes of others. **He died that sinners like you and me would live forever in the abiding, enduring, enfolding, perfect love of God.** *“In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son* ***to b****e the propitiation for our sins.” (1 John 4:10).*