

“I Thirst: Easter Weekend--3/22/2008 H.E.Douglass

Today is Crucifixion Sabbath. Young people! Two thousand years ago yesterday, a 33-yr-old young man, just about this time in the morning, was stripped naked, and was suffocating, hanging from three spikes, on a wooden cross.

Today we remember that awful Friday by calling it “Good Friday.” Probably the ultimate euphemism! This special weekend is probably the **only exact date we have in the life of Jesus**. We don’t know when Jesus was born or when He was baptized **but we do know when He died**.

How do we know this? Because we know that the Passover in that year occurred on the first Friday after the first full moon after the vernal equinox—and **that is exactly why we call March 22, 2008 “crucifixion Sabbath.”** Next year it will be a different day in either March or April, depending on the first full moon after the vernal equinox, which is what we call the first day of spring..

What a difference as we look at Calvarytoday! Here we are –well-dressed, calm, and comfortable. But that Friday **only gloom** as the disciples watched their Teacher and Healer humiliated. His closest friends were **wringing their hands in despair**. They tried to fade into the crowd out of stinging embarrassment—their own Leader **would not even try to save** Himself, and they knew He could if He wanted to!

Think with me—why does most of the world remember this one single atrocity, when there were **tens of thousands being crucified** during those years? In fact, a few years later, when Spartacus’s rebellion failed, 5000 crosses lined the Appian Way.

Years ago, banks and the business world **shut down at noon on Good Friday**. Churches had special services and I clearly remember the solemnity of Friday, especially at noon when He died. **Not so today** because we have become so drenched in the atrocities of the last 60 years—the Holocaust, Stalin’s purges of tens of millions, Bataan, the unspeakable bloodbaths of Cambodia, when one third of that country was killed, Hussein’s Iraq, the killing fields of the Sudan, and on and on the horrid awfulness adds up. We have just plain **got used to horror** and even emphasizing all this does not bring forth the tears as it once did!

This is where I get real serious about the cross. Calvary was never meant to wring tears from horrified or sympathetic viewers. Mel Gibson's film *The Passion* turned Calvary upside down. Catholic hospitals have a crucified cross in every patient's room—their **focus is on a dead Christ**. Protestants place crosses on their church walls and around their necks but not crucified crosses—**only a plain cross**. Their **focus is on a resurrected Christ**. **But for both Catholics and Protestants, where Jesus is now and what He is now doing is lost in a fog!** I find that amazing!

We have a hundred different directions we could go to understand what was happening on that awful Friday. **But our focus today is on what the death of this young man at 33 should mean to us today.** If He were God, what was His message? If He were the Son of God, **what kind of a Father** would let His Son be bullied, and beaten, and hoisted on a cross without a flicker of intervention?

What is going on here that says so much about the kind of God in heaven who would permit all this incredible pain and blood? Many millions have **rejected the Christian's god** because of the vindictive God behind the Cross, who needed someone's death to appease His wrath. It kept people like Ellen White from believing in a loving God for years in her young life.

What we need is some straight thinking regarding why Jesus died. And those thoughts lead into **my sermon theme:** The cross is **God's answer to the sin problem;** the cross **calculates the cost of sin;** it reveals **how far God will go to** convince rebels that He will do whatever it takes to get their attention—even to that point where He is so beaten down that He was forced to ask for a sip of water!

Listen to Paul in Romans 5:8-10: “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.”

Here is what the Corinthians heard: “All things are of God, who has reconciled the world to Himself, through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed

to us the word of reconciliation. . . We implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:18-20).

We get the picture, Paul: Calvary is not a payoff to appease an angry God! God. Calvary is God Himself stretching out his arms to a world of rebelling sinners. And the Christian's responsibility is to tell the world that God's front door has never been shut. That God is saying to everyone, wherever a mortal breathes, **"Please come home. I do not hold your past against you.** Let's face the future together with new energy, trusting in My promises."

That's the first message you should hear this morning from Friday's Cross.

Let's continue to linger at our Lord on that cross. We often speak of our Lord's suffering on the cross as if that fearful three hours was a unique experience in His life. But the cross was **only the terrible climax** to a career of suffering.

From the moment He was born, He was hounded by Satan-inspired men. His birth was scorned and ridiculed. His own **brothers** misunderstood Him. Even His **mother** didn't always comprehend His mission. His closest companions, the Twelve, **misjudged and under-rated Him.** He who had proclaimed the law upon Sinai was condemned by His own people as a transgressor.

As the days ticked off, the misunderstanding swelled—as the countdown to the cross began. The prospect of leaving behind no one who understood His mission obscured hope. There were not many Marys with their alabaster boxes of love. The Scriptures are too true—"He trod the winepress alone" (Isa 63:3). Gethsemane! And then the Cross!

John had heard, **"Father, forgive them!"** He heard our Lord's promise to the praying criminal who asked to be remembered; He heard our Lord's pitiful cry, **"My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"**

But John alone records the most human words of all, **"I thirst!"** (John 19:28). John wrote long after Matthew, Mark, and Luke had committed their memories to writing. **John's purpose was to fill in those important items that the other Gospel writers had overlooked.** John heard in this cry **the sum of all the yearnings and ache and agony** of His dying Lord. In sharp focus John heard the *breaking heart of love.* He felt the awful significance of our Lord's suffering: "I thirst!"

Jesus suffered **in the body**—He thirsted for physical relief! Jesus suffered **in the mind**—He thirsted for understanding; Jesus suffered **in the heart**—He thirsted for fellowship.

His physical suffering **began in Gethsemane**. The **weight of the consequences of sin** was crushing Him. The capillaries just under His skin gorged with blood until they burst on contact with the millions of sweat glands. A **microscopic hemorrhage** was produced all over His skin. His skin becomes too painful to touch: **Luke wrote that “His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground” (22:44).**

But **agony was just beginning**. Upon this tortured skin, the slaps, the ropes and finally the scourging of leaded thongs break open the hemorrhaging skin. The body shudders with each stroke but He remained man’s Lord and King, **bloody but, in spirit, unbowed.**

Back and forth between time-serving magistrates, Caiphas, Pilate, Herod, He was dragged. Then the heavy horizontal beam of the cross, as heavy as a railroad tie, is dropped on those bleeding shoulders. Then the **dragging** through the stony streets, the **repeated blow** of the great hammer pinning His hand to the wood. The pain traveled like fire through the median nerve to the brain, to be **wrenched again and again** as His body sags and stretches in the hours to come.

Then the other hand, but now He knows what to expect. His feet next, no water, no food, since the last supper, the incredible sweat in Gethsemane, the loss of blood from the enlarging holes in His hands. The red line inches up His arms and legs, fever raging, fighting off the creeping poisons—the **body dehydrates and begins to decompensate.**

Hoarsely, He whispered, “I thirst.” His fever-scorching mouth had long before dried up all saliva. **He couldn’t speak if He wanted to** and there was yet something He wanted to say—to be heard by men and women there and other created beings and angels throughout the universe.

A compassionate soldier, some say his name was Longinus, quickly offered hyssop soaked in the soldier’s brew, **cooling His throat, relaxing His throat muscles.** Clearly now, loudly, with the last burst of human energy, His cry from parched lips, **“It is finished.”**

He was in command to the last. He was not conquered but the Conqueror. **He stared Satan down** by showing that no man or devil can quench the heart of love. In doing so, He **settled the issue in the Great Controversy concerning God's fairness**: Our Lord proved God right and Satan wrong on all his accusations and lies against God.

The biggest two lies were 1) God was super-selfish, never willing to do what He asks His created intelligences to do, such as self-denial; and 2) God made laws that could not be kept by created beings and still be happy. For 33 years, Jesus proved God right and Satan wrong on both counts.

What is the second lesson we learn from Friday's Cross? That cry, "I thirst!" reminds us that Jesus knew and still remembers the extreme of human pain and emotional exhaustion. In fact, for 33 years, Jesus took all there was for a man or woman to endure—but He never lost character, He never flinched.

And that is what He wants us to know today. It may be our load of being misunderstood, of loneliness, or unfair criticism, of physical pain, the dark hours of a terminal disease, without hope of recovery. **We need never wonder if we must carry these burdens alone** because Jesus now can give you what He heard and needed from the Holy Spirit to endure the worst.

Now the third lesson we learn from Friday's Cross. Everybody in this room today knows how far God will go to win back His rebelling sons and daughters. He did not come as a Heavenly Prince but as a fellow human being, born into the genetic stream of humanity. He did not wear a heavenly space suit like one of our astronauts so that He would not be contaminated as a human, like the rest of us have been from birth. **He did not come to show us how God could keep His own laws but to show us what fallen human beings are able to do.** And never again would He not be a human being! That's how far God would go to get our attention! **Throughout eternity He will be the same Jesus that hung on the Cross, with the same scars that Thomas saw!**

Our fourth lesson: He died our second death, the one we too would suffer at the end of time—if we do not let Him save us from our sinful habits. He did not merely go to sleep as Lazarus did and all the rest of humanity has done \or will, if Jesus doesn't return soon. **He died with your face on His mind, with your name on those scarred hands.** He took my place, He died for Herb Douglass. He proved that sin has deadly

consequences, just like God has been saying since Eden. He proved that God does not lie—proving Satan wrong again and God as fair and just.

Fifth lesson: we now know that love—vulnerable, self-denying, unquenchable love—beats at the heart of the universe. Whatever God asks of you and me, He has already done Himself, in full view of this vast universe. He is fair, not asking the impossible from us!

He served others, Himself He did not serve. He stooped so low in humility that He requested a drink from those who were killing Him. **Until the very end, to His enemies, graciousness; to a repenting sinner, forgiveness and hope; to His mother, compassion; to His Father above, submission and trust.**

He has told us how much we are worth in the sight of God. Whether we accept it or not, the price is out there for all the universe to see. **That cry, “I thirst,” summed up in sharp focus the intensity of the Great Controversy Drama.**

The question we must continue to ask ourselves in the middle of the night or in the middle of huge disappointment, **why do we so often turn our face away from our waiting Father?** From our Forever Friend who died taking our place, hoping that He did not die in vain for you and me?

Why do we love Him in sunshine and on Holy days but strangely turn elsewhere during our difficulties or while pursuing earthly goals? Why do we pinch our praise and gratitude, whether it is our money or our time?

Let us ask Him to help us **claim His promises**. Let us **take Him at His word**, receive **His forgiveness and power**, and meet Satan face to face as He did. He has **called us** His brothers and sisters, sons and daughters of our Heavenly Father. **Let us be** His brothers and sisters and sons and daughters of God. **Believe it, Love it, Live it! He did not thirst in vain.**

No wonder we can face tomorrow! Our wonderful Lord is alive forevermore. And forevermore, we will keep learning more and more as to why He thirsted for you and me.

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