

## **A Word of Anguish**

Series: Words In Red

*Matthew 27:45-46*

Pastor Jarrett Stephens

We are looking today at the 4<sup>th</sup> statement Jesus made from the cross on what we refer to as Good Friday. Last week we took a one week break in this series due to hosting our special guest, R.T. Kendall. He was wonderful wasn't he?

What a powerful message on forgiveness he preached and it went right in line with Jesus first statement from the cross, a word of forgiveness, which was actually a prayer: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

The second statement was what we called a word of salvation. He looked at the criminal on the cross and said, "Today, you will be with me in Paradise". He granted that man salvation at the 11<sup>th</sup> hour when he didn't deserve and certainly couldn't have earned it.

It's a lesson for all of us on how salvation works. It is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

Now, to stay on course for Easter, we will not take the time to unpack statement number three, but will briefly mention it. It's found in John's gospel. These "words in red" are spoken to a mom and a disciple. This is a word of comfort.

**John 19:26-27 – "When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" 27 Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home."**

It's amazing to me that in the words we have from Jesus on the cross, up this point – NONE of them have been about him! Think about that! He's being beaten and mocked...nails have pierced his hands and feet. He has a crown of thorns on his head. He's been stripped of his clothes. He is a dying man.

And in his last hours on earth, he's granting forgiveness...giving salvation...and here extends comfort to his earthly mother.

He wants her to be taken care of – he is fulfilling his obligation and taking his responsibility seriously as a son to ensure his mother is cared for even after he is gone and entrusts her to John, the disciple whom he loved. He introduces the idea here of the importance and value of a spiritual family over sometimes even a physical family.

There's MUCH more we could say about this third saying...this word of comfort, but we are going to move onto our fourth saying.

This is the title of today's message. It's "Words in Red"...I'm calling it: **A Word of Anguish**

This is what Erwin Lutzer calls this fourth saying in his book, *Cries from the Cross*. It's what A.W. Pink calls it in his book on the seven sayings of Christ from the cross, and I just didn't know how I could improve on it – "Anguish" is a great word to describe this statement from Jesus we are looking at today.

It can be defined as severe mental or physical pain or suffering or being distressed about something. It carries synonyms like: agony, pain, torment, torture, suffering, grief, angst, misery, heartbreak, woe.

Now, the first three statements Jesus makes, he makes while it is light outside. He was put on the cross around 9:00 in the morning and we are told at noon it turned to complete darkness. Most scholars that I've read believe these last four statements we are looking at were made in rapid succession toward the very end of his life.

Let's look at this fourth statement from the cross. Here they are "words in red": A Word of Anguish

**Matt. 25:45-46 – "Now from the sixth hour (noon) there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour (3:00 in the afternoon). And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"**

I want to build this message today off four words. And in these four words we will see exactly why we are calling this a "word of anguish".

The first word is: **Suffering**

Now, there is no doubt suffering surrounds a Roman crucifixion. There was physical suffering of course!

We don't have to go into the details of it. We did a little bit in week one of this series. We talked about the scourging that would take place prior to a crucifixion. We can almost feel the physical pain just in imagining our hands and feet being nailed to a cross.

According to the prophet Isaiah, the Messiah...the Suffering servant – **Isaiah 52:14 – "...his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance and his form beyond that of the children of mankind."**

The physical suffering was one thing, but the emotional suffering had to be just as bad...maybe even worse!

Abandoned for the most part by the ones he loved. He was taunted and mocked by those near the cross. Read Matthew chapter 27 – Matthew uses words like people "derided him"...they "wagged their heads at him"...they "mocked him"...stripped him of his clothes.

Psalm 22 is best known for its prophecy concerning the cross. **James Montgomery Boice** (Pastor of 10<sup>th</sup> Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia for a number of years and is best known for his work in biblical commentaries said this regarding Psalm 22 – **“the best description in all of the Bible of Jesus Christ’s crucifixion.”**

In fact, the words Jesus spoke, “My God my God, why have you forsaken me?” – these words come straight from Psalm 22. You could lay Psalm 22 alongside Matthew 27 and they almost overlap!

Listen to **Psalm 22:1** – **“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning?”**

Jesus no doubt knew this Psalm and when he was being crushed on the cross, it was the words of this Psalm that were in his heart and on his lips...we’ll work it out more in just a moment, but let’s just pause here make a quick point of application.

You want to know why giving yourself to God’s Word is so important? Because life has a way of squeezing you at some point.

It’s going to happen. A curve ball is going to come your way...physical pain...emotional pain will be yours at one time or another in life. And we need our heart right now absorbing the word of God so that when it comes, it’s the word of God that first comes to our mind and heart, giving us peace and allowing us to move forward in confidence and by faith.

We don’t want to be overwhelmed or swallowed up by the circumstances of life, and the ONLY it doesn’t happen is by having God’s word hidden in our heart...having God’s word fresh on our mind!

When Jesus was squeezed – what came out? The word of God! It ministered to him...it helped him in his time of great need!

He is experiencing physical pain...emotional pain. Listen to some more of Psalm 22 talking about the emotional suffering Jesus was enduring – what a prophecy!

**Psalm 22:6-8, 12-13** – **“But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by mankind and despised by the people. All who see me mock me; they make mouths at me; they wag their heads; He trusts in the LORD; let him deliver him; let him rescue him, for he delights in him!...Many bulls encompass me; strong bulls of Bashan surround me; they open wide their mouths at me, like a ravening and roaring lion.”**

Bashan was known for its green pastures and therefore they had the strongest bulls. If we would have been at the cross, we would have seen and heard these men...these bulls physically and emotionally abusing Jesus. They were:

- hardened...
- had no conscience...

- no heart it seems...
- ravaging and roaring lions...

**Illus. emotional abuse** – Some social scientists, psychologists and others say that the effects of emotional abuse can be even more devastating than those of physical abuse. You can see the effects of physical abuse, but it's the emotional abuse that often goes unnoticed and can lead to all sorts of hurtful and harmful behaviors.

Jesus suffered physically (Ps. 22:14-17). Jesus suffered emotionally. But he also suffered spiritually. And this leads me to the next word I want us to look at, and this is the word:

### **Separation**

Of the seven sayings on the cross, three of them are prayers. The first one – “Father, forgive them.” The last one – “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit”. And this fourth one we are looking at today. Did you catch that it's a prayer?

“My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” – It's a prayer. The difference in this prayer though is stark...you can't miss it!

Study the prayer life of Jesus for any amount of time and especially how it is bookended here on the cross and every time Jesus prayed nearly, he refers or addresses his prayers to his “Father”.

In the High Priestly prayer recorded in John 17, six times Jesus uses the word Father as he prays. In the Sermon on the Mount, it was his idea as God as Father that was the game-changer for the people listening to him preach. He even taught the disciples to pray, “Our Father, who art in heaven.”

It's ALWAYS been Father...and not just “father” but “abba”...daddy! But, here in this fourth statement from the cross...he begins this prayer NOT with Father, but with the words, “My God, My God”!

Can you sense the separation? There has no doubt been a break here! Something has happened in the relationship between the Father and the Son. And Jesus screams up to God the words, “Why have you forsaken me?” Better and more literally translated, “Why me have you forsaken?”

Not one time in his life had Jesus ever sensed the disapproval of his Father. Instead, it has been just the opposite!

At his baptism, it is recorded that after Jesus came up out of the water, **Matt. 4:17** – “**and behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”**”

When Peter, James and John get to go with Jesus on the mountain and there they see him transfigured...right before their eyes they see Christ in his heavenly glory and in:

**Matt. 17:5** – “**He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.”**”

Jesus had only ever known the approval and affirmation of his Father...and so in this moment of separation...in this moment that is totally foreign to Jesus, he cries out!

See, it's one thing to be abandoned by your family...Jesus knows what that is like! Everyone but his mother thought he was crazy.

But, Jesus was NOT just forsaken and abandoned by his family, he was forsaken by his disciples...his best friends! Judas betrays him. Peter forsakes him.

Mark's gospel tells us that when Jesus was arrested **Mark 14:50 – “And they all left him and fled.”**

So, Jesus knows what it's like to be abandoned, but in all these times, even in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus still had his Father. He could still call out “daddy”, but not now!

He knows what's taking place – and he knows it's a separation that he has NEVER known!

And listen: This was not just Jesus FEELING abandoned by God! In this exact moment...because God lays on Jesus according to Isaiah 53 “the iniquity of us all”, there is a break in fellowship between God the Father and Jesus the Son...it is a separation!

**Erwin Lutzer** puts it brilliantly in his book *Cries from the Cross*: **“Now we can better understand why it was midnight at midday. The physical darkness was symbolic of Christ's separation from the Father, who is Light. Just as the wicked are thrown into ‘outer darkness,’ so the Son bore the darkness of our hell...Look at these hours on the cross and you are looking into hell: darkness, loneliness, and abandonment by God.”**

Now, I want to make sure to qualify what we mean when we say separation...or that the Father abandoned the Son. Understand that in this moment Jesus did not stop being God! They were NOT separated in essence...in being...Jesus was still God...they were separated in fellowship.

The Bible tells us in **Hab. 1:13 – “You (God) who are of purer eyes than to see evil and cannot look at wrong...”**

This is WHY it went dark for three hours that Friday! God turned away from his own son because his son had become the epitome of sin...our sin!

Suffering. Separation. The third word I want to give you is: **Silence**

When Jesus cried out that day...and he did cry out! The scripture tells us that Jesus “cried out with a loud voice”(v. 46).

The words “cried out” come from a combination of two different words. One means “to shout” and it carries with it the prefix “up”. And so when Jesus was “crying out” he was really “screaming up”. This is a guttural scream...like the roar of a lion.

And guess what? It's met with silence! NOT A WORD from God, the Father.

**Charles Swindoll** describes what is taking place: “Nature bowed in sympathy as its Creator was put to death. It was as though the light dimmed across the universe as the darkness of death descended upon the earth. How strange it must have seemed to those who stood and stared. From noon until three in the afternoon two things were present: darkness and silence.”

Going back to the prophecy of **Psalm 22:1-2** – “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer, and by night, but I find no rest.”

Jesus cries out and it's met with silence. This has been referred to as a “cry of dereliction. Others have called it a cry of “desertion” or “despair”...and even “desperation”.

It is said that the Luther sat for hours without food or rest contemplating and thinking on these verses and after hours of silence, it is recorded that he finally spoke and said, “God forsaken of God! Who can understand that?”

**Illus. Silence** - It's hard to fathom “God forsaking God”, it's not hard to fathom the silence though. The truth is, we've all felt this before haven't we? The silence of God.

- You're asking God to give you a baby...and it's just silent on the other end.
- You're asking God to move and get you a new job...you're miserable in the one you're in and it just seems like a dead end. And your prayers are met with silence.
- You're asking God to reconcile and restore that relationship that's broken or move in the life of that wayward child or grandchild, and ALL you are met with is silence.

Part of the beauty of Jesus on the cross, that he voluntarily went to – MORE on that in just a moment...part of the beauty of this passage right here is we see Jesus fully identifying with us. Jesus enduring the silence of God, the Father shows that he is our rightful high priest – he can sympathize with us!

**Heb. 2:17-18** - “Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. <sup>18</sup> For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.”

So, listen: The next time you are crying out and it's met with silence, know that you are in good company. Jesus knows the silence too, and will minister his presence to you in the moment!

A quote I found in my study this week...I don't know who it's attributed to so I'll just put my name by it! LOVE this quote!

**“Jesus cried alone and died alone so that when I cry and die, I will never be alone.”**

In this passage of scripture...in these “words in red” – this word of anguish we see: Suffering. Separation. Silence. We also see and this is my favorite: **Substitution**

Simply put...Jesus took my place and your place on the cross. See, the cross shows us the seriousness of sin.

God is a just God. And because he is pure and holy...because he cannot even look upon sin, it has to be judged! It would be against the very nature and character of God to simply overlook sin. And so, therefore sin has to be ATONED for...it HAS to be covered.

This was the case from the very beginning. Atonement of sins had to be paid for with blood.

**Heb. 9:22b – “...without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.”**

Go back to the garden. When Adam and Eve rebelled and sinned against God, they found themselves to be naked and ashamed. God covered their nakedness and shame with the skin of an animal...the very first sacrifice.

In the Exodus, it was the blood of the Passover Lamb put over the doorway of each home that saved the Israelites.

Look at the sacrificial system in the book of Leviticus. God institutes the Day of Atonement where the blood of a goat was sacrificed on behalf of the people of Israel.

If man was to be in a right relationship with God, sin had to be atoned for and that meant blood had to be spilt. However, we are told in **Heb. 10:4 – “It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.”**

Enter Jesus! God in the flesh! It is only his precious blood – the blood of the innocent Lamb of God that can take away sins.

**Eph. 1:7 – “In him we have redemption through his blood the forgiveness of sins...”**

This IS the story of the Bible! Jesus enters earth submitting to the will of the Father...he willingly lays his life down and he takes on our sin...becomes our substitute. Dies in our place!

**2 Cor. 5:21 – “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.**

Jesus on the cross is enduring the wrath of God that is justly ours and in so doing purchases our salvation. This is substitution and we see this in pictures and in language throughout the Bible.

In picture – think of Abraham and Isaac (tell story – substitute!). We see it in the day of Atonement (Lev. 16). We see it in black and white as well.

**Gal. 3:13 – “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree.”**

On the cross we see the substitutionary death of Jesus – it's a death that belonged to us, but in his grace and love, Jesus took our place!

Theologians call this the doctrine of: Penal Substitutionary Atonement. It simply means Christ bore our penalty for sin. He substituted himself and died in our place.

**Lehman Strauss** was a professor and pastor. He wrote in his book, *The Day God Died*: **“It was not possible to transfer sin without transferring its penalty. The Substitute for sinners must be rejected as a sinner.”** (he bore not just our sin, but our penalty for sin – the wrath of God!)

**Illus. Doctrine series after Easter** – going to look at several doctrines that are a “line in the sand” for us...that we are not moving on! Penal Substitutionary Death is one of them!

Sin had to be paid for...God's wrath HAD to be appeased...and Jesus was the ONLY way!

Very quickly, I want you to see the seriousness of sin in this. The cross and death of Christ shows us how big a deal sin...OUR sin really is!

**Charles Spurgeon** that said: **“Sin slew our Savior; how can we be on friendly terms with it?”**

May God by his Holy Spirit help us reckon ourselves dead to sin and alive to Christ (Rom. 6:11). Let's not be friends with lust...and pride...and anger...and bitterness...let's not be friends with any sin that put Jesus on the cross then and causes a break in fellowship with Jesus now.

As the puritan, **John Owen** said, **“Be killing sin, or sin will be killing you.”**

Suffering. Separation. Silence. And Substitution. Now, in closing, I want you to see the “why” behind all of this. WHY on earth would Jesus endure this which made him cry out, “Why have you forsaken me?”

I want you to see two invisible facts at play here that I hope will expand your love and devotion to God as we think about them. First, I want you to see: **The hand of God**

Jesus on the cross was not some secondary plan of God, but instead it was Plan A all along! THIS...all of this is God's divine doing!

**Is. 53:10a** – **“Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him...”**

**Acts 2:23a** – **“this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God...”**

According to Josh McDowell's *Evidence that Demands a Verdict* there are 29 prophecies from the Old Testament that speak to and are directly fulfilled the betrayal, arrest, trial, death, burial of Jesus.



Only God could do this! He set it up in this way to show us, he is God! His hand is involved in the whole thing! Often times we want God to prove his existence to us...to write it in the sky! Well, he did better than that...he gave us prophecy! No one could line things up like this!

Are you kidding me? 29 prophecies fulfilled in the last 24 hours of Jesus life. Incredible! You look at the cross and the suffering of Christ and we see God orchestrating...arranging...and carrying out his divine plan. We see the hand of God.

Some “theologians” look at this and say it’s divine child abuse...that God, the Father would put his Son through this, but they miss the fact that Jesus said in:

**John 10:17-18 – “For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. <sup>18</sup> No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.”**

God, the Father and God the Son took on the initiative of redemption and planned, purchased and secured our salvation. We see the hand of God going all the way back to Gen. 3 when the prophecy is made that the seed of a woman would crush the head of Satan.

That’s the hand of God. Let your mind attempt to wrap itself around this invisible fact, and I promise it will lead to awe and worship.

See the hand of God, but also in answering the “why” question of “why would God choose to do it this way?”, see also not just the hand of God, but see: **The heart of God**

Why would God deliver up his son to the cross? Why would Jesus, his only son willfully go to the cross AND choose to lay his life down on our behalf and go through the suffering, separation, silence and substitute himself on our behalf.

In searching the scriptures, I find only one motive: **LOVE**

**John 3:16 – “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”**

**Romans 5:8 – “but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”**

No hidden agenda...no bait and switch. It was love that moved the Godhead to accomplish and secure our salvation.

**Illus. Mission Trips** – God’s love is universal. His love communicates across cultures and to different languages. It doesn’t matter where you go or what you’ve done in the past, the love of Christ is for you. Whether it’s in Durango, Mexico or London, England or our own backyard, the love of God is what will change hearts and it’s the love of God that will change the world.

Have you embraced this love in your life? Have you trusted in Christ and found his love to be all that you really need? Look to the cross and in this cry of anguish, I hope today that you hear in it a cry of love.

Let's pray.

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