

Matthew 27:45-50 - Good Friday  
Series: The Son of God Goes Forth to War  
The Greatest Battle Ever Fought<sup>1</sup>  
Pastor Joel Gawrisch

Some of their names live in infamy, names like Waterloo, Hastings, Yorktown, Gettysburg, and Stalingrad. Others, you may have never heard of but feel their effects to this day, names like Huai-Hai (the 1948 battle through which the communist party took control of China), Cajamarca (in which Spain's Francisco Pizarro defeated the Incan Empire, imprinting the America's with Spain's language, culture, and religion), and Ain Jalut (the 13<sup>th</sup> century battle that stopped the Mongolian hordes from reaching the Middle East and Europe). The list, of course, could go on and on, bloody battle after bloody battle...surrounded by suffering, atrocity, crimes, and destruction as civilians, the so-called "innocent" pay the price.

But tonight, on this Friday we call Good, we remember in horrified awe yet with profound gratitude, the greatest battle ever fought. A battle fought not for land, not for power, not for wealth. A battle fought for souls. One of several accounts is the Gospel writer, Matthew: ***From the sixth hour until the ninth hour, there was darkness over all the land.***

The weather has played a roll in a number of key battles throughout history. The hurricane that destroyed the Spanish Armada, the harsh Russian winters that crippled Napoleon's army and then over a century later, Hitler's army. The fog and rain that allowed Washington to evacuate his outnumbered soldiers from New York, right under the noses of the British.

But this wasn't some random darkness or simply unexpected natural occurrence. No, suddenly, right at noon, when the sun is brightest, it turned dark. It was so dark that there was no sunlight at all, nor moon or stars. Just darkness. Everything came to a stop. Historians tell us that as far away as

Egypt, everyone was experiencing the same mysterious and frightening darkness.

And then there were the casualties. The Battle of the Somme in World War I with its 1.1 million casualties. The Battle of Stalingrad in World War II with its 1.25 million casualties. The Mongul sacking of Baghdad in 1258 with its more than 2 million casualties. Yet, in the greatest battle ever fought, there were two. The Book of Genesis tells us: ***I will put hostility between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed. He will crush your head, and you will crush his heel.***

The physical agony that Jesus suffered was horrendous. He had already been distressed the night before in Gethsemane. There was no sleep at all that night because of the trials. Then came the special punishment: the crown of thorns, the constant mocking, the pulling out of his beard, the blows to his face, the humiliation of having his clothing stripped off, the cruel scourging that ripped out skin and flesh down to the bone with each lash. Weakened, he was forced to carry that heavy crossbeam until he collapsed. Only after all that did they lay him down on the cross and drive long nails through his wrists and feet and hoist the cross up and into its hole as the soldiers and the Jewish leaders mocked him.

But through the darkness we begin to realize that all his physical suffering was perhaps like an insect sting compared to the spiritual suffering that is happening on the cross – the real battle.

Our warrior, our champion, was on that cross, alone, against all the forces of hell. Satan hates Jesus. And this is the moment when he now saw the Son of Man and Son of God at his weakest—where he might be vulnerable. Satan doing everything to force Jesus to give up his life's work of paying for your guilt and mine and for atoning for the whole world's sins.

It is here that the devil's lying would reach a fever pitch. Perhaps he told Jesus, "You won't make any difference, Son of God. You are not big enough to cover the whole world's guilt and sin, Jesus. The whole history of humanity is on my side, Christ. Why care about these people? They turned on you. Even Judas and Peter did it. Millions will turn on you later."

The internal pain and pressure mount higher and higher. So much darkness! Jesus is fighting this powerful evil angel in this great darkness, alone...pure, holy, and faithful. Still loving us. Still holding his ground.

But now the worst part: The Father's white-hot anger is burning against him. Think of the power he had—the Creator of the universe who crushed that world with a gigantic flood, who smashed Sodom and Gomorrah, who made the mountain tremble and shake for Moses—that's who is directing his full anger and fury against Jesus.

You can hear it in Jesus' voice as his tone changes. An awful and loud cry coming from those tortured lungs. **"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"** The same God whom Jesus had intimately called **Father** in the upper room, in the garden of Gethsemane, even as he was nailed to the cross, this same God the Father suspends his relationship with God the Son so that the warrior Son could pay for this entire world's sins. It must have torn at the Father's heart - his wrath so focused, his hatred for the malignant tumor of sin so terrible. This is the moment of sheer horror for our warrior. It's the worst moment of his life, and his lonely suffering has reached its peak on that cross. It is here that the battle is either going to be won or lost as Jesus suffers for you and me. As the Old Testament prophet Isaiah explains: **He took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished**

**by God, stricken by him, and afflicted.**

(Isaiah 53:4)

And through it all, as he was paying for sin, he did not sin. The Apostle Peter describes it: **He did not commit a sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.** <sup>23</sup> **When he was insulted, he did not insult in return. When he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.** <sup>24</sup> **He himself carried our sins in his body on the tree so that we would be dead to sins and alive to righteousness. By his wounds you were healed.** This is God's grace in all its sweat and blood!

Every war has its turning point. The battle of Stalingrad in War II, Gettysburg in the American Civil War, Thermopylae in ancient Greece. Yet none of them finished *anything*. No, the fighting kept going. The bloodshed, the atrocities, the crime...all of it, kept going. But not on Calvary. **When some of those standing there heard [his cry], they said, "He's calling Elijah." Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge. He filled it with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink. The rest said, "Now leave him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to save him." When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished" (John 19:30). "And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit" (Matthew 27:50).**

Mark tells us that the temple curtain was **"torn in two from top to bottom"** (Mark 15:38). No more need for sacrificing. No more sheep, goats, or bulls need to be killed. No more need for priests mediating between God and his people. All the restrictions that were in place to keep God's chosen people separate were removed. Every prophecy in the Old Testament about the coming Savior has been fully kept. God has opened up access to himself for all people, nations, languages, cultures, and generations through the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ. Yes, **God**

***made him, who did not know sin, to become sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him.*** (2

Corinthians 5:21)

In this greatest battle of all time, the work of atoning for humanity is over! Jesus has smashed Satan's head, as predicted in Eden - a clear knockout blow. Oh, he's still walking around, but he is mortally wounded. He can no longer win. Heaven is open. Sin is forgiven. God's justice is met. There is nothing more you or I, or even God, has to do. It is finished!

His work is done. He's exhausted, but everything is just as it should be. So it's time for him to leave. The soldiers, the mockers, hell, and Satan could not kill him. Now, of

his own free will, our champion warrior gives his soul into his Father's loving hands. Our holy Jesus, who remained unspotted and unblemished as he experienced our hell, now offers his pure and perfect life as the final, once-and-for-all sacrifice that had been promised of old.

*Sing, my tongue, the glorious battle;  
Sing the ending of the fray.  
Now above the cross, the trophy,  
Sound the loud triumphant lay.  
Tell how Christ, the world's Redeemer,  
As a victim won the day.*

It is finished! Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> 2020 Lenten Series, Northwestern Publishing House, Milwaukee, WI.