

**+ Isaiah 53:3-7, 10-11 + Victory Is Ours On the Cross + Good Friday + 3 April 2015 +**

Crucifixion was never meant to be victorious for the victim. It was meant to humiliate, to shame, to terrify, to break the will of a movement or a crime wave with the unyielding dominance of the Roman Empire. The Romans used crucifixion to force their will on a person or a people. They were supposed to be the victors every time a political rebel or a hardened criminal was nailed to a rough, wooden cross. To keep the pain on an unbearably slow burn, a Roman platoon ensured by force that the Roman Empire's winning streak would never end.

As we walk out to Golgotha on this holy night, that's what we see. There is nothing victorious about this place known as "The Skull" just outside the city gates of Jerusalem. It is a place of shame and pain and death. The focus of everyone's attention is on the man in the middle, the victim hanging on the center cross. All around him is a humiliating scene of defeat.

Crowds come out to gawk at and mock him, especially the religious leaders who attack their victim in all his shame not realizing that they utter ancient words prophesied by an ancient king. **"He trusts in the LORD; let the LORD rescue him."** (Psalm 22:8) **"Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!"** (Matthew 27:40) Even the two criminals—common thieves, really—hanging on crosses on either side of him hurl insults at him. Only a small handful of fearful women and one follower mourn him. The Roman platoon gambles away his clothes. After all, he doesn't need them anymore. So they took them all.

Can it get any worse for this **"man of sorrows"**? Can this total, humiliating defeat get any worse for Jesus of Nazareth? He has already endured so much—betrayal by one of his own beloved followers, beaten and mocked and spit on, condemned by injustice at the hands of religious leaders who should've known better and a pagan governor who preferred temporary peace to eternal truth. Jesus had been flogged so horribly that deep wounds were carved into his back. A crown made from a vine with sharp thorns had been pounded into his head. Then he had to carry his heavy cross through the streets until he stumbled his way to Golgotha.

Then long, sharp nails had been driven into sensitive nerves through his hands and feet into the rough beams of a wooden cross intentionally causing excruciating pain. Before they planted his cross in the ground, the soldiers posted a mocking sign above his head: **"Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews."** (John 19:19) Then he was lifted up so all could see his total defeat.

The prophet Isaiah had described this scene of defeat 700 years before. **"He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not."** If that's not bad enough, the prophet also described how things would actually get worse—yes, worse—for this Jesus hanging on the cross. **"...Yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted."** God himself would forsake, would turn his back on this Jesus and allow him to suffer and die.

...But that was all part of his plan. Jesus would allow himself to lose the battle on Calvary so he could win the war for your soul and mine. Yes, it was a scene of humiliating, shameful, painful defeat with **"the man of sorrows"** hanging on that center cross. Yet it was a scene of glorious victory—not for the Roman Empire or Jesus' enemies or even Satan himself, but for you and me through the Lamb of God taking away the sins of the world. Listen to the prophet explain, **"But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed."**

As the Roman soldiers pounded nails into Jesus' hands and feet, it wasn't the Roman government pinning down another rebel who threatened to overthrow them. It was your Savior-God allowing his blood to be shed as the payment price for all your guilt, for all those times when you have foolishly or intentionally gone where God has warned you to avoid, for all those times when you have wandered into the temptation traps of Satan and your sinful nature. For you and your transgressions, Jesus was pierced!

As Jesus hung on that cross, the holy God was piling all the guilt you've built up, all the foolishness you've done, all the selfishness you've cherished, all the iniquity that has caused all of us to fall short of God's required holiness, every consequence of every single sin all the way back to our first parents—and it crushed Jesus. The prophet explains, **"We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all."**

God piled it on letting your Savior feel the pain of every last sin. Is it any wonder why Jesus in the midst of the pitch-black darkness cried out from the cross, **"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"** (Matthew

27:46) Yet at that moment, the Lord of free and faithful grace, the holy God was turning his love away from his sin-crushed Lamb and turning his unconditional love towards you and me. For you and your iniquities, Jesus was crushed.

The Lord of free and faithful grace laid the crushing **“iniquity of us all”** on the almighty shoulders of the Lamb of God, and then it was done. Jesus cried out, **“It is finished”** (John 19:30), and committing his spirit into his heavenly Father’s hands, Jesus bowed his head and died. The perfect sacrifice was made, and God’s holy justice was satisfied. The earth shook. The rocks split. The heavy curtain in the temple that separated sinful humanity from the holy God tore in two. Even faithful believers who had died were restored to life. The battle was over and Christ by his sacrifice had won.

That sacrifice on Good Friday is now your victory. Your ransom has been paid with the holy, precious blood of your Savior Jesus Christ. You have been declared righteous, not guilty, innocent because Jesus was pierced, was crushed, was punished for you. You have peace with God because **“the punishment that brought us peace was upon Jesus, and by his wounds we are healed.”** In that scene of defeat, Jesus won the victory for you.

That was all part of his plan. Isaiah tells us, **“Yet it was the LORD’s will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand.”** You see, Christ’s victory on the cross, though covered in defeat, is there in the promises he fulfilled. All that happened to Jesus was a promise that he had made and he fulfilled. That means, then, that all the promises he makes to you, he will fulfill.

For example, those transgressions, those iniquities, that punishment you deserve for the guilt of your sin? God promised to wash away all of that for all eternity through the waters of Holy Baptism. The victorious Savior on the cross is God’s guarantee that he has done just that for you. He washes you clean of every stain of sin inherited from your parents, every stain of sin throughout your life. Why? Because Jesus was pierced and crushed and punished for you.

When you suffer pain or when all around you leave or when sorrow shadows your every move, Jesus promises to never leave you or forsake you—never ever. In fact, Jesus promised that he will guide all things for your good. The victorious Savior on the cross is God’s guarantee that he will do just that for you. The whole world could fall apart around you, but he won’t. Why? Because Jesus was pierced and crushed and punished for you.

...But there’s even more. His victory on the cross and the promises he guaranteed there take you all the way to your grave and beyond. **“After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied...”** Even the grave will not overcome this Savior who sacrificed himself on the cross, and therefore, it will not overcome you and me. You see, the story of Christ’s victory doesn’t end at the cross, but with an empty tomb—not just his, but yours and mine. Just as Jesus conquered death on Easter Sunday, he will give us the victory over death someday.

Dear friends gathered beneath the cross, tonight look on the victim hanging on the center cross and recall with sadness how your transgressions and iniquities and guilt put him there. Then look again and see victory hidden in the Lamb of God who is pierced and crushed and punished for you, for your forgiveness, for your peace, for your life both here and in eternity. Then go home not just with the sorrow of repentance, but with the joy of forgiveness and wait with the confident hope in this true and certain fact—**“Victory is ours through our Lord Jesus Christ!”** Amen.