

# Angelic Silence

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[ 0 : 00 ] We're going to turn to Matthew chapter 27 and to the passage that we read. It's with a degree of fear and trepidation, I think, that any preacher will come to a passage like this, because it's just so remarkable and you fear.

Like something fragile, though it's not fragile at all, it's absolutely strong, yet you fear that by dealing with it in an inappropriate way, you kind of break the power and the authority of the word, but we pray for God's Spirit, because we know He chooses to use clay vessels in which to share His truth. And we recognize again and again when we come to passages like this, the significance and importance of them, because our faith rests on them.

Our faith rests on recalling and knowing about and recognizing the significance of the events that are made known to us here, these historical events that are made clear to us, that they are clearly revealed in redemptive history.

These are not fabled events. This is a narrative of the work of Jesus Christ, of what happened to Jesus Christ, in the context of the claims of Jesus Christ as being the Son of God, and therefore when we put our trust in Jesus Christ as Christians, when you take the name Jesus, then you take all that comes with His name, and you take the influence of this event as a life-transforming influence for you.

[ 1 : 52 ] It changes as a Christian, your worldview. It changes how you get up in the morning. It changes how you speak to your wife or your husband or your neighbour. It changes our actions and our reactions.

It changes our lives. Excuse me, I'm going to do something unconventional. I'm going to take my shoes off, because the lace is loose and I keep standing in it.

I'm going to go flying, and I don't want to do that today. So we have here this tremendously significant and important and solemn event that we come to this morning, the crucifixion.

But did you read that this morning? Well, I imagine that many of us read that because we know that passage so well, and we read it and accepted it, and we maybe didn't even think of it.

Maybe you weren't even thinking about it when it was being read. Maybe you were thinking about lunch or about your past week or about your week into which you've entered. But when you sit back, when we sit back and think about this passage, it's so out there.

[ 3 : 01 ] It's so far away from our everyday life and experiences, isn't it? Have we got to that stage where we've lost sight of how completely out of our experience the events of the crucifixion are?

Darkness from noon to 3pm, covering the city, covering the known world. The conflict in that Middle Eastern city, its tensions.

Well, maybe that's not so much outside of our knowledge and understanding even today. This Jewish carpenter, itinerant preacher, nailed to a cross, a Roman cross.

The brutal and the gruesome public humiliation that he suffered there. The chilling, Aramaic cry that he gives from the cross.

The involvement of the people wanting Elijah. The strange and unusual death experience itself. Now some of you, some of us may not have much experience of being in the presence of death.

[ 4 : 11 ] But this is an unusual death experience. I'm not talking about the manner in which he was killed, but even his words in a strong, loud voice he cried out and he were told gave up his spirit.

We don't hear of death in these terms. In the 70 foot inches thick, double layered curtain of the temple, separating the holy of holies from the holy place and the rest of humanity, being ripped in two from top to bottom.

What is that? The earthquakes, the resurrections, the response of the Roman soldiers, in terror and adoration that this truly was a divine event.

So, you know, when we take and build up these events, we recognize as the Roman soldier recognized who saw crucifixion every day, this is not an ordinary event.

The events of the crucifixion that we have before us are events that, if you're a Christian, have transformed your life. This Jewish carpenter on a Roman tree nailed through his hands and feet.

[ 5 : 34 ] It is an event that has become life changing for you and has transformed everything about your existence, is it not?

And has transformed the lives of countless millions of people also. God, is it work?

And I want us to look at this passage in the context of God, the Creator God, the God who sustains you and enables you and me to be here today, the God before whom, before too long we will stand.

This God is intimately involved in this event, this crucifixion event. And as we'll see a couple of times in a couple of different ways, heaven is silent, the angels are silent, there's no angels at Easter here, there's nothing.

So we see this crucifixion, so very different from our own life to, like day to day living and experience. And maybe if we were to share this passage with the vast majority of people in Edinburgh, and we need to, I think, preach with them in mind and live with them in mind, what would they think of it?

[ 6 : 55 ] Have you ever considered that? Have you ever considered, have we ever considered reading or sharing a passage like this with people who have no biblical understanding and knowledge?

Crucifixion, it's outside of most people's life experiences, isn't it? But what about in the context of the life of Christ? Because we need to put this event into the context of the Bible, into the context of Jesus Christ, into the context of Scripture, and of Christ as the Son of God, the Christ who reveals himself as divine, God in the flesh. What does God look like?

What do you think God looks like? Well, Jesus says, if you've seen me, you've seen the Father, you've seen God and this is God in the flesh, and we recognize that this is a planned and divinely orchestrated event, this event of the crucifixion on the cross.

I just want to mention a couple of passages for ourselves to remind us of that in Mark 8 and verse 31. Jesus is speaking to his disciples, and he's saying, he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the chief priests, the elders and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again.

There we have in summary form the theme of our three services for Easter. Gethsemane, Calvary and the resurrection. Jesus predicted, prophesied, spoke about that to the disciples, and we know and we've seen before, haven't we, that they weren't simply unable to accept that, they were unable to register and work through what Jesus was saying.

[ 8 : 43 ] But Jesus, and long before this, of course, but Jesus had this crucifixion event in his diary.

It was in his heart, it was in his mind, it was in the divine plan. Everything up to this point was pointing, everything up to this stage, was pointing towards the death of Jesus on the cross.

So he is silent before Pilate and he's silent before his accusers and he doesn't defend himself and he doesn't plead innocence and he doesn't say, you need to let me avoid this.

I'm the Savior, I'm the Son of God, you don't want to crucify me. He's silent, as heaven is silent, he is silent.

And he determinedly, and we see it again and again in the Gospels, he determinedly sets his face towards Jerusalem, towards the cross.

[ 9 : 47 ] Why are you going there for, Peter says? They want to kill you there in an ironic statement that was, of course, exactly why he was going. So there's determination in the life and in the mind of the divine God, but there's also a demonstration.

It's a demonstration, this is where it becomes beyond ordinary. There's a demonstration in the cross of the love.

It's just where it brings it all into our lives and to our experiences. For God, John 3.16, so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.

And the use of fiction is the outworking of God giving. It is God giving in judicial sacrifice. It's God giving in our place.

It's God substituting our death for his own in the person of his Son. And it's a demonstration of his love for God, so loved you and me that he gave.

[ 11 : 01 ] It brings, even as we begin to unfold it brings us into, it brings the events of the crucifixion into our own experience, breaking into the mess of humanity, into the injustice and the darkness and the death and the separation he gives and lays down his life for us.

It's a picture of determined and demonstrated love that brings the crucifixion into our experience. But can I do so more tangibly and I hope more practically bring the crucifixion into the context, not just of the life of Christ and the life of the Word, but can I bring it into the context of our lives again? Can I do that? Will you bear with me for a few moments? A stocking sold preacher. Will you do that? Here is a recognition when we think about the cross and when we think about the crucifixion and we think about what Jesus has done and why he has done it.

We recognise that we are amazing beings. We are amazing people. We are made, we are people who have each of us been made in God's image, unique in this vast universe, this incredibly vast universe that is science and as we see increasingly through the wonders of technology how vast and how glorious this universe is, unique beings, image-bearers of the Creator God, you and I, amazing beings with frightening capabilities as people, frightening capabilities we have, even in that image which as we have turned from God in humanity from the very beginning all of us tired by that brush, even though that image is broken and death has come into our experience, we remain frighteningly capable beings, capable of the most astonishing good humanly and also of the most astonishing evil.

[ 13 : 33 ] Incredible in what we can do in beauty but also horrendously beastly. That is the reality of how amazing we are because in God's image as those who have turned from Him there is no depths to which we cannot plumb and humanly almost no heights to which we can rise.

Let's build a tower that will reach to heaven. Did God confuse that because they had the capability of doing so?

Symbolically as it were, great capability of humanity. So we have these amazing extremes because of sin and because of separation that allows us at a human level still to be glorious but unredeemed and ultimately lost but also gloriously bleak and dark and evil but mostly, mostly we are just damningly ordinary.

We are just ingloriously deceived into a life of triviality and self-absorption not being what we could be in Jesus Christ but simply living on a banal and plain and dull level that defies that we are image bearers of the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords.

But in this life that we live, we battle, don't we, against the reality of death. We've spoken about it in our prayers today. People's lives this week have been blighted by death. People's lives are the shadow of death over them.

[ 15 : 16 ] The questions that we face in death are questions we all have. I image bearers yet we sense the isolation of God and of one another.

We feel that we have what is the reason sometimes for living in this universe that we live in. And each of us to a greater or lesser degree longing for belonging, longing for love and for intimacy. The crucifixion speaks into all of that. Speaks into all of the reality of us being broken image bearers and the answer to that brokenness.

The answer to the horrendous evil that we are capable of. The answer to directing the good that we are capable of. And an answer to the triviality that blights so much of our lives.

We are amazing beings but we need Christ in our lives, don't we? What we are is humanity, what we are is people. Reminds us that we need the crucifixion. We need the cross.

[ 16 : 25 ] We need what Jesus Christ has done because he's taken our death, hasn't he? Do you know the verse that we would use for that? It's one that we should be able to be good to trip off our tongue.

2 Corinthians 5, 21. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. And that has worked out in the crucifixion.

It's not something that just was a random happening to a Jewish carpenter that is recorded. It's changed the lives of millions. It is the once for all redemptive act of God on our behalf.

It is God dealing with our questions about death and our awareness of our own mortality and our own brokenness before God.

It's a judicial act. It's beyond incredible where God sees His created beings impotent and broken and guilty.

[ 17 : 32 ] And He says, I'll pay the price. I will do it. I will bridge the gap as Paul reminded us on Wednesday night when he told us about sharing our faith.

Shared with us about sharing our faith. The reality of God incarnate Jesus Christ. With the acquiescence and the involvement of the Father and the Holy Spirit saying, we will do this. I alone can pay the price. There's a great section in Revelation 5 which speaks about in symbolic and pictorial terms the events of history and it speaks about the need of humanity in Romans 5 and the scroll that needs to be opened that would unfurl God's will and God's love for humanity. And the whole of humanity weeps because there's, the whole of heaven weeps because there's no one that is worthy of opening the scroll. And we're told beautifully that there's, in the great symbolic, there's silence in heaven for half an hour.

Can you imagine that silence in heaven for half an hour? And then we're told the Lamb alone is worthy to open the scroll. In other words, He's the only Redeemer. He's the only one.

[ 18 : 47 ] Silent. Heaven had no answer. Heaven couldn't possibly have imagined that it would be God, the Son, who would come to be the saviour of humanity. Christ dying as a diseased rebel in order that we might live.

Take our own sinfulness and our own death and our own failure and our own mortality and our lostness and let the crucifixion apply it to your life and apply it to mine because not only did He take our death, He experienced our deepest hell on the cross.

Again, I think we're speaking very much out of our understanding and also out of our thinking. Hell isn't in the consciousness today as maybe it was 20, 50, 100 years ago in people's thinking. Certainly not in the thinking of the Christian church and maybe not even in the preaching. But hell is, isn't it, it's the outworking of being judicially separate from God.

It's the outworking of being spiritually dead and it's the outworking of recognizing the holiness of God being unable to relate in relationship with sinful humanity unless that sin is dealt with.

[ 20 : 12 ] So we have His cry from the cross which we sung about in Psalm 22 and His experience of three hours of infinite darkness where the Son was unwilling even to shine on the events of the day.

A judicial separation from His Father, utter forsakenness and abandonment from God the Father to God the Son on the cross.

An experience for Jesus of rejection. Again, no voice from heaven saying, this is my beloved Son. With Him I'm well pleased.

No voice from the angels as there was in our comfort from the angels in Gethsemane as Neal spoke about last week. But he, at this point, having been silent himself up to this point more or less, now speaks heavenward and says, why have you forsaken me?

He says, where is God? Where are you God? He still speaks in trust. He says, where are you my God? He's still entrusting himself to the Father.

[ 21 : 24 ] But there is this incredible, really dense and complex and unutterable and inexplicable cry from the cross.

Why have you forsaken me? Not only in the pain of the Son, unless we forget, if any of you here have loving fathers or are a loving father, unless we forget the pain of the Father hearing that cry and being unable to respond, because this was the purpose, this was the plan, hearing His holy, precious, perfect child with whom He had eternal fellowship in ways that we can't possibly understand.

Say, why have you forsaken me in that moment? Can you imagine that as a parent? Can you imagine not being able to respond to your child's cry of helplessness, forsakenness and abandonment?

And yet, for all parties of the divine being, willingly doing this on our behalf. I know nothing about science, as you will often know from this pulpit.

But I know that a nuclear reaction comes, does it not, from splitting the atom? Something like that? Maybe not. But for the purposes of the sermon it is, okay?

[ 23 : 00 ] I'm sure I've heard that somewhere. It's a massive, amazing amount of energy comes that gives us nuclear power from that split. And there's no doubt that in the splitting of the Father and the Son and this forsakenness, that it is just so powerfully dramatic as the perfect God Christ roams the corridors of hell, as it were on our behalf.

And we can't think of ways of describing it that begin to, because I don't know what the experience is, but can you take a beautiful small child, an innocent child, from a human point of view a perfect child, a child that's loved, a child that has all that that child needs, and a loving family, and that child by the hand, and walking them through the trenches of the psalm in the First World War, through barbed wire and mud and rotting stinking bodies, and the darkness and the brutality.

Could you ever consider such a desperate contradiction? Times that by a million. And then we have maybe a grain of sand on the seashore of Christ's experience on the cross, on our behalf.

It's not only the deepest hell, it's also the greatest love, isn't it? Because he says, and it's the theme of a thousand films and books, isn't it? There's a love.

There's someone who loves, who sacrificially alone can act on behalf of their lover, in order to save or redeem them in a human way. And so here we have Jesus Christ, who alone can act, and who acts on our behalf out of love.

[ 25 : 02 ] And in the experience of the cross, and in the experience of paying the price for our sins, understands our questions, and our forsakenness, and the darkness that sometimes we feel.

The battles that we have, as even redeemed Christians in a world of brokenness and of sin and of rejection, he says, because of what I have done, I will never leave you, nor forsake you.

The same word that's used in Hebrews 13 verse 5, quoted from different sections of the Old Testament, that God's intention was always that he would never leave us in forsakers, because he's already forsaken his son on our behalf, greater love as no man in this that he lays down his life for his sins.

That is the love that we have. And this evening we're going to talk a little bit more about a response to that love through the example of the Apostle Paul in Acts, in our study on Acts. So it's the greatest love, the deepest hell, and the hour death that he experiences.

I just want to close, and I may be right or I may be wrong in this, but I feel that we struggle so often to recognize that reality by faith.

[ 26 : 28 ] I know I do, because if we truly did recognize it, we would absolutely be an army mighty with banners. We would be just on fire for Jesus Christ. When we think of the cost of our salvation, where does our struggle lie?

It may be that you think the claims of God are irrelevant. It may be that the whole event of worship and the truth of God's word and the redemptive story seems far away from you.

It may well be that you feel sin is just trivial. It's not significant and important in your life and the holiness of God that would drive him to the cross in order to open up the way back for us is something we've lost sight of.

It simply doesn't seem real to us. And maybe I'm struggling to find illustrations today. Maybe it's my own inability to understand. Maybe it's simply that God's spirit isn't moving as we would want him to move.

But I'm trying to illustrate the truth in ways that might touch us, and in ways that might drive us to the spirit of God himself to make things clearer.

[ 27 : 44 ] And I could think of one example that maybe relates to our own experiences of it all being very distant for us. And it's the example of someone I've been going to visit and see in the hospital over the last number of weeks, Masha's dad. He's got leukemia and cancer.

We've heard a lot about leukemia this week in the news. And for most of the time for us leukemia or cancer seems very far away. We know it's there. We know it's a reality for people.

And we know it's a serious thing for most people. But we don't seem to see it as real until it comes into our own life, our own experience.

And the amazing thing about the treatment that Melvin is receiving for cancer, bone marrow transplant, is that it speaks really well into our spiritual need.

He's been given radiotherapy and chemotherapy. He's in remission. But he's still to receive bone marrow transplant.

[ 28 : 53 ] Now, in order for that to happen, he needs a perfect match, bone marrow match. He's found that in his sister.

And her stem cells are boosted by drugs. Her healthy stem cells are boosted by drugs in preparation for the transfusion.

But before he can receive these healthy stem cells, he's given four days of life threatening chemotherapy to destroy not only his cancerous stem cells, but all his stem cells.

So that her healthy stem cells can be injected into his bone marrow and therefore into, from that point, into his blood.

I know that's a layman's way of looking at it. But that's the, you know, there's no compromise with cancer. You can't say, oh, get rid of some of the diseased cells now and again.

[ 30 : 03 ] As long as some of my bones and bloods are healthy. Those who are in the know recognize that the cancer must be destroyed because it is life threatening.

It is death carrying if there is to be any hope of healing and recovery. That is the picture of our sin that God speaks about.

Your sin and your condition in mind that it's life threatening. It not only is threatening to ourselves, but it separates us from his holiness and his goodness and his glory and his life and his fellowship. And we can't just nod our heads towards sin and be careless over it and allow it into our lives and hearts. God needs this incredibly solemn and powerful remedy that is not going to affect us because we can't pay the price.

But we do have a substitute whose perfect life becomes ours. When we trust in him to have taken our diseased life on the cross.

[ 31 : 25 ] So it's so significant that we put our trust in Jesus Christ. Think of him as your Creator, your God, the one that you will stand before, holy and separate from the sin that you have in your heart.

The conscience that you have that knows that deep down. Think about the cross where his love is freely and fully offered to you. Pray if you don't have it for the faith to enjoy and believe in the life changing power of the cross.

And live the way of grace. There is no life like it. It's a great offer. I visited someone else this last week and hope to visit them severally who has terminal cancer and is facing death and is organising their own funeral.

What a great privilege to share the gospel with someone that close to death. Something so relevant, so significant, so eternally potentially life changing for them.

So utterly and completely important and I know sometimes maybe we don't think that as a class of young people. We think life lies ahead of us indefinitely.

[ 32 : 44 ] But it's not just about the future, it's about our life now and about our health now and about living life to the full now. May God apply his truth to us.

I'm sure not a Christian where you consider Jesus Christ today, where you speak to me or somebody that you know in the congregation who is a Christian and ask them what must I do to be saved.

And may we be able to point you to Jesus Christ with you. I've asked Ian Neveson if you'll come up at this point and give thanks for the word.

Let's pray.

Father we would thank you for your word to us this morning. As we read your word and as it expounded to us and as it challenges us.

[ 33 : 48 ] Father as we think of it we are reminded of how you have indeed been working right through history. Of how our faith has a historical basis in this age where there are so many skeptics.

We're reminded of the death of the Lord Jesus and of his resurrection. Of how these are indeed historical facts at the foundation of our faith and attested by many people.

But as we think of these and are reminded that they are indeed historical facts, they're more than historical facts. We see in them, we see how you came and sought us out when we were far away, when we were spiritually lost.

We see your redemptive act that you paid the debt that we could not pay. And we see your love for us, your love in the death of your only son.

And Father as we see your infinite love to us, Father we see how we're called to respond to that love.

[ 35 : 02 ] And Father we know that what we offer is a pale in comparison. But Father we come before you and we ask that we commit our lives afresh to you.

And Father as you have given us blessings in so many ways, in the spiritual realm primarily, but also physically and in your provision to us in material ways.

We also give thanks for that and we commit what we give in our offerings to you. In Jesus' name, Amen.