

**Matthew 27:45-50** *From noon until three in the afternoon darkness came over all the land. <sup>46</sup>About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi lema sabachthani?"(which means "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"). <sup>47</sup>When some of those standing there heard this, they said, "He's calling Elijah." <sup>48</sup>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. <sup>49</sup>The rest said, "Now leave him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to save him." <sup>50</sup>And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit.*

Dear friends in Christ our Savior,

Waterloo in 1815. Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. Antietam-1862. Stalingrad 1942-43. Yorktown 1781. These are battles that have been listed by many as the greatest battles of all time. These ratings are very subjective and often based on the influence that a battle has on history. Lt. Col Michael Lee Lanning in his introduction to his 10 greatest battles of all time wrote, "Battles win wars, topple thrones and redraw borders. Every age of human history has experienced battles that have been influential in the spread of culture, civilization and religious dogma. They introduce weapons, tactics and leaders who dominate future conflicts. Some battles have been influential not for their direct results but for the impact of their propaganda on public opinion." Many battles have had a big impact not only on their society but on the world as a whole. Their outcomes have influenced a lot of people for a long time.

Yet one battle is almost always left off of this list of the great battles of all time. I would argue that this battle should be listed as the greatest battle of all time. This is the battle that we are witness to again this evening on the pages of Scripture. What makes this battle so significant that we would call it the greatest battle of all time is that it changed the entire world and everyone in it. The results of this battle have impacted every single person who is living today, who ever has lived and who ever will live. This is the battle that Jesus fought on the cross. Many skirmishes were fought that led up to this battle. This was the big one. Your future, my future, and the future of everyone who has ever lived was hanging on the outcome of this battle. The battle Jesus fought on the cross would bring the war to an end, guarantee victory for all who believe in him, and change their eternity!

From noon until three, darkness came over the land. The sun stopped shining. Right at noon when the sun was normally its brightest, it turned dark. There was no light at all—no sun, no moon, no stars. This wasn't an eclipse. Everything just went dark. It was more than just physical suffering that Jesus' was enduring at this time. Oh, that suffering was there. Normally with crucifixion, it would take a couple of days to die, depending on how badly the person had been whipped ahead of time. They would just hang there in the hot sun. The criminal's diaphragm would simply work slower and slower until he was asphyxiated as his breaths became shallower and shallower. All of this Jesus faced on top of the distress he endured from the night before. He had no sleep. They had placed a crown of thorns on his head, struck him on the face, pulled out his beard, stripped off his clothes and whipped him savagely ripping out skin and flesh down to the bone. Even in his weakened state they had him carry the crossbeam until he collapsed. Only after all of this did they drive long nails through his wrists and feet and hoist the cross up and into its hole as the soldiers and Jewish leaders stood there mocking him.

As horrible as this physical pain and agony was, it paled in comparison to the spiritual suffering Jesus endured. The darkness came when the Father turned his back on his Son and left him completely alone to face the torment of hell. The darkness shows us how much God hates sin. He pulled from his Son every single ounce of his love and left him alone. God's white hot anger burned against him. It was so horrendous that Jesus finally screamed out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" It's hard for us to wrap our minds around how the Father who is one with the Son could forsake him, abandon him and leave him all alone. His wrath was focused on the evil that Jesus bore because he hates so much the tumor of sin that is causing the human race to rot. This is the moment of sheer horror for our warrior. How the Father's heart must have been torn to see his son in such agony. His agony had reached its peak. It's here the battle is either going to be won or lost as Jesus suffers for us.

My friends, as the hymn, Stricken, Smitten and Afflicted so aptly says, if we are ever tempted to think of sin but lightly, nor suppose the evil great. Here you see its nature rightly, Here its guilt may estimate. If we are ever tempted to think that sin isn't a big deal or doesn't really matter to God, this scene tells a completely different story. God hates sin. He demands justice for it. He was willing to inflict this horrendous suffering and agony upon his Son because his wrath burns so greatly against sin. This entire scene, as terrible as it is, is because of us. Jesus remained perfect and holy in himself this entire time. Yet our sin was charged to him and he was willingly paying for it. What wondrous love is this! He was willing to suffer for every hurtful word spoken to those we love, for every selfish action, for everything we failed to do in service to our God because we were lazy and afraid, for every malicious thought, for every neglect of God's Word, for every time we place our needs and wants ahead of what God wants for us...Jesus suffered on that cross. God does not take our sin lightly!

But what sweeter cry could we hear than the cry of Jesus when he gave up his spirit. That was not a cry of agony...but of victory. Everything that needed to be done for our salvation had been completed perfectly. The perfect life that Jesus lived following perfectly every command and law of God was over. The sacrifice for our sins had been made when Jesus willingly endured hell itself. His relationship with the heavenly Father had been restored. That loud cry: "It is finished" says everything. Everything that needed to be done for our salvation along with that of the entire world had been completed. Jesus had smashed the devil's head as predicted in Eden. This was a knock out blow. While the devil may

still be walking around, he is mortally wounded and can no longer win. The greatest battle of all time—the battle for your soul and mine is over. Our home in heaven has been prepaid and is prepared and waiting for us. There is nothing that you and can do nor have to do to pay for our guilt and sins. We are forgiven. God loves us. Heaven is waiting.

What a comfort for us. The coronavirus is not the biggest battle before us. The fears of economic collapse is not the worst thing to fear. Sin and death are the worst things to fear and the biggest battle we face...and those have been conquered by Christ our Savior. Our holy Jesus, who remained unspotted and unblemished as he experienced our hell, offers to us his pure and perfect life as the final, once and for all sacrifice that brings salvation. A Facebook post this week said, "They are predicting this will be a rough week for America (because of the many deaths that would come from the coronavirus.). It was a rough week for Jesus, too. But just look at the outcome." That's what we celebrate tonight—the outcome! Even if death were to come to us or to loved ones or people we know, even that cannot win. With his sacrifice Jesus conquered death and opened the kingdom of heaven to all who believe in him.

There have been a lot of great battles in the history of the world. Many of them have had great impact and lasting influences on the world as a whole. You and I might disagree which of those battles ought to be listed in a Top 10 list of the greatest battles. But we can agree on the greatest—the one that not only impacted every single human who ever lived, but has guaranteed our eternal security and freedom. For that, we worship our Savior. Amen.