



**Theme: Tell Me Something Good –
Good News in the Gospel of John
“The Goodness of Suffering”**

Sermon preached by Jeff Huber, March 28-29, 2026, at Summit Church, Durango

Weekly Memory Verse:

²⁰ “I tell you the truth, you will weep and mourn over what is going to happen to me, but the world will rejoice. You will grieve, but your grief will suddenly turn to wonderful joy.” – John 16:20

VIDEO Sermon Intro

SLIDE “The Goodness of Suffering”

Today we continue our theme in the Gospel of John, longing for someone to **Tell Us Something Good** in a world full of difficult news. We are reading through the Gospel of John together in this season of Lent, the 40 Days and 7 Sundays before we get to Easter, using our Meditation Moments. If you do not have a Bible, we will be happy to give you one at our Welcome Center in the atrium. If you’re watching at home or online, you can download the **Meditation Moments** right off our website.

We are now in **chapters 18 and 19** which have to do with the arrest and the trial in the crucifixion of Jesus. Even if you have not been

able to read anything else up to this point from the Gospel of John, I want to encourage you to join us in reading these passages each day this week. They are appropriate for Holy Week and will take you to the events of **Maundy Thursday and Good Friday** and I know it will be a blessing to read these during this week.

In reading John's Gospel, we have been noting that this gospel is **different than Matthew, Mark and Luke**. John gives us information which is different and not included and he sometimes tells stories in different ways. Anytime we find stories that are like the other Gospels, we need to really pay attention in the Gospel of John because **every detail means something**. John was probably familiar with the stories of Jesus told in Matthew, Mark and Luke. Mark's gospel was probably written 20 to 30 years before John writes his gospel and Matthew and Luke were written shortly after that. John was familiar with this material, even if he hadn't read all the Gospels in their entirety.

John chooses to intentionally tell the stories differently, with **different details emphasized** there and as we see those differences we recognize that John sees these things as important, which are different than what we might read in Matthew, Mark and Luke.

John wants us to see those details differently because they add a **richness and a texture** and the meaning that **takes us deeper**. He does these things to move beyond telling us what simply happened in the life of Jesus. John is not trying to give us a reporter's account of what happened. He is trying to help us understand what this means for our lives.

- GRAPHIC** **Temple Mount Ariel**
- GRAPHIC** **Temple Mount Ariel with Route**
- GRAPHIC** **Gethsemane Above**
- GRAPHIC** **Gethsemane Above Route**
- GRAPHIC** **All Nations Exterior**

GRAPHIC Palm Sunday in Jerusalem

All four gospel tell us that Jesus entered Jerusalem the week before his death on what we call Palm Sunday. As we see in this photo, Jesus would have entered by coming down the Mount of Olives and going through the Kidron Valley until he came to the entrance to the city at the Dung Gate which would lead him to the Temple Court. Today, there are thousands gathering, even as the war rages in the Middle East, to remember this Holy day of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

This week in chapters 18 and 19 you will find many different details in John's Gospel. You find these only in John and we are meant to pay attention to them. Today we're going to focus on two parts of the story in these two chapters. We're going to **start with the arrest** of Jesus and then we are going to **go to the crucifixion**. In both stories we will find some details that are very important that we sometimes overlook.

In the beginning of chapter 18, Jesus has **just finished the Last Supper with the disciples in the upper room**. We spent the last two weeks talking about what Jesus said at the Last Supper because **John has five chapters devoted to this one evening** while Matthew, Mark and Luke only spend 20 verses on that night. The supper is over maybe around **10 or 11 or maybe even midnight**. Jesus and his disciples leave the upper room, and they go **down Mount Zion**, walking through the **Kidron Valley** and up the other side to the **base of the Mount of Olives**. They come to a place that John calls the garden and Matthew, Mark and Luke call Gethsemane.

They have come to this place every day during the week to pray and so they are familiar with it. In Matthew, Mark and Luke you might remember they tell the story where Jesus tells his disciples to stop and pray in one part of Gethsemane and then he takes Peter, James and John a little farther into the garden and has them pray in a specific spot.

Jesus then goes on even farther into the garden and he prays. Three times Jesus gets up from prayer, and he goes and he finds his disciples and doing what?

They are sleeping. He says to them, "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. Couldn't you stay awake for even one hour to pray with me?" We also find that Jesus, when he is praying, is deeply distraught. We read these words in Mark's gospel, chapter 14.

BIBLE *33 He took Peter, James, and John with him, and he became deeply troubled and distressed. 34 He told them, "My soul is crushed with grief to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me."*

35 He went on a little farther and fell to the ground. He prayed that, if it were possible, the awful hour awaiting him might pass him by.

36 "Abba, Father," he cried out, "everything is possible for you. Please take this cup of suffering away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine."

Jesus prays in Matthew, Mark and Luke that he doesn't want to go to the cross. He asks God to find another way, yet not his will but God's will be done. The humanity of Jesus comes out in Matthew, Mark and Luke and in Luke's gospel it says he's even perspiring profusely, like drops of blood. We can feel the passion of Jesus and the agony. On the video screen, you'll see a picture of the olive trees in the garden of Gethsemane that are a couple of thousand years old.

GRAPHIC **Garden of Gethsemane Olive Trees**

GRAPHIC **Church Nations Ext**

GRAPHIC **All Nations Interior**

GRAPHIC **Agony Mosaic**

GRAPHIC **All Nations Ceiling**

GRAPHIC **Rock of Agony**

The church that is in the garden of Gethsemane, is called the Church of All Nations. You can see a picture of it on the screen from when we went there several years ago, as a church. It's also known as the **Basilica of Christ's Agony**. The interior is stunning and a beautiful space to pray and remember tonight that Jesus came to this area to pray before his arrest. The front of the altar area contains multiple mosaics which extend throughout the room. The center mosaic is a depiction of Jesus praying on the rock of agony. I love the ceiling which is painted as if it stars sparkling on the purple night sky to help remember that it was dark when Jesus came to this place. The center of the church is the rock of agony on which tradition says Jesus prayed. This still is an active church, and you can find people this week gathering around this rock for worship.

This is what we find in Matthew Mark and Luke. When we turn to John's Gospel, we don't find any of that. **We don't find the emphasis of his humanity in John like we do in the other Gospels.** John is trying to tell us that we are **forgetting something**. Yes, Jesus is human and he experiences this passion and the human emotions, but let's be clear that he is also **God in the flesh**. God has come among us in the person of Jesus Christ, and we don't hear any of these aspects of his humanness in John's Gospel.

In fact, instead of asking that the cup be taken from him he says to Peter, **"Shall I not drink from the cup of suffering the Father has given me?"** This is quite different from what he says in Matthew, Mark and Luke. We don't read about Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane. Here's what we read in John's Gospel, chapter 18.

BIBLE ***1 After saying these things, Jesus crossed the Kidron Valley with his disciples and entered a grove of olive trees. 2 Judas, the betrayer, knew this place, because Jesus had often gone there with his disciples. 3 The leading priests***

and Pharisees had given Judas a contingent of Roman soldiers and Temple guards to accompany him. Now with blazing torches, lanterns, and weapons, they arrived at the olive grove.

As we go back to the front mosaics of the Church of all nations, we find this scene depicted on the left alcove mosaic.

GRAPHIC **All Nations Front**

GRAPHIC **Jesus Arrest 1**

In Matthew, Mark and Luke, there is a crowd that comes with Judas, but **John tells us that there is a contingent of Roman soldiers and Temple guards.** A “contingent of Roman soldiers” is a technical term and it typically was **600 soldiers.** These are Rome’s finest and they are a **trained killing machine.** They show up armed, to arrest Jesus. Can you imagine any criminal that would have **600 police officers show up to arrest them?** You would recognize that as a very dangerous and powerful person if 600 highly trained police officers came armed and ready to arrest that person.

What is John trying to tell us? He is not showing us Jesus praying in agony in the garden. Instead, there is a military force of 600-armed soldiers coming to arrest him. Then we read this in the next few verses.

BIBLE ***4 Jesus fully realized all that was going to happen to him, so he stepped forward to meet them. “Who are you looking for?” he asked.***

5 “Jesus the Nazarene,” they replied. “I Am he,” Jesus said. (Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them.) 6 As Jesus said, “I Am he,” they all drew back and fell to the ground!

Can you see what John is trying to emphasize? **600 Roman soldiers fall back in fear to the ground when Jesus speaks.** John wants to recognize that, yes Jesus was fully human, but he was also **strong**

and powerful and mighty and God in the flesh. Jesus is not afraid of anyone as he stands before them and answers their question. Those 600-armed men fall back in fear at his simple response of, **“I Am.”** While the translation we have before us is, **“I Am he,”** the original Greek is simply the phrase, **“I Am.”** This image of the arrest of Jesus is depicted on the back mosaic wall of the Church of the agony with this image in which you notice that **Jesus is glowing.**

GRAPHIC Jesus Arrest 2

SLIDE “I AM”

This is a phrase that Jesus uses repeatedly in the Gospel of John. When he uses this phrase, **“I Am,”** Jesus is taking us back 1300 years to the time of Moses near Mount Sinai. Moses sees a bush burning, but it’s not consumed. The voice speaks in the bush and says, **“Moses, I am your God and I’m sending you to go back to Pharaoh.** You are to tell him to let my people go. Then you will lead my people out of slavery in Egypt and into the promised land.”

Moses says, **“Okay, but what’s your name?”** A voice speaks in the bush and says, **“You tell the Israelites that I Am sent you to them.”** Remember that the Hebrew word is Yahweh. I Am that I Am means that **God is existence and being itself.** Everything that exists is contingent upon God for existence, which is exactly what John has said at the beginning of his gospel about Jesus. **“In the beginning was the word and all things were made through him.** Nothing that exists has an existence apart from him.” All of this is meant to be captured in that phrase, **“I Am,”** which is **why the soldiers fall back in fear.**

In this arrest story in John’s Gospel, John wants us to see that **Jesus is all-powerful,** and with the bat of the eye **he could wipe out** his enemies. **He could speak the Word, and they would cease to exist.** Jesus is **that powerful and that strong.** John wants us to know that this Jesus that we ask to walk with us and that we follow is **strong enough to face any enemy and to crush** them if He wants to.

So, when there are moments in my life where **I am walking through a difficult situation** or I don't want to go through it and I'm feeling vulnerable, I turn to **Matthew, Mark and Luke**, because there I find **Jesus who understands what it's like** to walk in a place where we are afraid and scared. I understand that **Jesus knows what it's like to feel suffering**.

But there are moments where I need to turn to **John's Gospel and find this Jesus who is strong and powerful** and mighty to save. He is not afraid and he promises that no matter what happens, he will carry me through whatever darkness or situation or enemy I'm facing. We talked about how one of the powerful things about Jesus is that he connects with all races and across all boundaries. There are pictures of Jesus in just about every culture, and one of the pictures I love is this one up on the video screen.

GRAPHIC Jesus Calms Storm

GRAPHIC Jesus Calms Storm Close Up

This image from Asia depicts a scene from the Gospels where Jesus and the disciples are riding in a boat on the Sea of Galilee. Jesus is sleeping because he's been up all night ministering to the crowds. A storm comes up and the disciples are afraid because of the terrible winds and waves. They are in fear of capsizing and there are no life jackets and there is no one else out on the water. In their terror, they finally wake up Jesus and tell him they are scared.

Jesus looks at them and says, **"Why are you afraid? I am here in the boat with you. Don't you understand?"** He then goes to the bow of the boat. He **commands the winds and the waves** and they die down instantaneously. They realize there is **no reason to fear** when Jesus is in the boat with you.

After I preached that sermon, there was a young man who emailed me. He told me he had **Asian ancestry** and how powerful that image was. He went and found it on Google images, and he made it the

screen background on his phone and the **screensaver on his computer** because he was going through a challenging time at his work and he had been diagnosed with a serious illness. He found strength in the fact that **Jesus is strong and powerful and mighty**, and he can calm the winds and the waves.

I don't know what each one of you is going through in your life today, but I remind you that Jesus in the Gospel of John is one who has the **power to calm the wind and the waves and have a legion of Roman soldiers bow down** to him. If you're going through **physical illness**, I know that God can work through the doctors and the nurses and there is always hope for physical healing. But, even if we don't experience that physical healing that we want, **God has a hold of us, and he will not let us go**. No matter what happens, Jesus is in the boat with us, and we are in the boat together and he is strong and mighty and powerful and will not let you go. It's why we sing that song, "Mighty to Save," because that's the God in whom we live and move and have our very being.

GRAPHIC Jesus in the Storm

I love this image of Jesus in the storm and how he is looking at his disciples. Jesus says in John's Gospel on several occasions, "**Don't be afraid. I am with you. I will be with you always.**" This is **John's emphasis in the arrest of Jesus**, that we would see his power and strength and know that with him we can face any enemy.

Even though **Jesus could have wiped out those soldiers** in a moment, he simply stands before them and says, "**I AM HE, so go ahead and take me. Here I am. I'm not going to resist.**" Jesus is in charge and he knows what's happening and so they arrest him. First, they take him to **Annas, the father-in-law of the high priest**, to put Jesus on trial. Then they take them to **Caiaphas, the current high priest**, and he puts him on trial. Then they take him to **Pontius Pilate**. Both **Annas and Caiaphas see Jesus as a blasphemer**, and they believe

he must die because he has claimed to be God. He has offended them and insulted them and has **told the truth they don't want to hear.**

Before Pontius Pilate, they accuse Jesus of sedition, of wanting to lead a rebellion and claiming to be a king. In the **Roman Empire, if you claim to be a king** over and against Rome and you seek to lead an army in rebellion, you would be put to death by crucifixion. Jesus is presented to Pontius Pilate in this way and so **Pilate asks Jesus, "Are you the King of the Jews?"**

Jesus replies, **"I am a king, but my kingdom is not of this world."**

The conversation continues and Pilate comes to realize that **Jesus is no threat to him** or to Rome. He is talking about a **spiritual kingdom** and not doing anything like what other rebels might be doing in the first century. **Pilate wants to release him** because he sees no cause in his crucifixion. The religious leaders insist that **Jesus is a danger**, and they even tell Pilate he would be **no friend of Caesar** if he lets him go.

Pilate goes back to Jesus and figures that if he **roughs him up a little bit**, that will be enough. He sends Jesus to the Roman lectors who will take **whips with metal on the tips and tear the flesh** from his back. **In John's Gospel, even after the beating, Jesus is still strong.** The Roman soldiers now want to break his spirit, so they make the **crown** of thorns and place it upon his brow. **They want to humiliate him.** "You think you're some kind of King? We will show you what kind of King you are and **what kind of kingdom you will rule in!**"

They put a **purple robe**, the symbol of **royalty**, upon his back and then they smack him in the face and say to him, **"Hail, King of the Jews!"** They don't seem to break his spirit, because Pilate then calls for him to be brought out in front of the **religious leaders**, thinking that they would now see this man broken and they would finally relent and say, **"That's enough."**

Pilate brings them out and says, **"Behold the man!"** Instead of being satisfied, they **are now even angrier** than before. They cry even

louder than before, **“Crucify him! Crucify him!”** This takes us to the moment of crucifixion. Here is what we read in John 19.

BIBLE ***So they took Jesus away. 17 Carrying the cross by himself, he went to the place called Place of the Skull (in Hebrew, Golgotha). 18 There they nailed him to the cross.***

Here is another detail which is different in John’s Gospel than we find in **Matthew, Mark and Luke**. In those Gospels, **who carries the cross?** It is a man named **Simon of Cyrene**, which means he is from **North Africa**. He happens to be in the **crowd for the Passover Seder** feast they have just celebrated, and he is ordered to carry the cross because Jesus was beaten so much that **he physically couldn’t carry** the cross.

But who carries the cross in John’s Gospel? Jesus himself carries the cross. While you might think there is a contradiction here, there really isn’t, because **Jesus probably did carry the cross for some time** and then Simon carried it toward the end. What’s interesting is that Matthew, Mark and Luke don’t tell you that Jesus carried his cross at all, and John doesn’t tell you that Simon carried it at all. Instead, **John focuses on the fact that Jesus**, although he is beaten nearly to death, goes and picks up the 50-to-75-pound patibulum, the cross member, and he picks it up and **embraces it**. He carries it toward that place where he **would be crucified**.

What is John trying to tell us? Jesus is **strong and courageous** as he picks up the instrument of his own death and embraces it himself, because he is on a mission. This is part of the plan and why he came, and so **he willingly carries this crossmember**, knowing he will be nailed to it. Once more, we see his strength and power and determination, and his choice.

I love the way that **CS Lewis talks about Jesus in the Chronicles of Narnia**. He describes **Jesus as a lion, Aslan**, who is fierce and strong and with the **bat of a paw can wipe out** anyone. Routinely in the Chronicles

of Narnia, the characters will say this about Aslan. **“He is not a tame lion.”** He is strong, fierce, powerful, brave and courageous, and he is coming to die. He is not praying this cup be taken from him, but coming to embrace the cross, just like Aslan embraces his own death as he walks into the middle of the enemy and gives his life for his human friends.

GRAPHIC Not a Tame Lion

We read these words about what happened next in John’s Gospel.

BIBLE ***Two others were crucified with him, one on either side, with Jesus between them. 19 And Pilate posted a sign over him that read, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.” 20 The place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and the sign was written in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek, so that many people could read it.***

Matthew, Mark and Luke don’t tell us that the sign is written in Latin and Greek like John does. Why does John include this detail about the sign being written not only in Hebrew or Aramaic, but also in Latin and Greek? The **Jewish religious leaders** asked Pilate to change the inscription to read, **“He claimed to be the King of the Jews.”** But Pilate simply said, **“What I’ve written, I have written.”**

It’s a **Roman governor who claims that Jesus is the King of the Jews.** This is the climax of John’s Gospel because **Jesus is finally enthroned.** He has the **crown placed upon** his brow and his throne is a cross. **He is a king that is laying down his life for his people.** The reason it is written in three languages is because, while Hebrew or Aramaic was the language of the Jews, **Greek and Latin were the languages of the rest of the world.** He’s not just the King of the Jews; he is the **king of the world.** God sent this king who would rule over all creation, and he comes and he embraces a cross, to **lay down his life for humanity.**

This is the kind of King that we serve. When we **join the church,** one of the vows that we take is that **Jesus is Lord** because Christians

claim this truth, that Jesus is Lord. The word “Lord” literally means, **“first thing.”** Lord is the **highest authority or the highest ruler** in a particular place. Jesus is not just Lord of some particular place, but he is **Lord, King, and ruler over everything.** This is the picture of the King that we serve, a king who willingly dies for his people.

Here’s another image for us to consider. As Jesus rides into town on that Palm Sunday 2000 years ago, there is a kind of **election** going on. Certain people are looking at Jesus and hailing him as the long-awaited King. However, they believe he will be a **military ruler and rule with might and power.** They were willing to embrace that. That’s the kind of King they wanted and what they hoped Jesus would be. While not explicitly stated in the Bible, historical theories suggest **Judas Iscariot** may have belonged to the **Sicarii, or “dagger men”**, a radical **faction of Jewish nationalists** or Zealots dedicated to overthrowing Roman rule. Others suggest he was a **disappointed nationalist who expected Jesus to lead a political revolution.**

But Jesus+ wasn’t that kind of King. **The policies that Jesus described during his campaign** were about **forgiving people** who have wronged us. **Loving our enemies** as we love ourselves. **Showing compassion** for people who are in need. **Having mercy** toward others, especially strangers. **Loving God** with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, and loving other people sacrificially. We are to **do unto others** as we would have them do unto us. This was the **platform that Jesus** was running on, and that he proposed during his ministry. Some saw this as weak, but for **Jesus it was the ultimate form or strength.**

After all the chaos of the 10 years, which included an election and what most observers would call a rough transition from one administration to the next, I found myself asking the question. **Could Jesus get elected as president in today’s political and media climate?** What do you all think? **I’m not sure he’d even be a finalist.** But why would he not get elected in a country where **75% of the people claim to be Christians of some sort?**

I think the main reason he would not get elected is because there are many things you must do in the American political system to get elected that **Jesus wouldn't be willing to do**. You must be willing to talk to well-funded people who can help you **raise millions of dollars** for your campaign. Maybe Jesus would do that, but he tended to spend a lot of his time with **poor people who were on the outside**. Then I think about what people have to promise in a campaign and how every person that I saw who ran for **president promised things they knew they couldn't deliver**, including our current president. Don't you think most of those people **knew they couldn't deliver** all those things? I'm not sure Jesus would be willing to make any of those promises knowing that he couldn't deliver. Promises can be said by him only if he plans on doing it.

It also seems like in today's political climate, you must **skew your campaign towards the fringes** or the edges of the extremes and somehow draw them in. But here's where I think the **real problem would be for Jesus** if he were to run for president. It seems like to get elected president in today's world; you must be **willing to talk badly** about the other candidates. While Jesus did speak harshly toward the **Sadducees and the Pharisees and the religious leaders**, I'm not sure he would be willing to **sling mud at other well-qualified candidates** and so I don't think he could really get elected in today's world. Not to mention that most of the people voting for Jesus would be the poor and the outcast and the sick and those who were seen as nobodies. And really **that is what landed him on the cross** in the end.

That's the **King that we say we want to follow** during this holy week. John wants us to understand that this **Messiah was not weak but was powerful and strong**. Jesus was the Almighty, and that's the one we choose to follow. He shows **divine strength by willingly laying down** his life for us.

So, here's the **million-dollar question** I get is a pastor when it comes to this idea of a suffering king. **Why? What was the point of his**

suffering and dying on the cross? I'm **not really that bad**, am I, that I need someone to die on the cross for me? Why would God require someone to be **tortured to death on the cross** for people to be forgiven? **Why would God send his son? That sounds like child abuse.** Is it necessary? Does God need to have **blood to forgive** people? That seems messed up! I know that some of you have thought that because you have asked those questions over the years, and some of us still wrestle with them.

I went to **college and then I went to graduate school** and got my Master of Divinity. In my last year of seminary, I also was finishing my **Board of Ordained Ministry paperwork** in which I had to write a **systematic theology** of how I understood God and Jesus and the church and many of the things I preach about every week. One of the questions was on the **atonement**, which is this idea of Jesus dying on the cross for our sins. I remember **agonizing over that question** because I had gone through all the schooling and spent thousands of dollars and I still didn't really understand it! My guess is that **most of you have struggled** with this as well, at some point.

I would hope that if I asked all of you to honestly share if you have ever **struggled with this idea of the atonement that 100%** of you would raise your hands. If you have never wrestled with this idea or struggled with this question, then **maybe you should come up and talk to me after the sermon** and set me straight. I think that most of us struggle with this at some point, even if we end up simply going back and being fine with the simple statement, **"Jesus died for my sins."**

I think the main reason that we have struggled with this question is that we often looked at the death of Jesus on the cross and saw it as a **mathematical formula** or **financial transaction** or **judicial penalty**. X is your sins and Y is the death of Jesus and that = forgiveness. I **owe X** amount and **Jesus pays Y** amount with his death and that = **freedom from my debt**. I am **guilty of X** and Jesus does the **sentence of Y** through his death and that = **my freedom** so I don't have to go to jail.

My understanding of the atonement has moved from this idea of a mechanical formula or financial transaction or judicial penalty to its **more being about a message from God**. This really comes to life in the Gospel of John because he begins with those words, **“In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God and the Word became flesh and lived among us.”** God’s desire is to communicate with us and **reveal himself to us** and his will for our lives and what it means to be human and what his hope is for the world and what his redemptive love looks like, and it’s **wrapped in human flesh** in the person of Jesus.

Jesus is called God’s Word made flesh in John’s Gospel. Throughout the Gospel, Jesus is moving toward the crucifixion and when we get there is not a mechanical formula or financial transaction or judicial penalty. It is the climax of the message from God and the message from God is speaking to us at different places in our lives, in different ways, telling us something.

So, the question is not, “Did Jesus need to die to forgive my sins?” God forgave sins in the Old Testament all the time, before Jesus even showed up. One of my favorite psalms is Psalm 103.

BIBLE *8 The Lord is compassionate and merciful, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. 9 He will not constantly accuse us, nor remain angry forever. 10 He does not punish us for all our sins; he does not deal harshly with us, as we deserve. 11 For his unfailing love toward those who fear him is as great as the height of the heavens above the earth. 12 He has removed our sins as far from us as the east is from the west.*

King David realizes that it is not about sacrifices in Psalm 51.

BIBLE *16 You do not desire a sacrifice, or I would offer one. You do not want a burnt offering. 17 The sacrifice you desire is a broken spirit. You will not reject a broken and repentant*

heart, O God.

God can forgive anybody for whatever reason he chooses to forgive, and he doesn't need a sacrifice or an offering. God didn't need Jesus to die on the cross, but we needed something to help us see and experience the grace and mercy offered to us by God. We didn't need a mechanism or more words. **We needed grace and mercy and forgiveness wrapped in human flesh. Jesus lives that message** physically through his life and his death.

When you read the Gospel of John, there are 7 different ways of understanding the meaning of the death of Jesus, not just one. I did an entire sermon on those earlier this year that you can go back and look at on our website, but we call this the atonement. Atonement means **at one ment**, or bringing **God and you are together again**.

GRAPHIC at-one-ment

This is a profound idea and can speak to us in powerful ways, if we don't make it JUST into a mechanical formula, but rather as **a message that speaks to our hearts**. The **cross is a message** sent to us from God through Jesus Christ, who embodied that message. There are multiple dimensions to that message.

There are moments when I look at the cross and it simply **washes over me**, and I see how much God loves me. I think about the movie, ***Hacksaw Ridge***, which chronicled the true World War II experiences of **Desmond Doss, an American pacifist combat** medic who was a Seventh-day Adventist Christian, refusing to carry or use a firearm or weapons of any kind. Doss became the first conscientious objector to be awarded the Medal of Honor, for service above and beyond the call of duty during the **Battle of Okinawa**, as he ran into the middle of bullets and bombs, pulling out 75 of his fellow soldiers and risking his life repeatedly.

GRAPHIC Desmond Doss and Bible

To lay down your life is **the biggest expression of love**, and on the cross Jesus looks at each one of us and says, **“I love you this much.”** To the **person who feels unloved**, like no one cares about you in all the world, Jesus hangs there and looks at you and says, “This is how much I love you. I don’t care what anyone else in the world sees. **When I look at you, I see a person worthy of my ultimate sacrifice.**” It’s a profound message that has the power to change your life.

When I look at the cross, I think about the idea of God suffering with us, and that **God understands our suffering**. He is Emmanuel, God with us, who says he will be with us when we hurt. **Christian Wyman** was in college when he had his **faith challenged so much** that he gave it up and he became an **agnostic**. He became a great poet by the age of 39, but at that age he was also diagnosed with an incurable form of cancer. He describes in his poetry what it was like to go through his cancer treatments and the painful moments of the disease that he felt bone crushing. He said, ***“There were times the pain was so intense that it utterly obliterated any possibility that I might believe in a loving God.”***

In the midst of his suffering, he went back to the stories of Jesus on the cross and he was touched by the words of Jesus in Matthew, Mark and Luke where Jesus says, **“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me!”** He wrote:

“I realized that God came in the person of Jesus and he walked through the hell that I’m walking through, and he is walking with me through this hell.”

It was this experience of looking at the cross that allowed Christian to embrace the cross and Jesus’s face and realize that God had walked through the muck and pain of his life and was still with him to the present day. Sometimes, we look at the cross and it becomes **the platform with which Jesus is going to change the world**. It’s a picture of sacrificial love and laying down your life for someone else. It’s

showing forgiveness and mercy and grace when Jesus looks at the people who put them there and says from the cross, ***“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”*** We look at that image, and it washes over us and we realize that we are **called to forgive** and love selflessly because look what Jesus did for us.

The power of the cross is the reason we give away what you designate for our Easter offering. We offer our second largest offering of the year because we have a crucified King who calls us to live our lives in this way, giving so that we can love God and love others sacrificially.

VIDEO Easter Offering

We also can look at the **cross and see the betrayal that Jesus** experienced. **Judas** betrayed him as one of his closest friends. The religious leaders are the ones who put him on trial. **Peter denied** him and **most of the disciples ran** away in his most painful hours. I’m reminded of the woman who discovered that her husband had been **cheating on her**, and she came to the cross and cried. She touched the cross and remembered that **Jesus was betrayed like she was**, and he knew her pain. Her husband came to the same cross and held onto it and wept, realizing this was **the only hope for redemption and forgiveness** for life that he had **totally messed up**. Christ had paid a price on the cross to heal a brokenness that he couldn’t fix and there is always hope. This was his hope as he cried out, ***“I need you. I need your forgiveness. I need what you don’t the cross for me. Please forgive me and heal me and make me new.”***

The apostle Paul describes the cross this way in 1 Corinthians 1:18.

BIBLE *18 The message of the cross is foolish to those who are headed for destruction! But we who are being saved know it is the very power of God.*

When I look at the **cross, I see love, grace, forgiveness, strength,**

compassion, a new beginning, a second chance, and empathetic ear, salvation from the past, salvation for myself, salvation for a broken world, a different way forward, and how we are meant to live our lives. I see mercy and grace that was costly and love that is deeper and wider than I could ever imagine or believe. The cross is our defining story as Christians because we serve our crucified King who suffered.

This is what the cross means. Not a mechanical formula which says that if we do this, then God will do that. It's **a message that God was sending through Jesus Christ**, and that message looks different at different places and times in our lives. It has the power to change our lives and the power to change the world. That's the meaning of the cross.

When we get to the end of the crucifixion in John's Gospel, **we don't hear the words** of Jesus where he says, **"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"** Here are the final words you hear for the lips of Jesus in John's Gospel.

GRAPHIC tetelestai – "It is finished!"

The English translation that we use, "It is finished," sometimes gives us the wrong impression of the meaning of this phrase. It's **not** to be understood as, **"I'm dying and my life is gone."** The Greek word is a shout of **victory**, "It's done! It's accomplished! What I came to do here has been finished on the cross! I came to show them this kind of love! I came to embrace them and draw them to God and lift them up! I came to save and deliver them! I came that they might have life! It is finished on the cross!"

Here's the invitation for us when it comes to the cross. It's really simple. I would love for you to say one three-letter word. That three-letter word is the word that we say when we embrace Christ as our crucified King. That's the same word we say when we say that we will follow Jesus. It's the same word we use when we talk about trusting in Christ. It is the same word we use to talk about being saved from

ourselves and the pain and the broken places in our own lives. That three-letter word is simply, **“Yes.”**

I would invite each of us today to imagine Jesus hanging on the cross, looking at us, and then simply saying, ***“Yes, Jesus. I choose to follow you as my King. I choose to trust in you as my Savior.”*** And then we can carry that out into our daily lives as we leave this place. If you’re willing, would you bow your heads with me and close your eyes?

SLIDE Prayer

I want to remind you that Jesus is a strong, mighty and powerful Savior who came to embrace the cross for you. I want to remind you that he reaches out his hand towards you and asks that you would allow him to be your king and your Savior. I would invite you simply to whisper to him this prayer under your breath after me if you’re willing.

Yes, Lord.

I trust you as my King.

Help me to follow you...

To love you...

To serve you with my life.

I embrace you as my Savior.

Save me from myself.

Make me the person you want me to be.

All that I am...

And all that I have...

I offer to you.

In your holy name, Amen.

March 28-29 Order

1. Ryan welcomes people.
2. Song – “Goodbye Yesterday”
3. Song – “Hosanna” (Kids come in with palm branches)
4. Jeff welcomes and shares:
 - A. QR Code
 - B. Invites people to greet each other.
5. Sermon Video Intro
6. Sermon
7. Offering (Early Learning Center)
8. Med Moments
9. Song – “Great Are You God”
10. Prayer and Lord’s Prayer
11. Care Ministers
12. The Bridge
13. Maundy Thursday and Good Friday at 7
14. Spring Fling, Easter Egg Hunt and Worship Saturday
15. Sunrise service on Sunday at 7 AM – blankets and chairs
16. Closing Prayer