

April 14, 2017
Good Friday
John 18 & 19

Jesus is alone. More alone than any man has ever been, I think.

In a sense, Jesus has always been alone when it comes to humanity; He is the righteous Son of God, the Savior, so He has always stood apart from fallen sinners—everyone else. But until now He has always had relationships: the crowds who followed Him, the disciples who spent three years learning from Him, friends like Lazarus and his sisters, and, of course, family. But they're all gone now; Jesus even seems to give up His relationship to his own mother, passing it on to the disciple John. No, Jesus is all alone.

And we see this as sad and mournful for Jesus. We shed tears for our tortured and crucified Savior all alone on the cross, forsaken even by God under the vile curse of the sins of the worlds, your sins and mine. We see the plight of anyone all alone in the world as sad, but that the divine man and God, the embodiment of perfect innocence and love, should be so despised and destroyed in this horrific manner with none to stand beside Him, is tragic beyond measure.

Yet from another perspective, it's absolutely right. Jesus is all alone in that everyone else...is a failure. When you look through this passion narrative, it's a story of human failure from one end to the other.

The disciples failed. Judas is the betrayer. Peter is the denier. The other ten are abandoners. Despite all the protestations of love and loyalty just a few hours prior, they all fail Jesus.

Annas, Caiaphas and the Jewish leaders are responsible for leading God's chosen people in the way of His Law and Prophets. Their job is to teach and follow God's Word. Yet standing before them is the one to whom the Law and the Prophets testify and not only do they not

recognize Him—they seek His death! They utterly reject Him! They reject the Word of God made flesh! Their leadership is utter failure.

Pilate? He is charged with carrying out justice, yet knowing full well Jesus is innocent of the charges against Him, Pilate caves and delivers Jesus over to be crucified. He doesn't do his job.

You've really got to give kudos to the women around Jesus. They hang in there at the cross and even in their grief are chomping at the bit to do the necessary care of Christ's body afterward. But the fact is they fail also. They think Jesus is dying, then dead and gone. Nobody trusts His Word anymore that He is the resurrection and the life. Nobody looks toward His rising on the third day. Jesus had called on His followers to believe. They all failed.

Everyone in Jerusalem that day failed to recognize God in their midst. Despite the Word. Despite the miracles. Despite the teachings. Despite the darkness. Despite His perfect love and innocence, nobody saw that Messiah had arrived and was doing the job for which the Father had sent Him. Earlier in Christ's ministry in John's Gospel the crowd asking Jesus what they had to do to be doing the works of God. His answer was simple: *"This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent."* Nobody did it. Nobody realized Jesus was not failing.

Jesus did not fail. Jesus has not failed. Christ crucified is Jesus glorified in accomplishing the work for which He was sent. We must know and believe this, because somebody has to not fail...and it certainly isn't us.

We're right there with all the other failures. Judas, the eleven, the council, Pilate, the cruel Roman soldiers. They failed to recognize God right there with them. We do the very same thing.

Every time we sin we're making ourselves a god unto ourselves, seizing the authority to make our own rules over and above God's perfect design for His creation. Every time we proudly place ourselves over and above someone else we are failing to love our neighbor as ourselves. Jesus Himself made it so clear in His teaching that when we hate or lust or avenge or get greedy or get self-righteous, we're failing. We are failing to be the loving creature God created us to be. We fail to do our job.

When we realize our failure; that's guilt. When we're sorrowful over our failure; that's contrition. When we beg God to pardon our failure; that's confession. When we turn from our failure seeking God's mercy in Jesus; that's repentance. And when we see Jesus Christ crucified and know that He did not fail, but that He did His job in perfect agonizing love and obedience unto death under God's wrath for me; that's forgiveness. That's salvation. That's your Savior, Lord and Redeemer. And that's never being alone again.

You see, Jesus was alone. The penalty for sin is death. Not just heart-stops-beating death. I'm talking cast-from-the-presence-of-God death. It is having every gift and blessing of God taken away and all that is left is you, all alone. No breath. No comfort. Everything good of God removed and every want and need of body and soul remains.

None of us has ever had to endure this. Even at our worst moments God has been caring for us, providing and protecting us in body and supporting us by the Spirit in faith. He has our back here in creation and beyond into eternity. The Father, Abba, Dad, is always there for us, even when we didn't want Him there.

Eternal death is to not have that...forever. And when Jesus cries, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me" that is what He is enduring. He is not just quoting Psalm 22. He is crying

out at the horrible reality He is enduring, being alone, cast from God's sight, because He has to be, because He is then sin...our sin...all damned in one man...for us...because that's His job.

That is what you and I are called to see, know and believe in Christ. He did not fail as we do. He lived a perfect, humble, serving human life in love, truth and perfect faith so that there would be such a thing as human righteousness, so that He could give it to us, because we fail at it. And then He marched to the cross to endure a perfect death, be the perfect sacrifice, to take the wrath and rejection of God we deserve in our place—to be alone under God's contempt and rejection...so that we would not. He did His job.

Yes, it is a horrible and sad day to remember. But it is also great comfort.

Put very simply, every time your sin is thrown before you face, every time you are shamed by what a failure you are before a holy God, every time hopelessness draws near because you know the truth—that you'll never wholly be that good and right man or woman you should be—you can know it's okay, because Jesus Christ did His job.

He took the wrath. He took the condemnation. He took the alone and forsaken by God. On that dark day the retribution for your failure was aimed squarely at Jesus and He took it all, because that's why He came, why He was sent. He does His job out of love for you, that you would never be alone and without Him.

Look on His cross with faith and hope and joy. Know that Jesus was, for a time, maybe somehow for an eternity, utterly alone, and that He went there willingly, so that you never will have to be.

Amen.