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Sermon Notes

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The Wickedness of Humanity Exposed and Healed by the Cross

Matthew 27:27-44

- I. The Costliest Education in History: The Knowledge of Good and Evil
 - A. The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil... We Have Gotten an Education
 - B. The High Cost of that Education
 1. Many speak of the spiraling costs of education
 2. College tuition is getting higher all the time
 3. Average cost of education at a four-year college is over \$21,000 per year
 4. But the education the human race has gotten in evil has been incalculably high
 - a. The murders, thefts, lies, broken marriages, addictions, broken hearts
 - b. The wars, slaughters, holocausts, genocides, rapes, pillagings
 - c. Human to human—the cost of our education in evil has been astonishing
 - C. The Education Reaches its Climax: A Full Display of Human Evil
 1. Now, in the account of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, the cost of our education in evil reaches its climax... AND
 2. Human history reaches its nadir... its lowest point
 - D. The Lowest Point of Human History: Wickedness on Display
 1. The catalog of human wickedness is dark and long indeed
 2. After the 20th century saw the slaughter of six million Jews in concentration camps in the coldly efficient hands of the Nazis, we can say we know what evil looks like

3. But I would argue that the crucifixion of Jesus Christ is the most evil deed in history
4. Here human wickedness is fully on display because of WHO JESUS WAS and HOW WICKEDLY THEY TREATED HIM

E. The Cross is the Center of Human History

1. OF FIRST IMPORTANCE!!! The most important story ever told

1 Corinthians 15:3-4 For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures

2. The culmination of the plan for human salvation that God had made before the foundation of the world
3. God revealed that plan a little at a time through the prophets over the years
 - a. In Genesis 3... the promise in the Garden of Eden
 - b. In Genesis 4... the establishment of animal sacrifice
 - c. In Genesis 6... the flood account
 - d. In Genesis 12... the promise through Abraham
 - e. In Genesis 21, 27, 49... the narrowing to Isaac, and then to Jacob, then to Judah
 - f. In 2 Samuel 7... the covenant with David—a Son of David would rule forever
 - g. Psalm 22... the crucifixion clearly predicted through David
 - h. Isaiah 53... the reason for the crucifixion clearly predicted through Isaiah
 - i. Psalm 16... the resurrection clearly predicted through David

F. A Sermon I Preached Some Years Ago: The Cross a Prism of God's Glory (more later)

G. Cross Also an Exposition of Human Wickedness

1. Each of the Four Gospels has an account of the crucifixion of Christ
2. Each Gospel writer has a different focus, a different emphasis

3. John's Gospel emphasizes the deity of Christ and the love of God in the cross... none of the humiliation, the gore, the suffering...
4. Matthew's Gospel looks at the cross through the lens of human wickedness... how EVIL were the people that killed Jesus or observed it being done
5. Four groups in particular
 - a. The Roman soldiers, in their wicked treatment of Jesus—their cruelty, their mockery, their abuse... and especially, their ignorance
 - b. The thieves who were crucified with him... men who were clearly sinners and under the same sentence, but who mocked Jesus as well; there we see the criminal mind—their selfishness and yet their skewed sense of morality; we have no conversion account of the thief on the cross in Matthew, but only in Luke... to get the power of his conversion, though... we need BOTH Matthew AND Luke...
 - c. The crowd passing by, the citizens of Jerusalem and the pilgrims who had come to celebrate the Passover—mocking Jesus cruelly
 - d. The religious leaders---the very ones who had orchestrated Jesus' trials, condemnation, and execution... not satisfied merely that He die, but needed to stand and watch it and mock Him further
6. Through these four groups, we will see the wickedness of the human heart exposed and laid bare
7. The prediction to Mary

Luke 2:34-35 Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, ³⁵ so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed.

Revealed = uncovered, laid bare, shown in plain view... what was concealed will be stripped open

8. The theology from Jeremiah

^{ESV} Jeremiah 17:9 The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?

9. WE NEED A SAVIOR!!!

II. The Wicked Soldiers: Ignorance on Display

Matthew 27:27-31 Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers around him. ²⁸ They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, ²⁹ and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand and knelt in front of him and mocked him. "Hail, king of the Jews!" they said. ³⁰ They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again. ³¹ After they had mocked him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.

A. Setting the Context

1. Jesus has already been tried and convicted by the High Priest and the Sanhedrin
2. Because of Roman Law, they couldn't execute Jesus; they had to hand Him over to Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor
3. Pilate knew Jesus was an innocent man, no threat to the Roman rule
4. Pilate kept trying to set Jesus free, but the Jews threatened to go to Caesar if he did
5. Pilate tried to placate the Jews by flogging Him... stripping His back bare and almost killing Him... but the sight of Jesus bloodied but still living just inflamed them like a pack of wolves... and they started to scream for Pilate to CRUCIFY HIM!!!
6. Finally, in a cowardly act, Pilate gave in to the crowd and washed his hands of the whole affair:

Matthew 27:24-26 When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. "I am innocent of this man's blood," he said. "It is your responsibility!" ²⁵ All the people answered, "Let his blood be on us and on our children!" ²⁶ Then he released Barabbas to them. But he had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.

B. Who Were These Soldiers?

1. Pilate says the soldiers of the Praetorium took control of Jesus... "ALL the soldiers of the governor..."
 - a. A full Roman cohort would have been something like 600 soldiers
 - b. The Praetorium was the governor's barracks at Fort Antonia in Jerusalem

- c. Though it seems unlikely that 600 soldiers took part in the mocking of Jesus, clearly there was a huge crowd of Romans doing this
- 2. These soldiers were just acting on orders... but they show their wickedness by going far beyond their orders with a special kind of maliciousness and brutality
- 3. They were completely ignorant of who Jesus was... they would have known the charge against Him: "This man claimed to be king of the Jews"... that's why they mocked Him with kingly garb... but it is unlikely that they would have understood any of the spiritual history, the miracles, that Jesus claimed to be the Son of God
- 4. Their ignorance was plain in Jesus' prayer for them:

Luke 23:34 Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."

- 5. In some ways this shows the coldness of their mockery: They did all this wickedness to a total stranger who had never harmed them in any way!

C. The Wickedness of Mockery and Humiliation

- 1. Public shame:
 - a. They gathered the whole company of soldiers around Him
 - b. They stripped Him of His clothing
- 2. Mockery: (Jesus claimed to be a King)
 - a. They clothed Him with a scarlet robe
 - b. They twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on His head
 - c. They put a staff in his right hand
 - d. They knelt down in front of Him and mocked Him
 - e. They said "Hail, King of the Jews!"

D. The Wickedness of Physical Abuse

Vs. 30 They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again.

- 1. The second time Jesus has been spat upon in these trials

2. As I said before... this is the ultimate show of disrespect between human beings
3. Then comes the physical abuse
4. Remember, Jesus has already been flogged by this time and can barely stand up; they're beating up a man in that condition!! What indescribable cruelty!!
5. John's Gospel indicates they also beat Him in the face with their fists
6. Then, they took the staff and smashed Him on the head with it... smashing the crown of thorns into His brown and undoubtedly causes lacerations on his scalp and face... and the blood flowed freely

E. The Symbolism of the Crown of Thorns

1. The first Adam was made King of the Earth...

Genesis 1:28 fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

2. He surrendered that throne to Satan, and God cursed the earth because of him

Genesis 3:17-18 To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat of it,' "Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. ¹⁸ It will produce thorns and thistles for you

3. The thorns were symbols of the curse that Adam brought
4. Now the Second Adam, Jesus Christ, WEARS the crown of thorns... immersing Himself in the CURSE our sins had produced

III. The Wickedness of the Crucifixion: Cruelty on Display

Matthew 27:31-37 After they had mocked him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him. ³² ¶ As they were going out, they met a man from Cyrene, named Simon, and they forced him to carry the cross. ³³ They came to a place called Golgotha (which means The Place of the Skull). ³⁴ There they offered Jesus wine to drink, mixed with gall; but after tasting it, he refused to drink it. ³⁵ When they had crucified him, they divided up his clothes by casting lots. ³⁶ And sitting down, they kept watch over him there. ³⁷ Above his head they placed the written charge against him: THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS.

A. Crucifixion

1. According to Herodotus: Crucifixion originated with the Persians... Darius the Mede apparently crucified 3000 Babylonians in 519 B.C.
2. Two centuries later, Alexander the Great also used crucifixions in his conquests
3. The Romans learned crucifixion from the Carthaginians and the Greeks, and they employed it liberally... though they considered it the worst possible punishment

Cicero called it "the most cruel and disgusting penalty" (*Verrem* 2:5.165)

Josephus called it "the most wretched of deaths."

Roman jurist Julius Paulus listed crucifixion in first place as the worst of all capital punishments, listing it ahead of death by burning, death by beheading, or death by the wild beasts

Roman philosopher Seneca:

Can anyone be found who would prefer wasting away in pain dying limb by limb, or letting out his life drop by drop, rather than expiring once for all? Can any man be found willing to be fastened to the accursed tree, long sickly, already deformed, swelling with ugly wounds on shoulders and chest, and drawing the breath of life amid long drawn-out agony? He would have many excuses for dying even before mounting the cross (*Dialogue* 3:2.2).

The ancients considered death by crucifixion to be not just any execution, but the most obscene, the most disgraceful, the most horrific execution known to man.

B. The Journey to Golgotha

1. They led Him away
2. They laid the cross on Him
3. Jesus spoke to the women of Jerusalem... His last public statement
4. Unable to carry the heavy cross any further, the Romans forced Simon of Cyrene to do it

Matthew 27:32 As they were going out, they met a man from Cyrene, named Simon, and they forced him to carry the cross.

5. Cyrene: a Greek settlement west of Alexandria, Egypt... in modern-day Libya
6. Simon: a Jewish name; this man was probably a Jewish pilgrim come from Cyrene for the Passover
7. Amazingly... this may have been instrumental in Simon's conversion and that of his whole family

a. Mark tells us that Simon was “the father of

Mark 15:21 A certain man from Cyrene, Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by on his way in from the country, and they forced him to carry the cross.

b. Clearly Alexander and Rufus were well-known to the Christian community

c. Since Mark wrote his Gospel from Rome, it may well be that Rufus was the same that Paul mentioned in Romans 16:13

Romans 16:13 Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother, who has been a mother to me, too.

d. This woman, Rufus’s mother, would have been Simon’s wife; thus it may well be that Simon, his wife and his two sons, were all saved as a result of this one experience!!

8. They arrive at Golgotha, where the crucifixions were to take place

a. It literally means “the place of the skull”... probably because it was shaped like a skull

b. The KJV of Luke 23:33 gives us the only mention of “Calvary”... a word not found in any other English translation because it is NOT English, nor Aramaic, nor Greek, but Latin... and would not have been in the original... but the KJV translators kept the Latin word for “skull” which is *calvaria*...

Luke 23:33 And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left.

C. The Procedure of Crucifixion

1. Not described in detail by the Gospel writers... they generally understated it

2. In Matthew, it is just this:

Matthew 27:35 When they had crucified him, they divided up his clothes by casting lots.

Literally: “The ones who had crucified Him divided up His clothes...”

Direct fulfillment of Psalm 22:

Psalm 22:18 They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing.

BUT... the crucifixion mentioned IN PASSING!!

3. Only from Thomas's comments about the nail marks in Jesus' hands and feet do we even learn that He was nailed to the cross, not lashed to it with leather thongs, as was done frequently
4. Non-biblical descriptions tell us what happened: Jesus was placed on the cross as it lay flat on the ground; first, His feet were nailed to the upright beam; then His arms stretched out across the horizontal beam and nailed through the wrists just above the hands, allowing a slight bend in the knees when the body was extended; the cross was then picked up and dropped into the hole... the jarring would have caused EXTREME AGONY to the wounds in His hands and feet

D. The Sufferings of Jesus Were Immense: YET HE REFUSED the Sedative!!

Matthew 27:34 There they offered Jesus wine to drink, mixed with gall; but after tasting it, he refused to drink it.

Jesus had told His Father He would drink the cup fully... and that meant every aspect of the pain!

MEDICAL ASPECTS OF THE CRUCIFIXION:

Medical Doctor C. Truman Davis, describes what went on medically in Jesus' body as He was dying on the cross:

As He slowly sags down with more weight on the nails in the wrists, excruciating pain shoots along the fingers and up the arms to explode in the brain — the nails in the wrists are putting pressure on the median nerves.

As He pushes Himself upward to avoid this stretching torment, He places His full weight on the nail through His feet. Again there is the searing agony of the nail tearing through the nerves between the metatarsal bones of the feet. At this point, as the arms fatigue, great waves of cramps sweep over the muscles, knotting them in deep, relentless, throbbing pain. With these cramps comes the inability to push Himself upward. Hanging by his arms, the pectoral muscles are paralyzed and the intercostal muscles are unable to act. Air can be drawn into the lungs, but cannot be exhaled. Jesus fights to raise Himself in order to get even one short breath. Finally, carbon dioxide builds up in the lungs and in the blood stream and the cramps partially subside. Spasmodically, he is able to push Himself upward to exhale and bring in the life-giving oxygen.

It was undoubtedly during these periods that He uttered the seven short sentences recorded:

The first, looking down at the Roman soldiers throwing dice for His seamless garment, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do."

The second, to the penitent thief, "Today you will be with me in Paradise."

The third, looking down at the terrified, grief-stricken adolescent John — the beloved Apostle — he said, “Behold your mother.” Then, looking to His mother Mary, “Woman behold your son.”

The fourth cry is from the beginning of the 22nd Psalm, “My God, my God, why has thou forsaken me?”

Jesus experienced hours of limitless pain, cycles of twisting, joint-rending cramps, intermittent partial asphyxiation, searing pain where tissue is torn from His lacerated back as He moves up and down against the rough timber. Then another agony begins -- a terrible crushing pain deep in the chest as the pericardium slowly fills with serum and begins to compress the heart. One remembers again the 22nd Psalm, the 14th verse: “I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels.”

It is now almost over. The loss of tissue fluids has reached a critical level; the compressed heart is struggling to pump heavy, thick, sluggish blood into the tissue; the tortured lungs are making a frantic effort to gasp in small gulps of air. The markedly dehydrated tissues send their flood of stimuli to the brain. Jesus gasps His fifth cry, “I thirst.” One remembers another verse from the prophetic 22nd Psalm: “My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaves to my jaws; and thou has brought me into the dust of death.”

The body of Jesus is now in extremes, and He can feel the chill of death creeping through His tissues. This realization brings out His sixth words, possibly little more than a tortured whisper, “It is finished.” His mission of atonement has completed. Finally He can allow his body to die.

E. The Invisible Suffering

1. The wrath of God poured out on Him (more next time)
2. The emotional agonies of being our sin-bearer

IV. The Wickedness of the Robbers: Criminality on Display

Matthew 27:38 Two robbers were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left.

Matthew 27:44 In the same way the robbers who were crucified with him also heaped insults on him.

- A. Jesus Not Crucified Alone: Two Others With Him
- B. Direct Fulfillment of Prophecy

Isaiah 53:12 he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors.

- C. These “Robbers” may have been Insurrectionists... but more likely simply highway robbers... selfish men as much a threat to their own countrymen as to the Romans
- D. They Just Want One Thing: To Survive!! They Insult Jesus to the End That He Might Save Them:

Luke 23:39 One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!"

At that point, neither of them FEARED GOD... but later, one of them would be a marvelous trophy of God’s redeeming grace in Christ... more in a moment!!

V. The Wickedness of the Crowd: Fickleness on Display

Matthew 27:39-40 Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads ⁴⁰ and saying, "You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!"

- A. Language Comes Directly from Psalm 22

Psalm 22:7-8 All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads: ⁸ "He trusts in the LORD; let the LORD rescue him. Let him deliver him, since he delights in him."

- B. This Was the Same Crowd that Had Seen Him Do Miracles... That Had Chanted “Hosanna” just a week ago... that were religious Jews there for the feast; that knew very well of Jesus’ healing works... and ALL THEY CAN DO IT MOCK HIM!!

- C. Here is the Shame of the Cross:

Hebrews 13:12-13 Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood. ¹³ Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore.

VI. The Wickedness of the Religious: Hypocrisy on Display

Matthew 27:41-44 In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him. ⁴² "He saved others," they said, "but he can't save himself! He's the King of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. ⁴³ He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, 'I am the Son of God.'"

- A.
- B.

VII. The Greatness of Jesus: God's Glory on Display

So... in Matthew's account, we have the wickedness of humanity on full display... the wickedness of the soldiers in their brutality and ignorance; the wickedness of the thieves on the cross in their criminal selfishness; the wickedness of the Jerusalem crowd as they passed by in their fickleness and mockery; the wickedness of the Jewish leaders most of all—the ones who diligently studied the word of God and hated the One it testified to

Yes... we can see the wickedness of man

But even more, you can see the brightness of the glory of God in the cross:

CSB John 1:5 That light shines in the darkness, yet the darkness did not overcome it.

A. The Cross the Prism of God's Glory

1. A prism = triangular piece of glass/crystal which causes white light to break out into its spectrum
2. The cross puts all the attributes of God on full display

B. The Glory of God: Attributes on Display

John 13:31 When he was gone, Jesus said, "Now is the Son of Man glorified and God is glorified in him.

C. "Portray" "Demonstrate": The Perfections of God on Display

Galatians 3:1 You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified.

The Greek word means: placarded, proclaimed, put on full display

D. What Attributes Does the Cross Put on Display?

1. Grace

Romans 3:23-24 all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

2. Love

Romans 5:8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

3. Kindness

Titus 3:4-5 But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, ⁵ he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy.

4. Holiness

Hebrews 13:12 Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood.

5. Justice

Romans 3:25 God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice

6. Wrath

Romans 3:24-25 Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.

7. Wisdom AND

8. Power

1 Corinthians 1:23-25 we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵ For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength.

Power for the salvation of sinners!

Also... we see the power of God in orchestrating events around Christ's crucifixion so the prophecies were all being fulfilled by people who had no intention whatsoever of fulfilling prophecies!!

9. Infinity

Zechariah 3:9 I will remove the sin of this land in a single day.

10. Patience

Romans 5:6 You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.

Amazing!! While humanity was at its darkest, Christ's light was shining its brightest

VIII. Applications

A. Bunyan's Applications on "Jerusalem First"

Luke 24:46-48 He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷ and repentance and forgiveness of sins will

be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ *You are witnesses of these things.*

1. Basic idea: the sinners in Jerusalem were the worst on earth, because they crucified the Lord of glory, despite all the miracles He had done
2. Luke 24: After His resurrection, Jesus willed to preach the gospel to them FIRST!!
3. Illustration from swimming: if you were walking by a swimming hole and saw four children in danger of drowning, but one seemed most imminently in danger, who would you try to save? So Jesus sought to save the worst sinners immediately!
4. Application ideas:

1. If Christ can save the worst sinners, then learn by this what Christ's heart is like: filled with LOVE!

2. If Christ can save the worst sinners, then how great are the merits of Christ! Sufficient enough to save the worst people on earth!

3. If Christ can save the worst sinners, then this should be an encouragement to you who think you're the worst sinner in the world!

4. If Christ can save the worst sinners, then come to Christ!! You'll never find anything better than Him!!

Bunyan: "No more such Christs! There will be no more such Christs, sinner! Oh, put not the day, the day of grace, away from you! if it be once gone, it will never come again, sinner.

But what is it that has got your heart, and that keeps it from your Savior? Have you, do you think, found anything so good as Jesus Christ? Is there any among your sins, your companions, and foolish delights, that like Christ can help you in the day of your distress? Behold, the greatness of your sins cannot hinder; let not the stubbornness of your heart hinder you, sinner.

5. If Christ can save the worst sinners, then why should you despair of salvation?

Your despair, if it were reasonable, should flow from you, because found in the land that is beyond the grave, or because thou certainly know that Christ will not, or cannot save you. But in the first place, you are still in the land of the living; and in the second place, you have a good reason to believe that Christ can save you; Christ is able to save to the uttermost them that come to God by him; and if he were not willing, he would not have commanded that mercy, in the first place, should be offered to the biggest sinners.

6. If Christ by proper faith can save the worst sinners, be sure you have proper faith, and not the counterfeit (presumption)

7. If Christ can save the worst sinners, he can save the least sinners too. [children, generally upright people who have sinned less than the worst sinners]

Although there is no sin little of itself; because it is a contradiction of the nature and majesty of God; yet we must admit of different levels and quantities of sin. Two sins are not so many as three; nor are three that are done in ignorance so big as one that is done against light, against knowledge and conscience. Also there is the child in sin, and a man in sin that has his hairs gray, and his skin wrinkled for very age. And we must put a difference between these sinners also. For can it be that a child of seven, or ten, or sixteen years old, should be such a sinner--a sinner so vile in the eye of the law as he is who has walked according to the course of this world, forty, fifty, sixty, or seventy years? Now the youth, this stripling, though he is a sinner, is but a little sinner, when compared with such.

Now, I say, if there be room for the first sort, for those of the biggest size, certainly there is room for the lesser size? If there be a door wide enough for a giant to go in at, there is certainly room for a dwarf. If Christ Jesus has grace enough to save great sinners, he has surely grace enough to save little ones. If he can forgive five hundred pence, for certain he can forgive fifty...

8. If Christ can save the greatest sinners, then this is why Satan so rages against and slanders Jesus in the world.

Not that Satan cares for the Father or the Spirit more than he cares for the Son, but he can let men alone with their notions of the Father and the Spirit, for he knows they shall never enjoy the Father nor the Spirit, if indeed they receive not the merits of the Son. ... Satan knows this, therefore he hates him. Deluded persons are ignorant of this, and, therefore, they are so led up and down by Satan by the nose as they are. There are many things by which Satan has taken occasion to greaten his rage against Jesus Christ.

9. If Christ saves the worst sinners, then cling to this when you are being tempted to think you've sinned more than could ever be forgiven

This is Satan's master-argument: thou art a horrible sinner, a hypocrite, one that has a profane heart, and one that is an utter stranger to a work of grace. I say this is his maul, his club, his master-piece. I believe there are but few saints in the world that have not had this temptation sounding in their ears. But were they but aware, Satan by all this does but drive them to the gap out at which they should go, and so escape his roaring.

B. Consider the Most Amazing Conversion in the Bible: The Thief on the Cross!!

1. This man began the time on the cross reviling Jesus, heaping insults on Him
2. He ended His life a few hours later in this way:

Luke 23:39-43 One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!" ⁴⁰ But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence? ⁴¹ We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong." ⁴² Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." ⁴³ Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."

3. Only the supernatural grace of God can account for this!!
 - a. Jesus had done no miracles in front of this man
 - b. This man was hostile to Jesus initially... but now thought He was the coming King
 - c. He believed in the RESURRECTION and FUTURE KINGSHIP of Jesus, though Jesus was dying on a cross!
 - d. He also believed Jesus was completely innocent... AND that He had power to save Him!!
 - e. Perhaps most amazing of all, he believed that he could be forgiven though he had no good works at all!
 - f. How? God revealed all this to him!!

Matthew 16:17 Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven."

4. Jesus' words of grace are among the most amazing in the Bible:

TODAY, YOU WILL BE WITH ME IN PARADISE!!!

5. SO: never give up on someone in evangelism!!
 - a. If God can save the thief on the cross, He can save ANYONE
 - b. Even to the end of life... a loved one, while they still breathe, is worthy of our prayers and evangelistic efforts

C. Let the Cross of Christ Be Enough to Cleanse Your Guilty Conscience

Hebrews 9:14 How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!

D. Never Underestimate the Wickedness of the Human Heart... and Do Not Be Surprised When they Hate True Christians

1. Jeremiah's testimony again
2. So we are seeing unfolded again the wickedness of the unregenerate heart

1 John 3:13 Do not be surprised, my brothers, if the world hates you.

1 Peter 4:12-14 Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³ But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴ If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.

E. Humble Yourself Concerning Your Own Heart

F. Edwards Application on Pain and Suffering

Resolved, when I feel pain, to think of the pains of martyrdom, and of hell.

Even better... resolved: whenever I feel pain, to think of the pains of Jesus Christ on my behalf