

January 6, 2019

“Jesus Foretells His Death”  
Matthew 20:17-19

FCF: Our foolish self-dependency

**PROPOSITION:** (anchor) We are absolutely dependent upon God’s grace.  
(magnet) We need to see that as we look at the cross.

**SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:**

In the news last week, as an historic first, China has landed a rover on the far side of the moon - the hemisphere of the moon that, because of its rotation, never faces the Earth. It’s a real accomplishment. Because of its landing site, the probe is cut off from radio frequency which makes direct communication with ground control impossible. How to get around the problem? Use a dedicated satellite in lunar orbit. Why get around the problem? The mission can’t succeed without that contact. The probe is dependent on ground control. It simply cannot go it alone.

There’s a lesson in that. And a warning. Our self-dependent turning from God is foolish.

**SCRIPTURE READING:** [Matthew 20:17-19](#)

**PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION**

**SERMON INTRODUCTION:**

It’s been awhile since we were last in this study so it’s good to get our bearings. Jesus’ ministry in Galilee was over. He and the disciples had begun their journey south to Jerusalem. And a recurring theme becomes apparent. Midway through chapter 19, we heard again the call to come to God with the humility of a child. That led to the exchange with the rich young ruler and the law’s purpose in exposing our hearts. That then leads to the parable of the laborers in the vineyard and our absolute dependency upon God’s grace. That theme continues here in our text.

This is the third of four predictions Jesus makes of His death. Each comes with greater detail and increasing clarity. Now we hear of crucifixion - not just of His death but the means of His death and the parties that will be involved in it. Jesus is pressing harder upon us. We are absolutely dependent upon God’s grace. “Absolutely” - without exception and in every way. We are absolutely dependent on God’s grace. And we need to see that as we look at the cross.

Three things become apparent here in this prediction - beyond just Jesus’ ability to foresee and foretell historical events. First, the depth of the problem. Second, the cost of the cure. Third, the extent of His love. Each of these makes clear our dependency on God’s grace.

**I. THE DEPTH OF THE PROBLEM**

First, the cross reveals to us the depth of the problem ([READ Matthew 20:18-19](#)).

*A) What We Know*

Briefly, let’s take an inventory of some things we know as we begin looking at this.

1. Sober history

Starting with Israel’s sober history. It was a story with great heroes. And spectacular failures throughout. All of which hinted, pointed, and provoked a longing for the greater Hero to come.

2. Sober images

Beyond the sober history, there were also sober images of how Israel had responded to the Lord. Idolatry - relying on and trusting in anything besides and before the living God. Adultery - the betrayal of this intimate relationship. Those were the themes. Something was truly wrong.

*B) What We See*

Reading the Scriptures, that's what we know. Coming now to this text, what do we see?

1. Jewish hypocrisy

Jewish hypocrisy - such stubborn concern for ceremony and settled conformity to tradition that, for the sake of those things, they were gladly willing to forego justice, mercy, and faithfulness.

2. Roman cruelty

Jewish hypocrisy. And Roman cruelty. Crucifixion was not invented by the Romans but they perfected it. It was deemed the worst form of execution. And so it was the method of choice.

Jerusalem, the holy city, was truly occupied territory. Hypocrisy and cruelty - do you see what's happening here? The very things that led to Jesus' crucifixion also made it necessary.

*Application:*

And the dark stripe runs right through here. However hard we may try to deny it or try to suppress the evidence. Case in point, the efforts of editors to alter the words to John Newton's *Amazing Grace*. It's true. All in the name of supposed refinement and progress. Here's the line. "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved someone like me." What's amiss here? A denial of our wretchedness. It fits the rhythm. But it's dishonest. It withholds truth.

We are absolutely dependent upon grace. The cross reveals the depth of the problem.

## **II. THE COST OF THE CURE**

Which is why Jesus says what He does (**READ Matthew 19:18a**). "Behold." Don't miss this. Take heed. Take hold. The cross reveals the depth of the problem and the cost of the cure.

*A) On the Surface*

Let's start with what you would have seen, with what was on the surface at the scene.

1. Physical agony

The physical agony. It's right there. The flogging. The crucifixion. A horrific torturous death.

2. Psychological anguish

And the psychological anguish. Jesus, the Son of Man, was mocked - isolated and ridiculed. And delivered over, betrayed. Twice we read that here so as to emphasize what He endured.

*B) Way Down Beneath*

That's what was on the surface. But what was worse was what lay way down beneath.

1. Ultimate estrangement

This was the ultimate estrangement. All the Son had ever known was harmonious relationship with the Father. All shattered upon the cross. This would be the full on experience of hell.

2. Explains so much

Which explains Jesus' agony in Gethsemane - the deep sorrow, the heavy sweat, the threefold plea for another way. And His cry from the cross (READ Matthew 27:46). It explains so much.

Remember what the angel said to Joseph? (READ Matthew 1:21) What would that take? Now we know (READ Matthew 20:18b-19). This is what it would take, the cost of the cure.

*Application:*

It is a cost we cannot pay. It is a burden Jesus alone could bear. And has. Everything He suffered we deserved. And everything we deserved He suffered. Not some. Not most. But all. He drained the cup of God's wrath dry. And so you, follower of Christ, are forgiven and free. You are in the process of being made new but utterly loved no matter how far short you fall.

We are absolutely dependent upon God's grace. And we see that in the cost of the cure.

### **III. THE EXTENT OF HIS LOVE**

Behold the depth of the problem, the cost of the cure, and the extent of His love. Let me point out two things here, both from the writings of the Apostle Paul as he reflected on all this.

#### *A) An Obvious Demonstration*

The first being that the cross is an obvious demonstration of God's love for us.

##### 1. Clearly stated

(READ Romans 5:8) God shows, proves, demonstrates His love for us through the cross.

##### 2. Clearly inferred

This is clearly inferred. What else could He do that He has not done? What could be lacking?

#### *B) The Sure Guarantee*

That's the first thing, an obvious demonstration. But the cross is also a sure guarantee.

##### 1. Clearly stated

(READ Romans 8:31-32) It is an argument from the greater to the lesser. He cannot but do this.

##### 2. Clearly inferred

This too is inferred. God is on our side. Think back to that twofold mention in Matthew 20 of Jesus being "delivered over." Who was behind that? It's the same word in Romans - "delivered over" and "gave up." Jesus gave Himself. And the Father gave up the Son. It's both. For us.

Behold the depth of the problem, the cost of the cure, and the extent of His love.

*Application:*

What does this mean for us tomorrow morning? Last week, we saw that our response to suffering exposes our hearts and the ways we treasure the gifts of God more than the Giver. But there's something else that can be said about suffering. We may not know the purpose or reason behind what we are going through. But, whatever it is, as we look to the cross, we can know this. It cannot be that God doesn't love us. Hear me. It cannot be that God doesn't love us.

For as we look at the cross, we see the extent of His love. Now let that settle in.

**CONCLUSION:**

Let me quote the words of another hymn we sing - *In Christ Alone* ([READ quote](#)):

In Christ alone my hope is found;  
He is my light, my strength, my song;  
This cornerstone, this solid ground,  
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm.  
What heights of love, what depths of peace,  
When fears are stilled, when strivings cease!  
My comforter, my all in all—Here in the love of Christ I stand.

“What heights of love, what depths of peace. When fears are stilled, when strivings cease!”

That’s a good line. My friends, it comes only through Jesus and His finished work on the cross.

We are absolutely dependent upon God’s grace. We need to see that as we look at the cross.

**PROPOSITION:** (anchor) We are absolutely dependent upon God’s grace.  
(magnet) We need to see that as we look at the cross.