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**So We Might Be Known**

Calvary Baptist Church of New Haven

For Tenebrae on Good Friday

April 19, 2019

**Matthew 27:46:** And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” that is, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

Something we don’t really think about but certainly feel very often is our desperate need to be known or understood. It’s a need that comes to us like hunger. We hunger for food because we cannot live without proper nutrition. So, too, we hunger to be understood because we know we cannot live without someone telling us – and affirming for us – that our existence matters. This need, in many ways, is what makes us social and relational beings, that is, it’s what makes us human. It’s what drives us to pursue social interactions and human conversations. It’s the reason why we chase certain relationships, while perhaps avoiding others, because some people seem to get us in ways no one else can.

The mystery of the incarnation is that God became man. That God took on human flesh in Jesus Christ, so that he not only appeared as one of us but truly became like us *in every respect*.[[1]](#footnote-1) Which means *Jesus* experienced real hunger, real thirst, and even the real human need to be understood.

However, because we live in a broken and fallen world, we are constantly misunderstood, even by those who are closest to us. Surely, there are times when people assume the worst in us. There are times when people overlook our achievements. There are times when people point out to us our worst qualities and failures, only to use them against us. And there are times when some people just outright tell us that it would’ve been better for us to not have been born at all, that our existence is a mistake. To some degree or another, we’ve all experienced this, and so we all know just how painful it can be, that is, to be misunderstood and to have our existence denied, or at least a part of it.

But if Jesus became like us in every respect, what must’ve this been like for Jesus as he experienced it? How was he misunderstood? Well, he was misunderstood by the crowds. They followed him and they loved him, but not for who he was, but merely for what he could do. He was misunderstood by the scribes and the Pharisees, who, after having heard his teachings, would go around telling people that Jesus was a nutcase simply because he spoke the truth. *Simply because he spoke the truth*, they looked for ways to undermine his reputation, and they schemed to harm and injure him. But not only that, Jesus was even misunderstood by his closest friends, his disciples. They called him Rabbi, Messiah, and Son of God, but it’s clear they had no idea what they were actually saying by calling him these things, since they all abandoned him in the end. For Jesus, these things meant that he would have to carry his cross unto death, and the disciples weren’t willing to go that far with him.

Sometimes when we are misunderstood it more often than not comes from a place of truth. It makes me feel bad, for instance, when someone points to a mistake I made in the past while not acknowledging how I might’ve grown from that mistake. But just because I feel bad about it, or just because my growth goes unacknowledged, that doesn’t mean I didn’t make that mistake. But for Jesus he was always above reproach. He lived a sinless and perfect life. He was without blame. And people knew that, which is why the only thing they could do was either twist his words or fabricate false lies about him.

Because we are sinners, we will never be able to imagine the sort of pain that someone so innocent as Jesus experiences in moments like this. For us, we are pained not because we’re sinless but because we just want other people to know what we know. But for Jesus, he is pained because he is falsely accused *though he is sinless*, and he undergoes tremendous suffering because such is the cost of obeying God within a rebellious world that chooses not to. But there is another reason why this sort of misunderstanding is so painful for him.

Notice that the degree to which we experience pain is determined by the significance of the relationship itself. Let me give you an example. It would be painful if one of you came up to me and said I am a mistake. But if one of my best friends came up to me and said that, the pain would certainly cut far deeper into me. Now if I try and imagine my *parents* saying something like that to me, no doubt I would be crushed and devastated. So, think about Jesus’ relationship to *us*, and those he came to serve.The reason why Jesus’ pain is far greater and so unimaginable for us is because his relationship to others is always determined by his unconditional love for them, that is, as the one who is their Creator and they his creatures. You see when it comes to us we so often demand to be known or understood for selfish reasons, whereas for Jesus he wants to be known for no other reason than for us to share in God’s love.

But instead of accepting his love, and responding in kind, God’s creatures reject him. Let’s pause here, and really try to see this from God’s perspective: Can you even imagine how much pain we cause Jesus, that though he patiently pursues us in love we treat him like trash and throw him aside? That his own creatures, instead of loving him, the Creator, for who he is, we merely want him only because of the things he’s able to do for us.

Even so, the reason why Jesus keeps going in the midst of loneliness and pain, the reason why he continues to walk the path towards the cross, is because of the joy he possesses in being completely known by the Father. Though the world misunderstood him, though the world *chose* to misunderstand him, His Father knew him completely, and for Christ that’s all that mattered. That was enough. So, though he was heckled by the crowd, slandered by the scribes, and abandoned by his disciples, the human need to be understood, that Jesus shares with us, was always met as the Father continued to affirm his existence, his life, and his mission in the words: “This is my beloved Son, with him I am well pleased.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

For us, though, our life is so precarious because, among other things, our longing to be understood feels like it’s something we can never truly have satisfied. I mean, if we can’t even trust our friends and our family to know us in the way we long to be known, who else can we turn to? This question plagues our generation, and it’s the reason why right now we are living in the loneliest generation ever in history, though we are more well-connected than any other generation that has come before us. Unsure of who to trust, because we are afraid of being hurt, people have removed themselves from others, looking for stability elsewhere in places like social media or videogames, and if not stability then at least an escape.

To simplify, the problem is that within every human heart there is the real need to be known and to be understood, but it seems like there is nothing in this world that can actually meet that need. But how can that be? Our hunger suggests that something called food actually exists. Our thirst suggests that something called water actually exists. Our sexual urges suggest that something called sex actually exists. So then what about this particular longing to be known?

In answer to this, C.S. Lewis brilliantly once said, “If we find ourselves with a desire that nothing in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that we were made for another world.”[[3]](#footnote-3) Here Lewis is only explicitly stating what we’ve already seen in Christ. Christ didn’t bank his hopes within this world, in being understood by us or other men, but rather he banked his hopes in God and in his kingdom. Having said that, that doesn’t mean he experienced any less pain by being so misunderstood by men. In fact, he would’ve felt a *deeper* pain, because for anyone who knows God and tries to live in the way he has called them to live Jesus tells us it will actually be more painful since the ones we are called to love will not love us back. Instead, they will reject us and they will mock us, in the same way they rejected and mocked him. So, the point is not that it was less painful for Jesus. The point is that within the great pain of being unknown by men there was the greater satisfaction of joy of being so completely known by his Father.

But now that we know this, that doesn’t mean we can simply say, “Great, God’s the answer, and now everything will turn out fine.” It’s not so simple, and his grace is not that cheap. Don’t forget, you are his enemy because you sinned against him. And because you sinned against him, you are estranged from him. What that means is because you are a sinner God does not know you. Because you have sinned against him, and have chosen not to acknowledge him, God no longer chooses to acknowledge you. And this is nothing less than death, the death and punishment we deserve. How could there be a greater death than this? That is, to hear the very source of our life and being say to us that he does not know us. This is why hell is loneliness in the most complete sense, because in hell not only are you not known by men, you are now no longer known by God, the very one who created you. Which means in hell you are left unknown for eternity.

God is a God of justice, and so this is what we deserve; yet God is also a God of love and so he steps in to save us. Prior to having his hands and his feet nailed to the wooden beams of the cross, Jesus was stripped naked and beaten to a pulp. They then smashed onto his head a crown of thorns, and he was forced to walk the excruciating miles, while embracing a two hundred pound cross, to the place where they would eventually crucify him. But for all the of physical pain Jesus went through, the greatest pain that any human could ever experience Jesus experienced so that we would not have to, when he cries out, *“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”*

In this moment, as he hangs and bleeds from the cross, God’s wrath is satisfied, and Jesus is now left *completely* alone. He has been abandoned by his Father. The Father who loved and delighted in the Son from all of eternity; the Father who the Son loved and delighted in from all of eternity. Remember how we said the level of pain is determined by the significance of the relationship? Imagine how much Christ suffers in this moment. That the infinite love that has been shared between them from all of eternity is now broken. Because Christ took our sins upon himself, and died in our place, he also bore the eternal punishment we deserve. Here God the Father says to Jesus the very words that constitute death: “I no longer know you” Why? So that through the cross he could now say to us, wretched sinners, “I know you, I see you, and I love you.”

On this day, God turned his face away from his most beloved and precious Son, so that his face could now shine upon us, so that we would never have to hear those soul-wrenching words “depart from me, I never knew you,” so that the pain of our longing to be fully known would at last be put to rest as we find ourselves in him, now and forever.[[4]](#footnote-4) Never in the history of the world has anyone been so misunderstood than Christ – and all for our sake.

1. Hebrews 2:17 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Matthew 3:17 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1980), 136-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Matthew 7:21-23 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)