

The Death That Opened the Door to Life

Luke 23:44-49

Have you ever felt like a door slammed shut between you and someone you love? Maybe it was a marriage where words turned cold and the intimacy you once shared felt locked away. Maybe it was a child who stopped answering texts, or a parent who withdrew into silence. Maybe it was a friendship that just... ended—no explanation, no reconciliation, just distance. You stood on one side knocking, hoping, explaining—but the door stayed locked. You couldn't get through, and the ache of that separation felt like it would never end.

That's the kind of pain many of us carry. But I want to submit to you that there's a far heavier door—one with eternal ramifications—that has been shut tight. Before the cross, the ultimate door—the one between us and God—was slammed shut, barred by sin, sealed by our guilt. We were on the outside, cut off from the presence we were made for.

But the good news we will be diving into today is this: at the cross, everything changed. The death of Jesus didn't just knock—it broke the door off its hinges from the inside out. And the access it provides not only has the power to heal broken relationships, but to sustain you in the One relationship that matters most.

Sermon in a Sentence: Jesus' substitutionary death plunged Him—and all the land—into darkness as He bore sin's penalty and separation, yet it tore open the way to God's presence, bringing life, light, and longing for full redemption.

To unfold this theme, we are going to look at three paradoxical realities of the cross that changed everything forever.

1. The Costliest Death Opened the Door to the Best Life

The first paradox we see is that the costliest death opened the door to the best life. Luke writes in verses 44-46:

“It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, while the sun’s light failed. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, ‘Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!’ And having said this he breathed his last.”

This was no ordinary eclipse. At Passover the moon was full; an eclipse was astronomically impossible. This was supernatural darkness. God Himself was pulling the curtain over the sun to show the horror of what was happening.

Jesus’ substitutionary death plunged Him—and all the land—into darkness as He bore sin’s penalty and separation. Sin’s penalty is death (Romans 6:23). And Death is not merely physical; it is separation from God. Listen to Isaiah 59:2: *“Your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear.”*

In that darkness the temple curtain—the massive veil separating the Holy of Holies from the people—was torn in two from top to bottom. Not from bottom to top as if man had done it, but from top to bottom by God’s own hand (Matthew 27:51). The barrier that kept sinners from God’s presence was ripped open.

Then we read that Jesus, the innocent Lamb, cried out with a loud voice,

“Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!” And having said this, He breathed His last (v. 46).

These are not the words of a victim. These are the words of sovereign surrender. It’s important to note here that Jesus was quoting Psalm 31:5 which reads: “Into your hand I commit my spirit.” This was a prayer of deep trust that God’s devoted people often prayed at night, entrusting themselves to God’s care in sleep, which pictures death. But Jesus prays it in broad daylight, at the hour of His greatest agony, with full consciousness and authority.

John records Him saying earlier, *“No one takes it (my life) from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again”* (John 10:18). No Roman crucifixion, no Jewish leaders, no cosmic forces took His life. He laid it down willingly and in perfect communion with the Father.

Even in this moment of forsakenness, when He bore our sin and cried *“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”* (Matthew 27:46), His final word is still “Father.” The relationship is unbroken. Though in His humanity He tasted the full weight of sin’s separation from God’s favor, His divine sonship remained unbroken. He entrusts His spirit to the One He has never ceased calling Father.

This prayer is breathtaking. It shows us that Jesus died not as a martyr forced to the end, but as the willing High Priest offering Himself. And because He did, something profound now belongs to every believer: the same confident trust.

Those who are in Christ can pray the same prayer in life and in death: *“Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.”* We don’t have to fear the final breath. We don’t have to wonder if God will receive us. Because Jesus entrusted Himself fully to the Father—and was vindicated in resurrection—we can entrust ourselves too. The door is open. The Father who received the Son receives us in Him.

And notice the breath part: *“He breathed His last.”* In His human body, Jesus exhaled His final breath so that we might inhale the breath of life again. When God first formed Adam, He *“breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature”* (Genesis 2:7). Sin snuffed out that life, bringing spiritual death. But in Christ, the last Adam, we receive the Holy Spirit who makes us alive to God (Romans 8:11; 1 Corinthians 15:45). He breathed His last so we could receive the Spirit who breathes new life into us—making us alive unto God forever.

But look what it all accomplished. The torn curtain says, “Access granted.” Jesus is the Door (John 10:9). Through His blood we now have boldness to enter the Most Holy Place (Hebrews 10:19-22).

Paradise—which He promised the thief just hours earlier—is not just a distant place; it is immediate presence with Jesus—the garden of Eden restored. God with us forever (Revelation 21-22).

This is not just “fire insurance.” This is relational restoration. The best life we could live is a life of knowing God, being known by Him, and living in His presence forever.

That is exactly what Jesus accomplished for us on the cross. He tore open the veil so we could enter boldly (Hebrews 10:19-22). The door is wide open—not because we earned the right, but so we can enjoy the relationship the King desires for us.

Beloved, this is the very heart of salvation, the barrier is gone. We are welcomed in—invited to know God, to be known by Him, to walk with Him and talk with Him as Adam and Eve did before the fall. This is relational restoration at its deepest level. And in that restored relationship, conversation flows both ways. But notice who speaks first: God.

Even from the cross, Jesus’ prayers were drawn from the Old Testament. As we saw, His final words quoted Psalm 31:5: “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” He was praying the Scriptures, showing perfect trust in the Father who had spoken to Him all along.

God has always been the initiator. In creation, He spoke light into existence (Genesis 1:3). In redemption, He spoke through the prophets and ultimately through His Son (Hebrews 1:1-2). In our salvation, He spoke grace to us while we were still sinners (Romans 5:8). So in prayer, God speaks first through His Word. We listen. Then we answer—with repentance, adoration, surrender, intercession, and bold requests shaped by His heart.

This is the heartbeat of true prayer. Prayer and the Word are not two separate disciplines; they are two sides of the same relationship. The Word is God speaking. Prayer is our answering speech.

The entire Bible—not just the Psalms—is our prayer book. It reveals who God is in His holiness, mercy, sovereignty, and mission. It shows us His worth, and only then do we rightly see our need.

Think of Isaiah in the temple in Isaiah 6. He didn't start by listing his problems. He saw the Lord high and lifted up, heard the seraphim crying "Holy, holy, holy," and immediately cried out, "Woe is me! I am ruined!" Seeing God's glory exposed his sin, and that vision birthed confession, cleansing, and commissioning. That is prayer at its purest: a response to revelation.

Yet how often is the Bible missing from our prayer lives today? We come with our to-do lists, anxieties, and wants, treating prayer like a monologue. But the God of the universe is speaking—from Genesis to Revelation—and He invites us into a real, two-way conversation.

Jesus tore open the veil so we could enter boldly. In that relationship, God speaks first through His Word. We listen. Then we answer—with repentance, adoration, surrender, intercession, and bold requests shaped by His heart. This kind of prayer changes our cares. We still cast them on Him because He cares for us (1 Peter 5:7)—but after soaking in Scripture, our cares are refined. We begin to want what He wants. We pray for His kingdom, His will, His mission, our churches, our cities, and the nations. We go after His heart instead of asking Him to chase after ours.

Jesus promised: "If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you" (John 15:7). This principle is not about earning God's ear—it is letting His Word dwell in us richly so that our asking flows from His heart.

So, in your prayer life, open the Word first. Read slowly. Ask the Spirit to make your heart tender. Wait for the answering response—whether it's awe, conviction, joy, or longing. Then turn that response into prayer. Let the whole Bible shape you: the law that exposes, the prophets that warn, the Gospels that reveal Jesus, the letters that instruct, the promises that anchor.

Try this simple rhythm: Read a passage. Then ask: What does this show me about God? About myself? About His will? And then pray that truth back to Him in your own words.

You will discover that the more you listen to God in His Word, the more He listens to you in prayer—and the more your life becomes a living answer to His voice.

That is the best life that Jesus opened the door to on the cross.

2. The Darkest Night Shone the Brightest Light

Now, the second paradox we see is that **the darkest night shone the brightest light**. Luke writes in verse 47:

“Now when the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God, saying, ‘Certainly this man was innocent!’”

In the middle of that supernatural darkness, a Roman centurion—a battle-hardened Gentile officer in charge of the execution squad—stood there watching Jesus die and declared, *“Certainly this man was innocent... and truly this was the Son of God”* as Matthew also records (Matthew 27:54).

Think about who this man was. He was a professional killer. He had supervised dozens, perhaps hundreds, of crucifixions. He had watched men scream, curse, and beg for death. He had seen every kind of agony, every kind of despair. Nothing surprised him anymore.

But this Man was different.

Charles Spurgeon captured it powerfully when he wrote:

“The centurion had seen many a man die, but he had never seen one die as Jesus died. He had watched the victims of crucifixion, but he had never seen one die with such calm confidence in God, such forgiveness toward His murderers, such care for His mother, such a cry of victory at the last. The centurion was convinced that this was no ordinary man. ‘Truly this was the Son of God.’”

The centurion didn't see a defeated rebel; he saw sovereign love. He didn't just see a broken body; he saw the Son of God giving Himself for others. In the hour when darkness covered the land, the light of Christ's character and sacrifice shone so brightly that even a hardened pagan could not deny it.

This is the love that saves us from wrath, secures us for eternity, satisfies our souls forever (Psalm 16:11), and sanctifies us so we are no longer slaves to sin (Romans 6:6-7; Galatians 2:20).

And here is the wonder for us:

When we are crucified with Christ, the same light that shone in that centurion's heart and in the thief's heart, as we saw last week, begins to shine through us. We become light in a dark world (Matthew 5:14-16)—the fifth gospel. Our lives — even in our own dark nights — can draw others to Jesus just as that centurion was drawn.

3. The Saddest Moment Gave Way to the Greatest Joy

Now, finally, verses 48-49: *“And all the crowds that had assembled for this spectacle, when they saw what had taken place, returned home beating their breasts. And all his acquaintances and the women who had followed him from Galilee stood at a distance watching these things.”*

Notice here that some in the crowd beat their breasts. Why? The beating of their breasts was the ancient sign of deep grief, remorse, fear, and conviction, like the tax collector in Luke 18:13, who also beat his breast and cried, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner!” This was not yet full repentance, but it was an awakening. Something had been stirred in them. They came to observe a spectacle, but they left carrying a weight they could not shake.

I believe we see here an early, quiet work of the Holy Spirit—convicting hearts of sin, even before the full outpouring at Pentecost. Jesus Himself promised that when the Spirit comes, “he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment” (John 16:8). The cross is the place where that conviction begins to press in.

The Spirit was already at work, awakening consciences, exposing guilt, preparing the way for the gospel to take root in the days ahead.

This beating of their breast, which no doubt was accompanied with groaning and tears, is the cry of lament.

Pastor and author Mark Vroegop, in his book *Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy*, says: “Lament is the honest cry of a hurting heart wrestling with the paradox of pain and the promise of God’s goodness... Lament is not the opposite of praise. It is the path that leads to praise.”

The crowds’ beating their breast and the silence of the women watching from a distance were raw, honest lament. They didn’t pretend everything was fine. They felt the weight of what had just happened. Faith is not denying your pain; it’s bringing it to God.

And here is the beauty of the gospel (and this is our final point): **the saddest moment gave way to the greatest joy.**

Those same women would soon run from the empty tomb with fear and great joy (Luke 24:8-9). Those same crowds would later hear Peter preach and be cut to the heart, crying out, “What shall we do?” and thousands would be baptized into joy (Acts 2).

Paul says in Romans 8:22-23 that creation groans and we groan inwardly as we wait for the redemption of our bodies. In Christ we are already delivered from sin’s penalty (justified) and its power (sanctified), but we still groan for the day when death is swallowed up in victory (1 Corinthians 15:54-55).

That groaning is not despair—it is holy longing.

Mark Vroegop reminds us that prayers of lament are “the transition between pain and promise... the path from heartbreak to hope.” The cross was the saddest moment in history, yet it gave way to the greatest joy the universe has ever known—the resurrection.

This resurrection hope doesn't eliminate pain. In a fallen world, if you love deeply, you will feel pain deeply. But because the saddest moment gave way to the greatest joy, we can bring our cries of pain to God. In His presence, we find reasons to praise—not despite our heartbreak, but in the midst of it. Prayers of lament become the path from pain to promise, from heartbreak to hope.

So here is the question for us: Do you groan or long for Jesus' appearing as Paul says those who receive the crown of righteousness do (2 Timothy 4:8; Titus 2:13)? You get there not by fixating on prophetic timelines or end-times events, but by getting closer to Jesus. The more you know Him—the more you behold His beauty, experience His grace, and walk with Him—the more your heart will naturally love and long for His appearing. That longing isn't manufactured by studying prophecy charts; it's cultivated by abiding in Him.

Beloved, that longing is not weakness; it is the evidence that you belong to the One who turned the saddest moment into the greatest joy. Let it fuel hope, holiness, and mission. We love Him, we long for Him, and because He lives, we can face every tomorrow with resurrection joy already breaking in.

Live as people who know that “the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us” (Romans 8:18)—and invite others into that joy.

Conclusion

At the cross, the costliest death opened the door to the best life. The darkest night shone the brightest light.

And the saddest moment gave way to the greatest joy. His death produced life, light, and longing. And when we are united with Him, and growing in this love relationship, that life, light and longing will be produced in us.

Someone might wonder: If the cross tore the door off its hinges, why does Revelation 3:20 show Jesus knocking? Because the cross opened the door to the Father's presence. And acceptance is guaranteed for all who believe. But the door to your heart has a

handle on your side. It's not a door God put back up. It's a door we put up—through not making time for God, neglect of prayer, self-reliance, and preoccupation with worldly affairs.

So Jesus stands there, knocking—not in frustration, but in love. Will you hear Him and open the door today so He can come in and dine with you—so you can know deeper fellowship and the joy of His presence? Confess the doors you've put up. Commit to making communion with Him your greatest priority. And ask Him to be at home in your heart.

If you are still separated from God—living in spiritual darkness—the Door stands open today.

Come through the torn curtain. Trust the One who died innocent in your place to save you from sin and give you new and eternal life in Him.

For those of us who are already saved: thank God for the costliest death that opened the door to your best life—knowing Him. Rely on the Spirit to die to self and shine His light. Live with resurrection joy breaking into your groaning. Let God use you to draw others in darkness—because the brightest day has already broken through the deepest night.