

Good Friday

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[0 : 00] It's lovely to be here seeing so many lovely beautiful faces and I just want to start our time! here meditating on Mark 15 that Emma's just read by asking a question.

! When was the last time you were left unsatisfied with the way a story ended? It could well be a book you read recently or a film you watched ages ago that's still stuck in your head and you thought what if it ended differently? Maybe it was Jack and Rose living happily ever after as they disembarked the Titanic. Or maybe it's Iron Man living to see that his sacrifice meant something. Well, I love films as you can tell by my examples. I just love the way stories are told on the big screen. And one of my favorites that I share with our dear Pat is Gladiator. Right? We talk about it quite a bit.

It's one of my favorite films of course. The first one with Russell Crowe, not the appalling sequel. But when I first watched it, I have to be honest, I didn't quite know what to make of it. The ending didn't sit right with me. And now I apologize in advance for those of you who were intending on watching the film in the next week or so because I think I'm going to spoil the plot a little. There we have Maximus, the good guy, the loyal soldier and general against the evil emperor Commodus. Now Commodus had murdered Maximus' family, his wife, his son, and he had stripped him of all his accolades. And so, of course, like me, I'm sure a lot of people were rooting for the protagonist, Maximus, to to have this triumphant victory over the evil emperor. But if you watch the film, it takes a rather unfortunate and surprising turn. And I just couldn't sit with that ending for a while. I just couldn't sit with it. Well, in a similar way, but much more strongly, that's what I felt every time I would read this passage, moments leading up to Jesus' death as a child. As a child, I'd read this, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and I was rooting for Jesus. I mean, who wasn't? He was the good guy, the best person to have ever walked the earth. But what was to happen? Moments leading to his death just didn't make sense. It didn't sit right with me. As a child, I wondered how could the death of the Son of God possibly be a good thing? How could something so horrific, the crucifixion, be so celebrated?

[2 : 50] In other words, what's so good about Good Friday? For the next few minutes, we'll look at that. Well, for the next seven minutes and four seconds, we'll look at that. And we'll look at those three statements as I thought, it didn't make sense. It didn't make sense. But the death of Jesus had to happen. The death of Jesus is our only hope. So it didn't make sense. It had to happen. It's our only hope.

The first reason why it didn't make sense for me when I read this was, as you can read from the first verse in chapter 15, we're told that a whole group of important people made plans against Jesus, a group of people who otherwise wouldn't cooperate, wouldn't work together. They worked together this one time to scheme against this one person, Jesus. They wanted him dead. What had he done?

Jesus hadn't done anything bad. He'd done good his whole life. It just didn't make sense. Now here was the prophesied King of the Jews, the long awaited Messiah, the Son of God who did so many wonders and miracles throughout his whole ministry. And yet when he stands in front of the crowd, when he's given a chance to defend himself by Pilate, what does he do? He barely raises his voice. He stays silent. That didn't make sense to me. And it didn't make sense to Pilate in verse 5, as we're told. Now imagine what's rushing through my seven-year-old mind. Do something, Jesus. Don't you know what fate lies ahead of you? Death by crucifixion. Now I was reading a book, The Gospel Stories by Andrew Wilson, that was recommended to me by my dear mentors, John and Daphne. And there's a chapter in it about the crucifixion. Now I don't have the time to go into all the details, and I'm way too sensitive and squeamish to even go and delve into all the details. But it's just ghastly. It's terrible.

It's inhumane and excruciating, crucifixion. And for this reason, I hated this man, this murderer, who was meant to die instead, Barabbas. I hated Barabbas because, you see, he was supposed to be crucified, not Jesus. Barabbas, you should have died instead of Jesus. You should have suffered on that cross, not Jesus. And you shouldn't have even lived to see another day. And while I pointed at Barabbas in my hatred, in my fury for what he'd done and whose life he had cost, there are three fingers pointing back at me for what I'd done, whose life I'd cost. You see, as I read scripture, I began to realize that I was no better than Barabbas. I had broken God's commandments. I had said hateful things about others in public and in secret, and I'd wished evil on others. And according to Jesus, I was no better than Barabbas. I was no better than a murderer. I was an enemy to God. And if someone as flawed and as imperfect as I am felt disgust and anger at the evil Barabbas had done, how much more must a holy, perfect, and just God look upon my sin? The sentence of Barabbas's action was death.

[6 : 22] In the Bible, we're told that the consequence of our sin against God is eternal death. Like Barabbas, all we can do is wait, wait for our sentence to be carried out. The verdict's been sealed long ago. We sinned. We broke God's holy law. There's no going back. No trial can save us now.

The final day arrives. We hear footsteps. It's the guards. The keys are rattling. It's the morning of our execution. We're taken out in front of the crowd, expecting this to be our last few moments alive. But then we hear the crowd shouting, and they're not shouting our name. They're shouting someone else's name. Someone else is going to die. What's more, this someone else is going to die in our place. And we're to be set free in exchange. You see, Jesus' death had to happen because it's our only hope. Our only hope of life. Jesus took all our sins on himself, and all the wrath of God that our sins had caused fell on this perfect man, Jesus. God looked at him as if he had done all the wicked and evil I had done, and God looked at me. God looks at us as if we have lived that perfect and that obedient life Jesus had lived. Jesus had to die because it was our only hope of being saved from the wrath of God. Like Barabbas, we were guilty. There was nothing we could do. We were headed for execution. But praise God, because like Barabbas, we walked away free. Instead of taking our sins to the grave, we were forgiven. We were restored. We are loved. We can even share a relationship with

God because of what Jesus has done, and even call him Father, all because of what Jesus has done on that cross. Friends, I hope you're filled with the same joy I felt when I first discovered why Good Friday is indeed so good. And I think the opening lines to the well-known tale of the two cities captures the significance beautifully. It was the best of times. It was the worst of times.

It was a season of darkness. It was a season of hope. It was a winter of despair. On what seemed to be the greatest injustice, the greatest tragedy, the worst of times, it was also the best of times, because we were made right with God. Our slate was wiped clean, and we need not fear God's judgment, because Jesus faced it for us. That the reminder of just how terrible and how ghastly the cross was, but how beautiful and glorious it became, especially in light of what was to happen three days later, be a cause for celebration, not just this time around, but all year round. Now, though the gladiator ended in a rather unsatisfying way for me, we know that the story, the historical story of Jesus didn't end there. It didn't end in a winter of despair, but for the disciples, the friends of Jesus, for the family of Jesus, for us, it was to bloom into this glorious spring of hope, the greatest hope the world has ever known. And what happened three days later, you might ask? Well, as a movie fan, I'll leave that on a cliffhanger and ask you to come back on Sunday to listen to the sequel. Let's pray. Let's pray. Gracious Heavenly Father, thank you for being so good to us. Thank you for being good to us every morning. And as we remember your goodness, your mercy, and your grace this morning, as we remember the greatest display of your love for us on that cross, in the sacrifice of your Son, Jesus, let us be filled with joy, Lord. Let's be filled with gratitude. Thank you for showing your love to us, even when we were enemies to your kingdom like Barabbas. Thank you for the cross, a symbol that was once meant to show weakness. Suffering is now a symbol, a great symbol of love, forgiveness, and assurance for Christians throughout the ages. We thank you and we praise you in your Son's name. Amen.

[11 : 06] Amen.