

Good Friday: Hold Your Head High

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[0 : 00] So welcome here for this Good Friday, March 29th, 2024. My name is Kent Dixon, and it's my joy to be the pastor here. We're continuing in this series, this brief Easter series called Come Alive, and it began on Palm Sunday last Sunday, and it continues today and then again on Sunday, two days from now.

More than 2,000 years ago, God's plan for redemption changed the world forever. The power of sin and death was broken through the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ and that first Easter. Death was defeated. True spiritual life, God's life, triumphed. And so we've embarked on a journey together through the events of Holy Week to come alive to God's story, which transforms our lives and our world by his grace.

We started our Holy Week journey with Palm Sunday and coming alive to Jesus' life, which was above and beyond human understanding. And today, Good Friday, we will not look down in fear and defeat.

So if you're here this morning looking to feel sad, I'm going to change your mind. We're here today to hold our heads high as we focus on the cross, as we come alive to the sacrifice that Jesus made.

[1 : 28] And then on Easter Sunday, we'll celebrate Jesus' resurrection and come alive to his power to change our lives. The life that Jesus offers us is a reason to celebrate, and we can be thinking about that today.

It's honestly okay. We have the opportunity to respond to God's open arms and his invitation to draw near to him, because on Good Friday, we recognize the way it was being made.

I'm so glad you're here today. But it's not easy Friday, right? But it is good, because we're continuing to discover the life-giving truth of Holy Week and of God's power to transform each one of us into a new creation.

It's so difficult to look at death. I don't know if you've ever been in the room when someone has taken their last breath, but you never forget it.

I was there shortly before my mom passed in 2000. I literally was in the room, went home, and as I got home, Michelle answered the phone from my dad, saying, time for him to come back.

[2 : 44] I turned around and went right back. I've seen friends and family members laying in a casket at a service, knowing that I would not have a last conversation, or a last hug, at least not for now.

As a pastor, I've held hands and sat at bedsides. I've said prayers and read scripture to people as they lay dying. I've been asked to bring comfort to people facing heavy grief and crushing loss. And it's a humbling, holy, and often difficult task, sitting in sacred spaces where the mortal and temporal intersect with the eternal.

I'm sure all of you have personal stories of your own, of both comforting others and being comforted yourself. But it's in those moments of staring death in the face that we truly remember what is most important.

There is incredible tension on this day. We look at the cross, the most brutal tool of Roman execution. In fact, one of the most brutal tools ever invented by human beings.

[4 : 02] We call it, as we have a bit this morning, we call it wonderful and glorious and beautiful. We call the day of our Savior's death Good Friday.

As difficult as it is, it's important to take a few moments to look intently at the cross of Jesus Christ. When the Apostle Paul considered the cross, and it's always interesting to me because I listen to Vern speak before they lead in worship, and I'm thinking, oh, that verse is this morning.

That verse is on Sunday. So it's not just by chance, right? God is at work behind the scenes. So when the Apostle Paul considered the cross, he said it this way in Galatians 6, verse 14, and this is

the ESV translation.

But far be it for me to boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world.

To look at the cross is to refocus and recalibrate your life around this one thing, and to receive the confidence of knowing that the God of the universe, as Vern touched on this morning, laid down his life, not just for everyone, but for you specifically.

[5 : 30] I want to focus for a moment on the one word in the verse I read, just read, the word boast. You ever read that verse and thought, oh, Paul seems a little arrogant there?

Well, let's get some perspective. I believe we tend to think of, and you'll probably agree, boasting is bragging, right? I'm going to boast about some things I did.

Well, it's bragging, really, is what we're talking about. But what Paul is actually suggesting here really is the idea of having confidence. So far be it for me to have confidence, Paul is saying, in anything other than the cross of Jesus Christ.

Your motivation, my motivation, to live out our faith should come from a sense of confidence confidence that you will overwhelmingly conquer any obstacle because of the power of almighty God.

And this confidence comes, unfortunately, from looking at this moment of unbelievable suffering. The Greek word here, translated as boast, also translated and sometimes as exalt, literally means to hold your head high.

[6 : 50] Hold your head high today. Look at the cross of Jesus Christ. And that's the title of our sermon this morning. Good Friday, hold your head high.

I don't know about you, but I've noticed over the past several years, we seem to live in a look-down society these days, don't we?

When you're driving and stopped at a light, you look at the vehicles next to you, are they looking at the road, eagerly anticipating that light to change? 80% of the time, nope, they're looking down.

You're looking down maybe to change the controls, change the radio station, you're bored, you're entertaining yourself. People are looking down at their phones quite often, right?

We look down all the time. Think about it. We look down at our computers. We look down to read, down to text, down to stand over a countertop and prepare a meal, and even to pray.

[7 : 57] So many of our daily activities and habits cause us to literally look down. A little science for you this morning. Each of us have trillions.

That's a big number. I'm not a math guy, but that's a lot. Trillions of cells in our bodies that all play different roles. I have to look at Kathy and Vern and make sure.

Is that accurate? Trillions of cells? Every single one of those cells is directly impacted by the condition of your spinal cord, by that electronic communication system that's in your body.

The curve of your neck, believe it or not, is particularly important in this. Because whenever you look down, you're actually compressing the spinal cord in a way.

Every time you look down, you're literally, potentially, hampering some of the function of your nervous system. So one of the most powerful things you can do, one of the most effective things you can do, throw your shoulders back, tilt your neck and your head back and up.

[9 : 06] Lift your chin and look up. This posture can quite literally help restore life to your body, help improve communication and function.

And it's the posture that Paul is suggesting to us that we have today to help us to restore vital function in our perspective, our focus, our priorities.

It's a corrective measure that we can take today to remind ourselves that our hope is built on nothing less, say it with me, than Jesus' blood and righteousness.

That's what we're here for today. Today we hold our heads high about nothing less than the cross of Christ. As we look at his life and what he has done for us, it allows us to recalibrate all the ways that our lives may have drifted out of alignment.

We don't hold our heads up high out of a sense of the importance of our work, our achievements, our gifts, our talents. we don't hold our heads high about our contributions or our accomplishments.

[10 : 21] We follow the example of Jesus who stepped out of heaven and made himself less than for our sake. we look up and hold our heads high to, as John 1 verse 29 says, again, ESV, behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Do you see him this morning? What an amazing statement that John the Baptist made when Jesus first came on the scene. before Jesus had performed any miracles in his public ministry, before he preached the first word of his first sermon, John knew what was coming.

Imagine John's excitement. John said, behold. He said, see, look upon. The word can even mean experience. Look upon the Lamb.

The Lamb born in Bethlehem the birthplace of every Lamb who would be killed in an official capacity as part of the Passover in Jerusalem.

Born to be the sacrifice, this Lamb, the sacrifice. Born to be the price of our reconciliation back to God.

[11 : 49] Born to be the payment for our sins. my friends, hold your head high and look upon the Lamb.

Hold your head high and look upon the one who ate with sinners, the one who welcomed the outsiders. Look upon the one who said, let the little children come to me.

Don't keep them away, for such is the kingdom of heaven. Hold your head high. Look upon the one who never forced himself on anyone.

Look through the New Testament. I dare you. Jesus never made anyone come to him. But he welcomed and listened to everyone.

Hold your head high while the Son of Man walks upon the water and calms the sea and casts out demons and feeds the hungry.

[12 : 52] You know these stories. Hold your head high and look at the blind receive their sight as the lame learn to walk again.

As disease is healed and those who are held captive to their sins are set free. Hold your head high and look upon the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

In the same way that John the Baptist told us to behold him, the Roman governor Pontius Pilate did the same in a different way. As we read in John 19 verse 5 in the ESV translation, So Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe.

Pilate said to them, behold the man, see him, experience him, look at him now and remember this day that occurred not quite 2,000 years ago.

I was listening to the gospel account this morning. Jesus was betrayed. He was abandoned by his followers. He was denied by his closest friends.

[14 : 10] He was whipped by the Romans. Jesus was beaten until the Roman soldier holding that whip's arm grew tired. They twisted a crown of thorns and pressed it into his head.

And then Pilate brought him forward and told the crowd to behold him. After all of that, Pilate declared him not guilty.

It began as just a Friday morning of Roman mockery. but the crowd wanted more. What do you want me to do? Pilate asked.

Take him away, they shouted. Crucify him. We can't physically see Jesus today. But as best we can in our mind's eye, we can look up and look upon him.

1 Peter 1 verses 8 to 9 says, though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

[15 : 31] souls. So how can we look back at this account? How can we look back at such suffering and death and be filled with inexpressible joy?

Because it's personal. It was for you and it was for me. There was only one purpose for Jesus to be battered and beaten, abused and abandoned.

Just one purpose. 1 John 3 16 says, by this we know love, that he laid down his life for us and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.

Jesus' execution was declared and as Vern mentioned this morning, Jesus carried his cross through the winding narrow streets. Ultimately, we know that he couldn't bear that cross on his own. So the Roman soldiers commanded someone else to carry it along the path. The Via Dolorosa. The way of suffering.

[16 : 41] It was filled with shops and patrons, crowded like no other time of the year. According to some sources during Passover, Jerusalem's population would swell by more than, hear this, 400%.

100%. The intention was not just crucifixion here, but utter humiliation. Because the Romans were setting an example for any others who might be tempted to rebel against the power and authority of

Rome.

and then Jesus was laid down and attached to the beams of the cross by Roman nails. One of the most powerful Good Friday experiences I've ever been involved in was at a church and we hammered nails into a beam backstage during quiet in the service.

very powerful, very impactful. 1 Peter 2 verse 24 says, He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.

By his wounds you have been healed. The New Testament writers would reflect upon the cross of Jesus and declare our sins canceled by the pounding of those nails.

[18 : 17] And it's a miraculous contradiction, I don't know if you've ever thought of it, but that in Jesus' wounds, in his suffering and humiliation, we would find healing.

It's that beautiful mystery that the streams of blood from the lashing and the nails and the thorns would cover our sin.

Even God the Father turned his head from the sin that accompanied Jesus' suffering. Jesus was left alone to die. And then a few moments later, he finished his work.

And Jesus, the Lamb of God breathed his last. To hold his suffering in your heart creates overwhelming gratitude and humility, at least I hope it does.

Because it's almost impossible not to bow your head in sorrow and reverence. You can tell my emotions stirred by the reality of this day.

[19 : 30] yet today, this is why we're here. This is what we've come to hear, what we've come to see, what we've come to talk about and reflect upon.

So we look upon him. This is what the writers of scripture talked about. This is the reason that Paul said he boasted.

did. This, my friends, is the reason we hold our heads high. Jeremiah 29 verse 23 says, Thus says the Lord, Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom.

Let not the mighty man boast in his might. Let not the rich man boast in his riches. We're determined to know nothing but Jesus, and him crucified.

We put our trust in nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness. Today, we hold our heads high and look to the cross.

[20 : 41] This instrument of death became the cornerstone of victory in our lives. And this is what makes it a good Friday.

today. This is why you can hold your head high today. Hold your head high as he declares you forgiven.

Hold your head high as he bears every sorrow and every grief and every pain. Hold your head high as he removes your guilt, your shame, and most of all your penalty.

Hold your head high as the one who knows you by name, declares you fearfully and wonderfully made, boasts over you with joy, rejoices over you with shouts, and loves you without limits.

my friends. Hold your head high and know that not only is the cross empty, but the tomb is empty too. Spoiler alert. Hold your head high and declare as Galatians 2 verse 20 says, I have been crucified with Christ.

[21 : 58] It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me, loved you, and gave his life for you.

Hold your head high and for nothing else but the cross of Christ. Amen.