

Good Friday, Luke 23:32-43

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[0 : 00] This is Luke 23, starting at verse 32. Two others who were criminals were led away to be put to death with him. And when they came to the place that is called the skull, there they crucified him and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left.

And Jesus said, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. And they cast lots to divide his garments, and the people stood by watching.

But the rulers scoffed at him, saying, He saved others. Let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his chosen one. The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine and saying, If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.

There was also an inscription over him. This is the king of the Jews. One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, Are you not the Christ?

Save yourself and us. But the other rebuked him, saying, Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds.

[1 : 18] But this man has done nothing wrong. And he said, Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom. And he said to him, Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Please be seated. Well, good evening.

It is a wonderful thing to gather with you here tonight as we commemorate and celebrate all that Jesus has done. You know, it is no exaggeration to say that for Christians, Good Friday is what matters most.

Even if for everyone else, the question lingers, why should Good Friday matter at all? For some, then, we gather tonight and consider the goings-on of Good Friday, and we deem this to be what truly matters.

While for others, the events surrounding the death of Jesus remain immaterial. I don't know which camp you fall into. Have you come to commemorate this day?

[2 : 40] Or are you curious about what Christians have to say? Perhaps neither of those. You've been active, as it were, asked to come.

And therefore, are awaiting the claims of the day. Either way, I'm glad you've come. By the time I'm done, I want to do two things.

I want you to leave tonight knowing why it is that Good Friday fails to matter to so many. But especially why Good Friday should matter to you.

That Good Friday doesn't matter to many is nothing new. The first half of the text that Amy just read for us this evening make that abundantly clear.

Did you notice Luke, the gospel writer, groups three very contemporary-sounding voices that question why Good Friday should matter at all?

[3 : 46] The three included the rulers of verse 34, the soldiers of verse 35, and one of the criminals in verse 39.

All three are dismissive of attaching any significance to this day. All three, especially so, are suspicious of attaching a meaning related to one's salvation.

That's clear with the three words that are used to express their sentiments toward Jesus in the hour of his death. Did you catch the words? Scoffing.

That's the rulers. Mocking. And railing. These three words, to this day, still epitomize the human response to the death of Jesus and the celebration of salvation that Christians find in it.

Let's just take a quick look. I want you to hear these words. The rulers scoffed. I looked at the text this week to see what kind of word this was.

[4 : 58] It's actually a word from which we get our word mucus. To scoff, as the rulers did, was to almost have this guttural disdain, this phlegm-like disgust toward the Friday you call good.

You could almost hear it in their voice, these rulers, most likely religious rulers, given that the word attached to them is, if you are the Christ, if you are the one who's going to save your own people, then save yourself.

They don't sense any significance to this death along those lines. The soldiers mocking.

This word is used elsewhere in the New Testament when people are ridiculing the Christians, as Peter writes, where they might ask, where?

Where is the promise of his coming? It's this voice that isn't just guttural disdain. It's questioning by way of sarcastic ridicule.

[6 : 18] Really? Here you are, on the cross. Blood and outflows. Save yourself.

What? Can't you? Are you unable to? Are we really stronger than you? This questioning by way of disbelief, this verbal ridicule that this one, this impotent one, this hanging one, has the capacity to rule the world.

Even the word they use there, king, rather than Christ, indicates that both now the religiously oriented ones who were looking for some salvation from God and relief from their oppression, they now scoff at this one being the one who can carry it off.

And the world itself, who would like a political king, says, not this one. Is it the way you enter into any throne room? And then the word railing. Did you catch that?

The one criminal. It literally, literally is translated to blaspheme. I guess the New Testament translators, Andrew, weren't quite sure how to indicate blasphemy in a text like this.

[7 : 39] So instead they are railing. This is what the one on the cross is doing. The one criminal while the other is yet quiet. The religious leaders are scoffing from guttural sounds.

The soldiers are mocking as they see his inability to save himself. And the criminal is blaspheming him. What must that have been like?

I can't even communicate it in the church setting, especially when children are present. What? You? This swearing that would begin to come. If you really are that one, then get us out of this mess.

Notice he even says, don't just save yourself, save us. He's representative of the common man who would look to Jesus to get us out of what we're in the midst of. In other words, the railing, the blaspheming is the contemporary voice of blame.

[8 : 50] You've heard it, haven't you? Something goes wrong in your life? Who are the first two words out of your mouth? Is it ever Jesus Christ?

This blame game, this taking of his name, this attachment that's on our streets throughout all of human history from his time.

It is his name that is blasphemed in our midst by ourselves. It is he that we say, well, you're to blame. Something bad happens.

His name comes forth from your mouth. Something has happened to you that circumstances are such that you can't relieve yourself of them. His name is what comes from your mouth.

Something trivial happens. His name is disdained from our mouths. It's clear.

[9 : 48] I told you I was going to tell you what you already knew, that Good Friday doesn't matter the most. Why?

What can possibly be accomplished from a man shedding his blood on the cross? Certainly not the deliverance of his people. Certainly not one who's strong enough to rule the world.

Certainly not one who can get me out of the mess I'm in. But why ought it matter? Why ought it matter to you?

You know, there is a voice, a person in the text who we haven't yet heard from. It's the criminal, the second criminal. He's really the preacher in the text.

It's really a Good Friday sermon through his own voice. Gone are the scoffing. No more mocking.

[10 : 53] No more cursing. In their place, simply four statements by the second criminal that indicate to you and me why this day ought to matter most to you.

First, Luke says that he rebuked him. That's his opening line in his sermon. Normally, preachers try to connect with the audience by some way of you and me are the same.

But what he says is he rebuked the cursing one. In other words, here's the word. He admonished him. It's almost as if he's heard all of this going on.

And he says, enough. Enough. No more. Scoffing.

Mocking. Cursing. Why? What's the admonishment? Do you not fear God as you are under his condemnation?

[12:00] I mean, this is declarative preaching. This is not conversational preaching. This is not assuming that you need to do anything other than say, do you not fear God?

He assumes God exists. Not going to argue for it. He's going to declare it. And the criminal says to the other criminal, and through the text of Luke, he says to us tonight, do you not fear God?

There is a God under whom you now sit in condemnation. That's an admonishment.

But then he turns to an acknowledgement. Notice the second movement of his own sermon. He asks the other criminal, and by the text asks you and me to acknowledge something about ourselves.

This is what he says. We indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds. This is simply called a confession of sin. This is a man saying, you and I are guilty.

[13:11] We're on the cross because we have committed either insurrection or murder or something that he knew the verdict was actually appropriate. Have you ever stopped breathing out?

Words against God long enough to take your eyes off of him and onto yourself and to consider, are we not justly receiving the due reward of our deeds?

All of us. All of us. You and I will one day stand before the living God.

All of us. All of us. And he will reward us according to what we have done, what we have left undone, what we have said, what we didn't say, when we should have said.

Did you know that Thomas Jefferson, who took his scissors to most of the New Testament, never cut out anything that called on a final day of reckoning and accountability?

[14:29] It's fascinating to me. He disregards the miracles. He gets rid of all the things he doesn't like about Jesus. But when it actually comes to there is a day, there is a day of accounting.

It's still there. And the thief declares that to you and me. Why ought Good Friday matter?

It ought to matter because God exists. It ought to matter because you and I will stand before him. It ought to matter because we will receive what we have coming.

But then he affirms something. He affirms something about Jesus. He says, but this man has done nothing wrong.

Now, get it now. This criminal on the cross is not just a law student in Chicago trying to get somebody off death row who was wrongly accused as good as that would be.

[15:26] It isn't just as if he's agreeing with Herod or Pilate or the centurion who will also say this man was entirely innocent. Luke is not saying to you that Jesus was a person like you or me who was wrongly convicted of one thing that could have been overturned.

Luke is saying all the way through he is the righteous one. He is the innocent one. He's the one who's come from God. He has never sinned. He is completely pure.

He is completely pure. And all the blood over all the centuries and all the temple sacrifices could never atone for it.

And so they would make more blood and more blood and more blood. But Jesus' blood was not for his own sin.

This is what must be affirmed by you tonight. This is why Good Friday matters. And finally, not only are we to be admonished and acknowledge that we're sinners and affirm that he is righteous, but look what the thief does last.

[16:42] He asks, Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom. This is a man who understood that my life is over.

He's probably now within the last hour of his life. And he actually believed that there was a coming day, a coming kingdom in which Jesus would reign.

And he says, look, I'm done. Be mindful of me. That's what it really means to be, to remember me. Be mindful of me. Don't forget me.

I believe in you. He asks for mercy. He knows he's guilty.

He knows he will soon stand before God. And these are the reasons why Good Friday matters. It ought to matter to you.

[17:46] His voice falls silent. And Jesus says, today you'll be with me in paradise. This paradise. Today you'll be with me in this enclosed space.

Today you'll be with me in Eden, as it were. In the garden, as it is. Today you will be with me in the presence of God.

For as I, Jesus, the pure sacrifice, will rise and walk into his presence. I will be mindful of you. And you, when you die here, will be with me.

Imagine, imagine the thief. Imagine. He's like, I don't have much to show from my life. And I'm on the way out.

I never made anything of my life. Other than a just death sentence under Roman law.

[18 : 46] But I admonish those who would say this doesn't matter.

I would acknowledge that I'm a sinner. I would affirm that he is righteous. And I would ask him to forgive me of my sins.

Have you ever done that? Oh, that you would? Yes. There was a young university student in Cambridge by the name of Charles Simeon who entered in his first year and attended Easter week, Holy Week.

And he had never really considered these things before. And he became a Christian on Holy Week. Sometime between Wednesday and Saturday, he becomes a Christian.

And this is what he wrote about it. In Easter week, the thought came into my mind. What may I transfer all my guilt to another?

[19 : 51] Has God provided an offering for me that I may lay my sins on his head? Then, God willing, I will not bear them on my own soul one moment longer.

Accordingly, I sought to lay my sins on the sacred head of Jesus. Jesus. If you do that tonight, then today, you are right with God.

That's not a bad day, is it? Come in here tonight, estranged from God. Go home tonight, right with your maker.

Come in here today.

My goodness. How good is Good Friday?