

Good Friday: Why We Call It Good

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[0:00] Amen. Amen.

It's really fascinating to be watching Holy Week being experienced through the eyes of a child. As a parent, I'm getting to do just that. Now, last Sunday, which of course was Palm Sunday, Mia comes up to me before the service to tell me that she notices I'm wearing a different color and that it looks good on me.

It was a very nice compliment. And, of course, she's been talking quite a lot about how great it is when her daddy watches her feet on Monday Thursday.

And this week we were talking to Mia about Good Friday, about what it means when we remember the death of our Lord Jesus. So we were explaining it to her, and given what we remember, Mia asked what I thought was a really insightful question.

Why do we call it Good Friday then? Well, Elaine asks her, what is it that Jesus did on the cross? And she says, well, he died for our sins.

[1:40] And she answered her own questions and was pretty satisfied with that, I think. She got it. So why do we call this Friday Good?

That's the question I want us to think about today. Why is it good? And what does that goodness mean in our lives? Now, for the first reason, I really want to key in on what Mia had to say, because I think she was on to something.

It's good because Jesus died for our sins. Jesus, who lived a perfect life for us, was obedient to his Father even unto death. And in that supreme act of obedience, he offered himself as a substitute for us, died for our sins and our place, satisfying the justice of God so that our sins could be forgiven through faith in his blood.

Our reading from Genesis 22 for this morning really points us forward to that reality, finding its fulfillment in Jesus.

So what's going on in Genesis 22? Well, Abraham is on his way, he thinks, to sacrifice his only son Isaac. Now, Isaac, being an insightful young man, observes that something is a little bit off.

[3:01] He knows they're going to offer a sacrifice. They have everything they need except for the sacrificial lamb. And he's not in on the secret that the plan is to sacrifice him.

So he asks his father where the lamb is. What does Abraham say to him? God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering.

So what happens? Abraham prepares to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice. And he stops at the last minute.

The Lord provides a ram to be sacrificed instead of Isaac. My brothers, my sisters, each one of us really stands in the place of Isaac in this story.

It was for my sins and for your sins that the Lord Jesus died. He died in our place just as the ram died in the place of Isaac.

[4:04] And we are completely and totally forgiven if we are in Christ. There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus because the Lord has provided a lamb.

The Lord has provided the lamb for us. So there is no guilt. There is no condemnation. There is no separation from God. We can come boldly to the throne of grace through the blood of Jesus because Christ has been sacrificed for us once for all and has put away our sins forever.

Forever. It is finished. And isn't that a good thing? What else is good about this day?

Well, this is the day, my brothers and my sisters, that the devil is defeated. This is the day in which our war is won.

Right after sin enters the world through Adam, under the influence of Satan in the form of a serpent, God makes a promise that points forward to Jesus.

[5:13] What does God tell the serpent? What does God tell Satan in Genesis 3? I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your offspring and her offspring. He shall bruise your head

and you shall bruise his heel.

And that enmity between the seed of woman and the serpent reaches its culmination on the cross of Jesus Christ.

Jesus, the seed of woman and God incarnate, is taking on the devil. The cross is a battleground. Now, if we see Jesus on the cross only as passive victim, so we see him just as an object of pity, we're not looking at it the right way.

Jesus is on the cross as a mighty, righteous warrior. He is on the cross as our rescuer. He is on the cross as the Lord of everything.

The battle takes place as Jesus hangs on the cross. The ultimate battle between good and evil.

[6:22] And what happens? What is the outcome of that battle? Jesus' heel is bruised. He dies, but to rise again.

But what about the devil? He is totally and utterly defeated. His head is bruised. His head is crushed. Because by entering into death, which cannot contain the one who is life itself, Jesus defeated Satan forever and set us free from our slavery to him.

The devil got more than he bargained for. He is conquered. He no longer has any claim or hold on us.

That's what we read in Hebrews chapter 2. Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he likewise partook of the same things.

Speaking of Jesus. That through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death. That is the devil. And deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.

[7:38] So through his death, Jesus has destroyed the one who has the power of death. Through his death, he has delivered those who were held captive to the devil.

Those who were in lifelong slavery due to the fear of death. Now, we are free. Free because the devil is defeated.

Free because death is defeated. And if death can't harm us, if the devil can't claim us, what do we have to be afraid of? What do we have to worry about?

The Son has set us free and we are free indeed. And that is life-changing. Now, as most of you know, and as I mentioned in my sermon last night, dozens of our Christian brothers and sisters in Egypt were killed in terrorist attacks at churches on Palm Sunday.

I ran across the words of one Egyptian priest directed to the terrorists who did this. What did he say to them? He thanked them for shortening the journey of the martyrs to heaven.

[8:53] He said, We thank you because you shortened for us the journey. When someone is headed home to a particular city, he keeps looking at the time.

When will I get home? Are we there yet? Can you imagine if in an instant he finds himself on a rocket ship straight to his destination?

You shortened the journey. Thank you for shortening the journey. He goes on to tell the terrorists that he loves them. He asks his flock to pray for them.

He says, We must all pray for them today that God opens their eyes and opens their hearts to his love. Because if they knew him, they could never do this.

Now those are the words of a man who knows Jesus. Those are the words of a man who knows he doesn't have to be afraid to die.

[9:54] Those are the words of a man who is not in bondage to the devil. His words remind us that we don't have to be afraid of anything. That nothing can take our joy from us.

Because Jesus has destroyed the devil and set us free from the fear of death. And isn't that good? Now on to my last point about why this Friday is good.

Now some of you may know our family really loves the Jesus Storybook Bible. Now the account of the fall of man, as it's described in there, is very insightful.

That particular chapter closes with this. Eve picked the fruit and ate some. And Adam ate some too. And a terrible lie came into the world.

It would never leave. It would live on in every human heart, whispering to every one of God's children, God doesn't love me. Have you ever heard that whispering voice?

[11:00] I think we've all heard it one time or another. I think we're especially prone to hearing it when times are tough and when we're suffering.

We might say or think things like, how could a loving God let this happen? Where was God when this took place? And I have to tell you, my brothers and my sisters, I don't think that there is a

satisfactory answer to those questions apart from the cross.

We look for God when we're hurting. We look for God when we're suffering. And where do we find Him? We find Him in human flesh, sharing in our sorrows, being beaten, suffering a violent execution, dying.

As Isaiah 53 tells us, He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. Now, on this point, in this week's newsletter, I shared a quote from John Stott's book, *The Cross of Christ*.

That's so good that I feel that I should share it again for emphasis. Stott says this, I could never myself believe in God if it were not for the cross.

[12 : 15] The only God I believe in is the one Nietzsche described as God on the cross, ridiculed as God on the cross. In the real world of pain, how could one worship a God who was immune to it?

I have entered many Buddhist temples in different Asian countries and stood respectfully before the statue of the Buddha. His legs crossed, arms folded, eyes closed, the ghost of a smile playing around his mouth, a remote look on his face, detached from the agonies of the world.

But each time, after a while, I had to turn away. And in my imagination, I have turned instead to that lonely, twisted, tortured figure on the cross, nailed through hands and feet, back lacerated, limbs wrenched, brow bleeding from thorn pricks, mouth dry and intolerably thirsty, plunged in God-forsaken darkness.

That is the God for me. He laid aside his immunity to pain. He entered our world of flesh and blood, tears and death.

He suffered for us. Our sufferings become more manageable in the light of his. He suffered for us. He shares in our sufferings.

[13 : 38] He put away forever that lie that God doesn't love us, that God doesn't care about us. He loves us so much that there is no burden that he is unwilling to carry for us, even to the point of death.

And isn't that good? This Friday, solemn, but it is good. Solemn because our Savior is beaten, bloodied, crowned with thorns, and nailed to a cross.

And solemn because it's our sins that put him there. He's there for us. But it's good. It's good because he has secured full forgiveness for all who put their trust in him.

It's good because the devil is defeated and the captives are set free. It's good because that lie that God doesn't love us has been completely demonstrated to be untrue.

As we see that our Lord loves us enough to die violently for us. It's good because to those who are being saved, the cross is the power of God.

[14 : 48] And it is good because it is finished. In the name of the Father, of the Son, of the Holy Spirit. Amen.