

GOOD FRIDAY - The Christ of God

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[0 : 00] For those who are wondering, yes, this colour blue is the official staff shirts. No, we didn't ring each other this morning. Well, it'd be great if you have a Bible or could look onto a Bible to open it to Luke chapter 23.

You will find that helpful because we'll be moving pretty quickly through that account and I'll be drawing out some things as we go. There's also an outline that you would have received on your way in.

Well, not too long ago, a man called Mario Gonzalez in Dallas, Texas, tried to break into a house through a chimney.

The only problem is he got stuck. People saw him stuck in the chimney and so they called the police and then they couldn't get him out so they called the fire brigade to help dismantle the chimney brick by brick and then pull him out.

So you can see the bricks are not there. They've pulled him out and the police have got him. Now, the kicker in all this was the house was for sale and empty. Apparently he missed the for sale sign at the front.

[1 : 12] And so humiliated, Mario was taken away to hospital to be treated for his cuts and abrasions after which he was arrested and taken to prison. Now, I don't know how you feel when you hear a story like that, but it's certainly hard to feel any sympathy for a man, for poor Mario.

He deserved to get caught in the end, didn't he? He was breaking the law and he deserved to get caught. But when it comes to undeserved punishment and particularly innocent death, our reactions are far different, aren't they?

Four months ago, just four months ago, you might remember this, 20 primary school children were shot dead in Connecticut in a primary school. Do you remember that? All age between six and seven years of old, simply because the man was angry at his mother and wanted to take it out on someone.

Shot 20, dead. When we hear that, that kind of innocent suffering, our reactions are vastly different, aren't they? Well, today on Good Friday, we remember another innocent death.

Yet this innocent death brings with it mixed emotions, as Matt was talking about in the children's talk before. Because while it is shocking, and it is, it is also good. Hence, Good Friday.

[2 : 27] And so how can an innocent death be both shocking and good? Well, you've heard the answer already in the children's talk, but Luke gives his own version, which we'll be glad to know is the same. But let's look through this account as Luke records these historical events in his book.

And the first thing that Luke highlights for us is that Jesus is innocent. So point one on your outlines and verse number 13 in your Bibles. Have a look there at verse number 13. It's pretty clear, isn't it? Jesus is declared innocent. In fact, this is the second time Pilate finds no basis for the charge. The first time is back in verse 4. And so he sends him to Herod.

Herod, who is another governor at the time, finds no basis for the charges. So Herod sends him back to Pilate. And Pilate again says here in these verses that he has done nothing, verse 15, to deserve death.

Jesus is innocent. Yet in order to appease the people, Pilate says he'll punish Jesus a bit, have him flogged or something, and then let him go. However, this is not enough for the people.

[3 : 54] They want more. See verse 18. But the whole crowd shouted, away with this man, release Barabbas to us. Barabbas had been thrown into prison for an insurrection in the city and for murder.

Notice verse 20. Wanting to release Jesus, Pilate appealed to them again. But they kept shouting, crucify him, crucify him. And for a third time at this stage, he spoke to them.

Why? What crime has this man committed? I have found in him no grounds for the death penalty. Therefore, I will have him punished and then release him. In our first reading from the book of Isaiah, we heard that God's servant would be despised and rejected by people.

Well, here it is. The pinnacle of this rejection as the crowds cry, crucify. But notice Pilate declares his innocence. For a third time, it says in this account, plus the time back in verse 4.

So four times he's declared Jesus innocent, plus Herod. And just to make the point abundantly clear, Luke then records over in verse number 41, that even the criminal says Jesus is innocent.

[5 : 03] And in case we still don't yet have the point, at the climax of Jesus' death, just after he dies, the centurion declares he's innocent. See verse 47? Just skating over there for a moment.

The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, surely this was a righteous man, an innocent man. You see, Luke is at pains to point out that Jesus is the innocent one, the righteous one.

And so this makes the crowd's cries even more shocking. Come with me back and pick up the story again at verse 23, where we left it there. But with loud shouts, the crowd insistently demanded that he be crucified.

And their shouts prevailed. So Pilate decided to grant the demand. He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, the one they asked for, and surrendered Jesus to their will.

You see, despite Jesus' innocence, the crowd still cry, crucify. And although Pilate knows Jesus' innocence, he gives in to peer pressure and gives up Jesus to the crowd.

[6 : 13] And so Jesus is led away in verse 26, with a crowd of curious bystanders following him and some women who were wailing and mourning, not because, I think, they believed Jesus was king, but because, I think, they knew also that he did not deserve this.

And then we read, pick it up in verse 32. Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there along with the criminals, one on his right and the other on his left.

Jesus said, Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing. And they divided up his clothes by casting lots. Here again, the words that God spoke through the prophet Isaiah are coming true.

For God said that his servant would be numbered amongst the transgressors, amongst the criminals. And here Jesus is numbered amongst the criminals. In fact, between them, so that we don't miss the point.

But Jesus is no criminal. As we've heard many times, he is innocent. And lots of people know it. This is a gross act of injustice. And it ought to shock us.

[7 : 19] But often, it's not until we are the victim of injustice ourselves that we are shocked. Isn't that right? Just the other day, I accused my daughter of doing something wrong, when it was actually really her younger sister who did it.

And my daughter was indignant. How dare I accuse her? She is always innocent. At least at this time she was anyway.

But we react like that, don't we? We are indignant when we are falsely accused. And particularly if we suffer unjustly. Yet we ought to feel some of that shock, at least.

Some of that indignation, at least. When we see Jesus given up to die while a murderer goes free. It's not right. Yet Jesus remains silent.

And instead of defending himself, he, the innocent one, dies in the place of Barabbas, the guilty one who goes free. Of course, this is a picture of what Jesus has done for us, isn't it?

[8 : 17] For we are guilty like Barabbas. Of course, we haven't murdered anyone like Barabbas has. I'm assuming no one here has murdered anyone. So how are we guilty like Barabbas?

Well, we are guilty of insurrection, as he was. You see, insurrection means a violent uprising against authorities. And we may not have done it violently, but we have all risen up against God and his authority over us, you see.

We've all at one time rejected him, either actively, like the crowds who yelled crucify, or passively, like Pilate, who went with the flow. You see, we are actually like Barabbas. Our problem is we just don't think ignoring God is all that bad.

I was teaching a CRE class a little while ago. It was a combined grade one and two class. And I asked the class what they thought might happen if they ignored the principle.

One child piped up and said, oh, you'd get in lots of trouble. I asked them, well, how many detentions do you think you might get if you ignored the principle? Another child piped up and said, 65. I have no idea why 65.

[9 : 25] That's just what this child thought. And so I continued and said, well, why so many? And then another child called Ewan, I remember his name. Ewan said, because he is the principle.

Now, it wasn't because the principle was mean or scary. It was because of who the principle was. The principle, the king of the school, if you like. You see, even these children knew that ignoring a person of such importance was more serious than ignoring others.

Well, how much more so with God, the king of not the school, but the universe? You see, we are actually guilty of insurrection against God.

And he's much, much worse than we think it is. But Jesus, the innocent one, willingly takes the place of us, the guilty ones. Why? Well, we find out as the story continues.

We're up to the insults. Point to verse 35. The people stood watching and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, he saved others. Let him save himself if he is God's Messiah, the chosen one.

[10 : 30] The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar and said, if you are the king of the Jews, save yourself. There was a written notice above him which read, this is the king of the Jews.

Even one of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him. Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us. Now, here we see Jesus cops it from every side, doesn't he?

He is insulted from the people and the rulers, verse number 35, and then from the soldiers, number 36, and then even from one of the criminals beside him, verse number 39. And all these groups of people say the same thing, don't they?

If you are the Messiah, which is a word that means Christ or king, all three words mean the same thing. If you are the king, then prove it by saving yourself and us.

The irony is that he was proving he was God's king. For God's king had to first suffer and die before rising again. In fact, that's what Jesus had been saying all along in the earlier chapters of Luke.

[11 : 33] In fact, that's what he'll say on Sunday when we look at Luke chapter 24, that the king must first suffer and die before rising. And so by staying on the cross, Jesus was actually proving he was the Messiah or king.

That's the first reason why he had to die, because that's who the Messiah is. But the other irony, though, is that while Jesus seems to be saving no one, he's really saving everyone who would believe.

For as Jesus dies on the cross, he takes the punishment we deserve. Again, we heard this from Isaiah, didn't we? We heard that he was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities.

The punishment that brought us peace was upon him. By his wounds, we are healed. In other words, it is by Jesus' death that he saves us. This is the next reason why he had to die, to save us. In January 2008, a lady called Lorraine Allard was diagnosed with cancer and needed to start chemotherapy to have a chance of living. The only difficulty was she was pregnant at the time.

[12 : 39] And so the doctor told her that the treatment would seriously harm the child and more likely kill the child, and so she should abort the child and get treatment to save her life.

It was one or the other, the child or her life. But of course, as a mother-to-be, she loved even her unborn child, and so she chose to save her baby.

Yep, slides up. Liam is his name. Now, two months after this photo was taken, she died of cancer. You see, she gave her life to save her child.

Why? Because she loved him. And that brings us to the third reason why Jesus died for us, because he loves us. The difference, of course, is that Lorraine and Liam both deserve to die, but when it comes to God and life eternal, we don't deserve it.

As we've heard, we deserve judgment for ignoring God, for insurrection. It is more serious than we realize. But Jesus gives his life, not only because he's the king, the Messiah, but also in order to save us and because he loves us.

[13 : 48] Indeed, we saw a glimpse of that back in verse number 34. Do you see what Jesus does in verse number 34? Just have a look back there. This is right after soldiers have nailed massive nails into his hands and feet, and Jesus says, Father, forgive them.

I'd be saying, Father, get them. Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing. That's love.

To pray that for people who've just nailed you to a cross. And it's that love that sends Jesus there in the first place, to take the judgment that we Barabbases, Barabbi, whatever the plural is, to take the judgment that we deserve so that we can be saved.

On the cross, Jesus suffers hell in our place so that we can live forever in his place, in paradise. And that brings us to point three, the impact of Jesus's innocent death.

We see there verse 40 and following. Have a look at verse number 40. The other criminal rebuked the first one and said, Don't you fear God? He said, Since you are under the same sentence, we are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve.

[15:01] But this man has done nothing wrong. And he said, Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom. Jesus answered him, Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.

You see, Jesus's death, it's not just about the physical. Even the criminal dies physically. Rather, it's about what Jesus suffers at his death. For there he suffers judgment that the criminal and that we all deserve for ignoring God.

And because of that, even this criminal is free to come to God in heaven, in paradise. That's the impact of Jesus's death. That's what makes this shocking death so good. And that's what God affirms in verse number 44.

It says, It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. For the sun stopped shining, and the curtain of the temple was torn into, and Jesus cried out with a loud voice, Father, into your hands, I commit my spirit.

And when he had said this, he breathed his last. You see here in verse number 44, God the creator speaks through his creation by making the day go dark at noon.

[16:10] Not normal. And in the ancient Greek culture of the time, darkness symbolizes the death of a great man. But this darkness symbolized much more than that. In the Old Testament, it symbolizes judgment.

And so on this slide, there's a verse from the Old Testament, from Amos. It says, In that day, it's talking about judgment day, declares the sovereign Lord, I will make the sun go down at noon, and darken the earth in broad daylight.

You see that? Darkness refers to God's judgment day. And so what is happening here is that the eternal judgment we deserve on that last day is brought forward and suffered by Jesus at the cross, so that we can now come to God freely.

That's exactly what verse 45 symbolizes, actually. The curtain that stopped all people coming into God's presence at the temple, except one priest once a year, that curtain is now torn into.

It's as though it's opened up and so that all people now have access to God all year round. You see, by suffering God's judgment in our place, Jesus opens up a way to God for all who believe.

[17:18] And if you only remember that one thing from this morning, I want you to remember one verse that sums up this whole account, really. And it was written by a man who was there and saw these things happen, a man called Peter.

And this verse that Peter wrote is actually on the bottom of your outlines. You can have a look at it there. The bottom of your outlines, it says this. Christ, that is the king, died for sins once for all, the innocent for the guilty to bring you to God.

That summarizes exactly what we're seeing, isn't it? That Christ died for our sins. He, the innocent one, for us, the guilty ones, to bring us to God.

This is what Good Friday was and is all about. And this is why Good Friday is shocking, but good. It is shocking that God's king, the Christ himself, the innocent, righteous one, would die a horrendous criminal's death.

But it is also good because by his death, he opens up a way to God if we're willing to believe. So I guess the question we're left with is, will we believe? That is, how are we going to respond to Jesus this morning?

[18:24] How are we going to respond to this innocent one who died to bring us to God? You see, Luke gives us all sorts of responses, doesn't he? He gives us the mockers, Pilate, the women, the criminal.

It's as though he's asking us, which response is going to be yours? Is your response going to be that of the mockers? Are you perhaps sitting here this morning thinking, it's a nice story, but it's a

load of rubbish.

I don't really think it. I'm here because my family wants to come. Is that your response? That of the crowd that actively rejects Jesus? Or is it more like Pilate, who is pushed around by peer pressure? You know, perhaps you're sitting here thinking, great story, Ed. I like Jesus. Good guy. And then when you leave this building, you're pushed or pressured by your friends or family or even society in general to not do anything about Jesus, but to live the world's way instead of Christ's way.

Perhaps you could be like Pilate, who knew something about him, but didn't do anything in the end.

Or perhaps we're more like the weeping women in verses 27 and 28, who mourn and wait for Jesus, not because they believed he was king, but because I think they knew he was innocent.

[19 : 33] But it's interesting, Jesus turns around, have a look there actually, verse number 28.

Jesus turned and said to them, daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, weep for yourselves and for your children. The time will come when you will say, blessed are the childless women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed.

Then they will say to the mountains, fall on us and to the hills, cover us. In other words, Jesus says, don't weep for me, weep for you because a time of judgment is coming and it will be so bad that it'd be better not to have kids whom you see suffer.

It will be so bad that it'll be better for a mountain to fall on you than to suffer it. And judgment is coming for all those who reject God and his King, Jesus. And perhaps there are some here today who might not realize it, but they are a bit like the women.

They come to church to pay Jesus their respects on this Easter morning, to mourn for him as it were, not really realizing that they need to admit their sin and trust completely in him.

And if that's you, then Jesus is saying, don't weep for me. Don't mourn for me. Mourn for your own sin and then believe that you may be saved.

[20 : 44] Otherwise, it'd be better off that a mountain falls on you than to face judgment on that last day. It's a great warning, stern warning. You see, in the end, we're actually to be like the criminal, aren't we?

That's the right response. We are to be like the criminal. In fact, that's the only time you'll hear a minister say, be like a criminal, just to be clear. Why to be like a criminal?

Well, because this criminal admitted his guilt and trust in Jesus. In verses 40 and 41, he says he deserves to die. And then he says, remember me, Jesus, or save me when you come into your kingdom.

He acknowledges Jesus is king of a kingdom. You see, he trusts in Jesus, the king, to save him. Notice he doesn't get baptized. He doesn't take communion. He isn't nice and doesn't help people, though they're all good things to do.

But none of them gets him into paradise, do they? What does was admitting his guilt and trusting in Jesus as his king and saviour. We had to be like this criminal, not the one I told you about at the start who tried to break into a house, but this one who believes in Jesus, who will save.

[21 : 53] And by believing in Jesus, we too are welcomed into paradise. Do you believe in Jesus? How are you going to respond this morning? Now, I know for many of us here, we do believe in Jesus.

We have put our trust in him. And so what's the application for us? Well, essentially it's the same. It's to keep trusting in Jesus because he's still king, isn't he? And so we're to keep trusting in him, keep seeking to follow him.

That's what trust means. If I really believe he is king, then I will show it by the way I live. We have some friends who, his name is Richard, and he's a guy that's probably had the most impact on my own Christian life.

And he longs to serve Jesus, his king, not because he must, although that is true, but because he wants to. For he knows Christ gave his life for him.

And he wants to serve Jesus even through difficult times. And for those who were here last Sunday morning, I spoke about his wife, called Bronwyn, who is dying of cancer. In fact, on Facebook yesterday, he wrote that his wife has been sleeping for the past 24 hours, and I am not sure if she will wake.

[23 : 10] Yet he also wrote, See, he knows what it costs Christ to die for him and save him.

And so it motivates him to keep serving Christ even through difficult times. For he knows that Jesus and his death brings both he and his wife Bronwyn forgiveness, has brought them close to God,

and that when his wife passes in the next few hours, she will be in paradise with Christ. So why wouldn't you serve Jesus? Keep trusting him. This is why Good Friday is so good, you see. This is why we need to keep trusting in Jesus as king, for Jesus Christ, the innocent one, died for us, the guilty ones, to bring us to God now and to paradise later. May we all keep trusting in him. He gave his life for us. Let's pray. Our gracious Heavenly Father, we do thank you for what this day reminds us of, that very first Good Friday all those years ago. That day that is still so shocking, yet also so good. That day all those years ago that still has great relevance for us today.

[24 : 41] For on that day we remember Jesus Christ, the King, died once for all. He, the righteous one, for us, the unrighteous ones, so that we might be brought to you now and forever.

Father, help us to live in light of this reality, we pray, for Jesus' sake. Amen. We're going to sing a hymn that reminds us again of the cross and our response.

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Amen. Amen.