

GOOD FRIDAY - Save Yourself

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Preacher: Paul Barker

[0 : 00] Almighty God, we thank you that the Lord Jesus Christ is indeed our mighty Saviour. We thank you for his death for us.

And we pray now that you'll speak to our hearts from your word, write it on our hearts by your Spirit, that we may trust in his death for us and live in its light and with the hope of glory.

Amen. Amen. The first time I heard it, I was a little bit intrigued. I still remember years ago, the first time noticing in the instructions in an aeroplane that in the event of oxygen, if you have children, to make sure that you put your own mask on first and then the masks of your child or children.

And I thought to myself, if I had a child or children, then I would probably be wanting to do the opposite. I'd be wanting to put their mask on, make sure they're okay and then worry about myself. But of course the logic is there that if you look after yourself and save yourself first, then you're able to save your children by making sure that they put and have masks put on them.

[1 : 19] Save yourself first, in effect, and then save others. Now if you're going to be a hero and save people by placing oxygen masks on them, by having an oxygen mask on yourself first, you're looking after yourself, putting yourself first, but for the sake of other people.

We often expect that heroes are people who can save themselves or ought to be able to save themselves and look after themselves. On those endless Batman and Robin TV programs that I used to love when I was about 10 years old, invariably the superhero would get stuck in a dire predicament that looked as though they really had no way out and finally the series was about to end because Batman and Robin would cop it and that would be the end of them.

But of course it never happened. They were always able to save themselves through some increasingly ingenious way of extricating themselves from the situation that the Joker or the Riddler or whoever the baddie was had put them into it.

And invariably the Joker or the Riddler or whoever would be laughing at and taunting Batman and Robin saying, now at last I've got you and you're going to die and I'm the winner and so on.

You might have been able to save whoever it was or Gotham City but now at last you can't really save yourself. Well, of course they were always wrong. Batman and Robin, Superman, whoever the superhero is, they could always save themselves in the end and go on saving others as a result.

[2 : 54] On the Sunday before Good Friday, Jesus arrived in Jerusalem to a hero's welcome. It was a sort of ticker tape parade of acclamation and applause, of singing and shouting.

Not only were there great crowds that had accompanied him, singing his praise, but also great crowds had come out from Jerusalem to meet him and to join and make an even larger crowd, giving him an extraordinary welcome into Jerusalem.

If it had been modern times, he'd be given a key to the city and stand on the balcony of the town hall and have a great meal and so on. Certainly this indeed was a sort of hail the conquering hero, here he comes.

And after all, his record of saving people was fairly impressive. In Luke's Gospel, which is where our second reading was from, Luke uses the language of Jesus saving people a number of times in his Gospel up to this point.

He saves a sinful woman from her sins in chapter 7. He saves a woman suffering hemorrhages in chapter 8. He saves Jairus' daughter from death by raising her to life again in chapter 8.

[4 : 07] He saves a Samaritan leper in chapter 17. And then just a few days before the arrival in Jerusalem, he saves a blind beggar on the outskirts of Jericho.

But now it seems the shoe's on the other foot. Here the hero hangs on a cross. It seems unable to save himself.

It seems in need himself of being saved from the cross by someone else. We expect heroes to save themselves. And so one of the taunts at Jesus as he hung on the cross was the very taunt, save yourself.

If you could save someone from a grave, come on, save yourself from this cross and its nails. If you could save someone from their sins, save your own life and come down.

If you could save a blind man, a leprous man, a woman with hemorrhages and so on, come on, come on, come on, save yourself.

[5 : 17] And so it was with the people around the cross. The Jewish leaders, first of all, we're told in verse 35, scoffed at him and they said to him, he saved others, let him save himself if he's the Messiah of God, his chosen one.

Words that are dripping with mockery and ridicule, oozing with sarcasm and rudeness and scoffing. But it wasn't just the Jewish leaders who mocked him and scoffed at him. The Roman soldiers, the same. Here we find that combination of the Jewish religious people, the Roman pagan people, joining together in mocking and scoffing scoffing at Jesus hanging on the cross.

So the soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine and saying, if you're the king of the Jews, save yourself. Now there was above Jesus that inscription as Pilate had placed it there, saying, the king of the Jews.

And here are the Roman soldiers of Pilate poking fun at him, joking about him, taunting him, offering their ridicule and mockery and sarcasm.

[6 : 34] But they're not the only ones either. Jewish leaders, Roman soldiers, and then thirdly, the thief that's next to Jesus. For we know that Jesus dies with a thief on either side of him.

And one of those thieves says to Jesus, are you not the Messiah? Save yourself. And then he adds, perhaps desperately and certainly selfishly, and us, save us.

All three taunts urge Jesus to save himself. But they're taunts of mockery. They're not a real challenge or invitation to Jesus to save himself.

They're laughing because he can't. So it seems to them. And they're taunting him. Save yourself.

All of those taunts are mocking Jesus' apparent powerlessness as he hangs nailed to a cross, unable to free himself.

And all three taunts gloat in the tall, poppy cut down type of syndrome. Would we be any different? I doubt it.

[7 : 47] Our country loves to see tall poppies cut down. We who love to see the high and the mighty fall. Ashamed, I hear my mocking voice call out among the scoffers, says one of our modern Christian hymns.

But Jesus, bearing shame and scoffing rude, remains silent as he hangs from the cross. Perhaps the hero is defeated after all.

Perhaps this is the end of that great list of acts of salvation come to a cruel end and defeat. Perhaps he's unable to save himself.

But in the midst of the scoffing and the taunts, the ridicule, the mockery of the crowds of Jewish leaders, the crowds of Roman soldiers and the thief on one side of him, there is a lone voice that does not scoff and mock and laugh and taunt.

A surprising voice. Not the voice of one of Jesus' disciples, one who's followed him through thick and thin and heard his predictions of death and resurrection.

[9 : 02] No, they're quiet or gone. The surprising voice is the other thief on the other side of Jesus. What does he say?

Firstly, he rebukes the mocking thief. Do you not fear God since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?

And we indeed have been condemned justly for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds. But this man has done nothing wrong. And then he turns to Jesus directly and says to him, not to the thief, Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.

Somehow, and we don't know how, but somehow and some way, this thief sees the truth as Jesus hangs dying.

He sees his own sin, not only before the Jewish and Roman authorities who are justly putting him to death as he says, but he sees that also he will have to face God and the judgment throne of God.

[10 : 26] Do you not fear God? He rebukes to the other thief. You see, he knows that he's failed and sinned and he knows that he's accountable not just to the human authorities who are putting

him to death justly, but ultimately to God.

And he acknowledges and confesses his own sin and guilt to God. And then he sees next to him on the next cross an innocent man, a man who does not need or ought not to die, a man who's done nothing wrong, not only in human terms, but especially in God's terms.

And so he acknowledges Jesus is different. This man has done nothing wrong, he says, echoing a consistent thing, not only in Luke's account of Jesus' death, but in all the others as well.

Jesus is innocent. Jesus is innocent. He's done nothing wrong. But then somehow, and we do not know how, maybe through some inspiration from God, this thief sees that Jesus is indeed the King. The inscription above his head he sees is not just mockery, but truth. And so he says to Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.

[12:03] Here you see, the thief sees salvation. You see, he sees that somehow Jesus will live beyond his death on the cross.

That death is not defeat and finality for Jesus, but that somehow beyond the cross Jesus will arrive in his kingdom. And here is a thief who's committed sin that deserves death, probably more than being a thief, asking for in effect mercy.

That somehow when Jesus arrives in his heavenly kingdom, there may yet be mercy for this thief who is hanging on the cross next to Jesus dying.

You see, this thief knows all too well he cannot save himself. This thief knows all too well he can't remove the burden of his sin and guilt, his crime, whatever it is, and start afresh.

He can't do it. It's not even too late. He could never do it. He knows that he needs somebody to remove that burden for him.

[13:16] He needs a saviour and he needs Jesus and he knows that he needs Jesus and he sees somehow, some way that we do not understand that Jesus, this innocent man, this king dying on a cross next to him is the saviour.

He is the king who will go to a heavenly kingdom and he asks for that king to remember him when he gets there because he sees that Jesus in fact can still save.

Here he is bound and nailed to a cross in the last throes before dying but he sees beyond the physical appearance and sees that even there on the cross and indeed we might say especially there on the cross Jesus still saves.

It's in fact where Jesus' life has been heading towards deliberately. It's where the gospel accounts of Jesus' life have been heading towards deliberately. It's even where the miracles of Jesus and his offers of salvation and saving people are all pointing towards not just healing somebody from hemorrhages, not just healing a blind beggar, not just saving a leper, not just even saving somebody from death and from the grave but pointing towards the great salvation that comes as he hangs on a cross dying.

And this thief sees death. Jesus doesn't need to save himself and he doesn't need to save himself in order to keep on saving others but it's precisely in not saving himself that he saves others and he asks Jesus to be saved for of course it's Jesus' death that is the very means of salvation being offered to the world.

[15:21] Bearing shame and scoffing rude, in my place condemned he stood, sealed my pardon with his blood. And Jesus saves this thief.

Jesus' reply to him is truly I tell you today you will be with me in paradise. paradise. What an extraordinary salvation.

He's not baptized. He doesn't go and do a Bible course to understand what Jesus is about. Of course there's no time for that. But instantly Jesus replies to him today you'll be with me in paradise. That is I save you here on the cross. My hands are bound, I can't reach out, I can't touch you, lay hands on you or anything like that. But here in what looks to be my impotence and powerlessness, what looks to be my defeat, I save you.

And today beyond death you'll be with me in paradise forever. It's a fairly outrageous deathbed salvation. In some ways it offends us.

[16:33] Here is a man who's been at least a thief and probably more deserving death. And right on his deathbed he turns to Jesus and he's saved. It's not quite fair.

What about all these good people who are around, all these righteous people who are around who've tried to serve God with their lives for so long, what about them? Shouldn't they get in first?

But could it be that the very first person into heaven other than Jesus is this thief? God's sake? It sort of offends our sense of just desserts.

And so it should. Because the gospel of God is offensive. It offends us because we do not deserve salvation.

Oh we may not be a thief like this man. We may not be worse like he probably was. But none of us deserves to be saved by Jesus Christ.

[17 : 35] That's what the gospel is all about. If you think you deserve salvation, if you think you deserve God's favour, if you think you deserve one of those rooms in the heavenly mansion, you're wrong. None of us deserves it.

This man didn't nor do we. No matter how good we are, no matter how long in our lives we've tried to serve God and follow God and read our Bibles and be part of church and do what is right and good and honourable, no matter how long and how much we've done, we still do not deserve the salvation that God offers us.

That may offend you and it ought to because salvation is God's free mercy, his grace to us when we do not deserve it.

And whether we're like this thief or not in badness, we are like him in not deserving it. And if we pick up something of the offensive nature of the gospel of Jesus and his grace, then maybe we're beginning to understand the gospel for the first time.

The dying thief rejoiced to see the fountain in his day and there have I, though vile as he, washed all my sins away. Well, the Oscar hype is over at last.

[19 : 01] And some of you, probably not wanting to confess, I certainly didn't, but some of you might have watched all that glitz and glamour, all that rubbish on Monday night or whenever it was. And the heroes have all collected their accolades.

Who knows why they earn enough anyway. But you may have noticed, or probably didn't, that Glenn Dewey did not win an Oscar this year. As far as I'm aware, he's never won an Oscar any year.

He usually doesn't. He's unknown. He's also unseen. Probably none of us knows who Glenn Dewey is. But in some ways, in fact, he is the real hero.

Who is Glenn Dewey, you say? Well, Glenn Dewey really is Tom Cruise. I don't mean Tom Cruise, who's got a real name, Glenn Dewey, nothing like that. But in the film Mission Impossible 2, which I've never seen and don't intend to, Glenn Dewey got drenched, got sunburnt, suffered all the elements and the tiring work of standing in the set out in the rain or the sun or whatever it was, while the cameras were set up and all the lights were got right for hours on end, so that when it was all ready, he could walk off and Tom Cruise could saunter out of his air-conditioned luxury, stand in the place, the films would roll and then he'd wander back into his air-conditioned luxury, while Glenn Dewey kept on suffering the sunburn, the rain, the elements, whatever it was, for hours on end until it was all ready for Tom Cruise.

That is, Glenn Dewey was his stand-in. He stood there so that everything could be right. He suffered all the pain of the elements so that Tom Cruise wouldn't have to.

[20 : 40] I mean, if you were Tom Cruise getting paid \$20 million for a film, you wouldn't want to stand out in the element for any longer than you had. Get Glenn Dewey to do it. He probably got paid \$20,000 to do it.

Hanging from the cross, Jesus is our stand-in so that we do not have to face an eternal death from God. He suffered the elements, whatever it was like that day.

It was in Melbourne, it would be wet, but if it's in Jerusalem, it's probably hot. He suffered the pain, but in the end that doesn't matter. It's his death that mattered, and he died for us as our stand-in or our substitute, if you like.

Oh, one day we will probably all die physically, but that's not the death that Jesus died for us. It's the eternal death, the being separated from God, cut off forever.

forever. That's where Jesus stood in for us, taking our sins on himself, so that when we die physically, we can be with God forever and receive eternal life.

[21 : 55] He's our hero. He is our saviour. As he hangs on the cross, the reason he doesn't save himself is not because he couldn't, but because he wouldn't, and he wouldn't so that he could save us.

He saves us before he saves himself. And if he tried to save himself, he wouldn't have saved us. He probably wouldn't have liked the instructions in an aeroplane about oxygen masks, though being obedient, he would have done them.

But he knows that for real salvation, for eternal salvation, it's not a matter of saving himself so that he can save others. It's precisely in not saving himself that he saves others.

He stands in our place so that we can live with God forever. He saved others. Let him save himself. If you're the king of the Jews, save yourself. Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself. But he doesn't.

[23 : 02] Because he saves us from our sins, from their punishment, from God's wrath, from judgment, and from eternal death.

We have an odd expression, at least in Australian English. If you get landed with the really lousy job, the clean-up job, the messy job, if something gets left on your plate and everyone else goes out to have a good time.

You say, who's the bunny that's left with all this? Who's the person who cops all this messy, difficult job? You may not believe in Easter bunnies, but they're real.

Well, one of them is. Jesus is the bunny that cops the lot to deal with our sin. He's the one who takes responsibility for our sin, our failures, our mess, and he takes it on himself as our stand-in substitute on the cross so that we can be freed from our sins, from their punishment, from God's anger, and freed to have life eternal.

it's the one who takes full. No wonder the hymn we just sang at the end of each verse said, Hallelujah, what a saviour.

[24 : 30] Is that not true? Hallelujah, what a saviour. Thank you.