

The Innocent King Dies

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Preacher: Andrew Price

[0 : 00] Well, I don't know what you're doing for Good Friday today, apart from being here, of course, so thank you. But people respond in different ways to Good Friday these days, don't they?

For some, it's footy day. Go the roos. No, I said that because there's a lot of Bombers supporters here, but they were very polite and didn't say anything.

For others, it's just a day off or a long weekend to get away. For others, it's the day we eat fish and hot cross buns. Did you realise how many varieties of hot cross buns are out there now, by the way?

I just saw some online. So on the next slide, we've got the fruitless and the fruitful. The fruitful are more popular, five stars. And on the next slide, you've even got Cadbury choc chips or white chocolate with raspberry.

And of course, on the next slide, you've got the gluten-free and even fancy brioche. Hmm. Although the last one did puzzle me a bit. It's fruity hot cross buns.

[1 : 01] And down the bottom, it says designs may vary. So a circle cross buns. What does that mean? But the point is, people respond differently to today, just as they did on that very first Good Friday.

And as we look at Luke's account this morning, we'll see some of those different responses to Jesus. We'll also hear some things declared about Jesus, too, starting with his identity.

So at point one and the first verse, verse 66. At daybreak, the council of the elders of the people, both the chief priests and the teachers of the law, met together and Jesus was led before them.

If you are the Messiah, they said, tell us. And Jesus answered, if I tell you, you will not believe me. If I ask you, you will not answer. And so just to set the scene, last night, Jesus had his last supper and then was arrested, taken to a high priest's house and put on trial.

They brought forward all sorts of false witnesses and made all sorts of false accusations. And then because it was getting late, they handed him over to the Roman guards who spent most of the rest of the night beating him and mocking him.

[2 : 13] And now it's daybreak, very early Friday morning, and he's brought back to the religious leaders for round two of the trial. And here they ask him if he is the Messiah.

The word Messiah is the Old Testament version of the word Christ, and they both mean anointed king. But Jesus knows that despite all the evidence he's shown them, they've already made up their minds about him.

They're not really interested in what he has to say. They're just looking for an excuse to take him away. You see there again in verse 67, Jesus says, look, if I tell you, you're not going to believe me. And if I ask you a question, you're not going to answer me. This is a waste of time. But the truth is, Jesus is actually more than just king of the Jews. For he adds in verse 69, he says, Now to sit at someone's right hand is a sign of authority and power.

We sometimes use the expression, the seat of authority, don't we? And you can't get a more powerful seat than at God's right hand, can you?

[3 : 29] And so this means Jesus is not just the king of the Jews. He's much, much more. He's the king of all people. He is the one to whom all people will one day give an account.

And the Jews rightly perceive that this is such an exalted position that he must have some sort of special relationship with God. So they ask him in verse 70, Are you then the son of God?

He replied, you say that I am. Then they said, why do we need any more testimony? We have heard it from his own lips. Now, Jesus's reply is not a straight out yes, is it?

Possibly because they've not fully grasped what it means for him to be the son of God. But they've got something of who he is. And so he doesn't deny it either, does he?

And if we'd been reading Luke's gospel, we would have seen plenty of evidence that he is the son of God. In fact, Luke says he's written his book to give us evidence.

[4 : 31] On the next slide, at the start of Luke's book, he says that he's made a careful investigation so that the reader, in this case, Theophilus or for us, can be certain of the things that have happened.

We also have other historical sources outside the Bible, like from a guy called Josephus. On the next slide, he's a Jewish historian who didn't like Jesus, yet even he admits that Jesus was a doer of wonderful works, by which he means miracles.

We have all these historical sources, as well as eyewitness accounts that give evidence for who Jesus is. And yet people today still act like the religious leaders in his day, don't they?

Rather than considering the evidence, they've already made up their minds about Jesus. I

remember one time visiting someone in a nursing home. I'd never met them before.

They were the auntie, or great auntie, I think, of someone at my church. And when I walked in, she did not believe I was a minister. She said, I look too young. I said, thank you.

[5 : 42] This was clearly some time ago. But you see, I did not fit her expectations. And no matter how much evidence I showed her, I was wearing my clergy collar, sometimes known as a dog collar.

I was wearing my clergy collar. I showed her my Bible, my business card, even the things I brought for communion. And still, she did not believe. She wasn't even interested in it. She'd already made up her mind. I cannot be a minister.

It was a very short conversation. People do that with Jesus today, don't they? Jesus was just a good teacher, or some ancient figure, or the guy one of my relatives believes in.

But I've already made up my mind myself about him. They don't consider the evidence, which even historians, non-Christians historians suggest, that he is the king, the son of God.

Indeed, the title Messiah or king continues throughout our passage seven times, for this is who he is. Not only that, he is also innocent. Point two, chapter 23, verse one.

[6 : 47] So the whole assembly of the religious leaders rose and led him off to Pilate. And they began to accuse him, saying, We have found this man subverting our nation. He opposes payment of taxes to Caesar and claims to be Messiah, a king.

So Pilate asked Jesus, Are you the king of the Jews? You have said so, Jesus replied. Then Pilate announced to the chief priests and the crowd, I find no basis for a charge against this man.

I hear the religious leaders actually tell lies about Jesus. Because in Luke's gospel, earlier on in his book, Jesus actually told people to give to Caesar what is Caesar's, to pay you taxes.

So that's a lie. And Jesus was not inciting revolution, nor wanting Caesar's throne as a rival king. I mean, why would he want that throne when he's got the throne of God at God's right hand?

And so Jesus is innocent of these charges and Pilate knows it. So he declares it, doesn't he? But in verse five, the religious leaders try again. And then verses six to seven, Pilate sees an opportunity to make this someone else's problem.

[8 : 01] Herod has come to town. And he's only a ten minute walk away. And so off Jesus goes to him. And in verses eight to nine, we read that Herod longed to see Jesus.

Why? Well, because he wanted Jesus to perform for him like some circus monkey. And he applied questions to Jesus. But like the servant in Isaiah that Vijay read at the start of the service, Jesus is silent or was silent and gave no answer.

Not because he had no answer to give, but because Herod deserved no answer. I mean, Jesus is the king, the son of God. And Herod is just the puppet king for the Romans, not even a real one.

And so like a child who throws a tantrum when they don't get what they want. So Herod loses it and starts to mock and ridicule Jesus. He even dresses Jesus up and then sends him back to Pilate.

Where Pilate again declares him innocent. I'm going to read quite a chunk now and keep an eye out for how many times Jesus is declared innocent. I mean, it's already happened once in verse four, but have a look down at verse 13.

[9 : 15] Pilate called together the chief priests, the rulers and the people and said to them, you brought me this man as one who was inciting the people to rebellion. I've examined him in your presence and have found no basis for your charges against him.

Neither has Herod for he sent him back to us. As you can see, he has done nothing to deserve death. Therefore, I will punish him and then release him. But the whole crowd shouted away with

this man, release Barabbas to us.

Barabbas had been thrown into prison for actually inciting rebellion in the city and for murder.

Wanting to release Jesus, Pilate appealed to them again about his innocence.

But they kept shouting, crucify him, crucify him. And for the third time, he spoke to them. Why?

What crime has this man committed? I found him in him no grounds for the death penalty.

Therefore, I will have him punished and then released. But with loud shouts, they 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.

[10:26] Here, by the way, we see two other responses to that first Good Friday, don't we? One from the crowd who only five days earlier declared Jesus to be the king.

Remember, he wrote in Jerusalem with the palm branches. They put him down. They said, Hosanna, blessed is the king of Israel. And then five days later, they're now crying out, crucify him.

Here is a mob mentality. There are fickle people who just go with the flow, even though it's wrong. We see this today, actually, particularly on social media.

You know, people start saying one thing and people jump on the bandwagon, even though it's wrong. And then there's Pilate who caves to peer pressure. He knows Jesus is innocent.

And yet, he just washes his hands of it and then gives him up to their cries. But did you notice, as I read, how many times Jesus is declared innocent? All up at seven times in our passage.

[11:28] We read five of them. So first in verse four and then verse 15, Herod indicates it. And then the second time that Pilate talks to the crowd in verse 13, verse 20 and 22, he declares it.

In fact, later on in verse 41, down the bottom there, one of the criminals says Jesus is innocent. And then over the page in verse 47, the centurion declares, surely this was a righteous, innocent man.

You see, Luke is keen for us to know that Jesus is the innocent king. Why? Well, to help us to see that Jesus is not just the innocent king, but the suffering servant.

Come to die for our sins. The one from the passage that Vijay read from the beginning of the service. Let me show you on the next slide. Here are some verses from that passage from Isaiah 53.

Notice how it's verse 11. It says, my righteous, innocent servant will, what will he do? Justify many, make many people right with God and he will bear their iniquities, their sin.

[12:43] And then it goes on to say how Jesus will be numbered with the transgressors. You know, put in the place of Barabbas. Two criminals either side.

And in fact, we know that Luke wants us to make this connection because Jesus has already made it himself one chapter earlier. So on the next slide in Luke chapter 22, one chapter earlier, Jesus said it is written and he was numbered with the transgressors.

Isaiah 53. And notice what he says. And I tell you that this must be fulfilled in me. Luke is pointing out that Jesus is not only God's king, but God's servant, the innocent one who dies for the guilty ones.

And that's exactly what we see happening with Barabbas, isn't it? Barabbas is actually guilty of insurrection, of inciting rebellion in the city. The very thing that the religious leaders accused Jesus of doing.

Yet this guilty one goes free while the innocent one goes to die. Numbered with the transgressors. But what Jesus does for Barabbas is actually a picture of what he does for us all.

[13:59] For we are all guilty like Barabbas. We haven't murdered anyone. I'm assuming not. But we are all guilty of insurrection, of rebellion against God.

We've all ignored God from time to time and not lived God's way. Instead, as Frank Sinatra famously sang, I did it my way.

We've all done that. We're actually guilty of rebellion against God, insurrection like Barabbas. Our problem is we just don't think it's all that serious.

But unfortunately, it is. Like Barabbas was going to have to face judgment, we are going to have to face judgment. But Jesus, the innocent one, swaps places with us, the guilty ones.

And he takes the judgment for our sins in our place so that we can be saved from it. And free to go. Around this time last year, there was an attack in the south of France.

[15:07] A gunman had already shot one person dead and entered a small supermarket and took several others hostages. You may have heard of this. Police managed to negotiate the release of

all but one hostage whom the gunman refused to release.

It was his only leverage. And so this French police officer on the next slide, Ornard Beltran, swapped places with the hostage. Once he swapped places, the gunman shot him.

The other police stormed the supermarket hearing the shots. Belcher was still alive but later in hospital died. One headline read on the next slide, French officer who swapped places with a hostage in terror attack dies.

You see, by swapping places, Beltran saved the hostage, didn't he? So that they could go free.

Now, of course, the illustration breaks down a bit because neither Beltran nor the hostage deserve to die.

But we deserve judgment for ignoring God. Yet Jesus swapped places with us to take our judgment in our place.

[16:15] But this only works. We can only go free. We can only make use of this gift if we accept Jesus for who he is. If we reject him, if we reject his death for our sins, then, well, we'll end up having to pay for our sins ourselves.

We'll have to face judgment ourselves. Which brings us to Jesus' warning. Point three, verse 26. As the soldiers led him away, they seized Simon from Cyrene, who was on his way in from the country and put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus.

A large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wailed for him. Jesus turned to them and said, daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me. Weep for yourselves and for your children.

For 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 the hills cover us.

For if people do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it's dry? Here's another response on that first Good Friday.

[17:24] The women who are weeping because they know Jesus is innocent. And that's a normal reaction when we see innocent people suffer. But Jesus says, don't weep for me.

Thank you, but I don't want your sympathy. You actually need to weep for others. There's something worse coming. Weep for yourselves and your children because judgment is coming. And it will be so terrible that you'd rather have mountains fall on you than suffer that judgment. I mean, that must be pretty bad, wasn't it? But who will this judgment come on?

Well, verse 31, on those who do these things. What things? Well, the things happening in this very chapter, the rejection of Jesus. If people continue to reject him while the tree is green, while it's not ready for burning, you know, you don't burn green wood.

Well, what will happen when the tree is dry and is ready for burning? When judgment does come, it won't be pretty. Jesus may have prayed for God to forgive them for killing him.

[18:30] But if they continue to reject him and his death for their sins, then they will have to pay them themselves and face judgment. And so Jesus' warning is judgment is coming and it won't be pleasant.

Don't weep for me. Weep for yourselves. Repent. Turn back and trust in me. For my death is what will save you from judgment for life eternal.

So point four, 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, 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. The people stood watching and the rulers even stared at him. They said he saved others.

Let him save himself if he is God's king, the chosen one. 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.

[19:38] There was a written notice above him which read, this is the king of the Jews. One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him. Aren't you the Messiah, the king? Save yourself and us, he said.

Now we're meant to see a whole lot of irony in these expressions where the repeated request is for Jesus to save them. Because he was working to save them.

It's by his death that he also takes our judgment in our place to save us from it. And he said, give us life eternal with him.

But again, only if we trust in him as our savior king. Do you see verse 40? But the other criminal rebuked the first one.

Don't you fear God, he said, since you are under the same sentence. We are punished justly for we are getting what our sins deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong. Then he said to Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.

[20 : 44] Jesus answered him, truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise. I hear this man is guaranteed a place in paradise with Jesus today, the day he dies.

Why? Is it because he was religious or did lots of good works? Well, no, he's a criminal. And in fact, crucifixion was saved for the serious of criminals.

Rather, it's because he firstly admitted his guilt. Do you see verse 41? He says, we are getting what our deeds deserve. He knows he's guilty.

He admits it. Second, he believes only Jesus can save him. See verse 42. Jesus, remember me.

Not, I'll do it myself, but Jesus, remember me. So simple, isn't it? And third, he confesses Jesus as king.

[21 : 48] For he adds, remember me when you come into your kingdom. He acknowledges Jesus is a king of a kingdom. And so here are the ABCs of being guaranteed a place in paradise.

Admit, believe, confess. Here's another response too, isn't there? What about us here today?

What's our response going to be? Not which footy team you're going to go for or which hot cross buns you'll have. We're having some today. I'm not sure what they are. But which response on that very first Good Friday here in Luke is most like yours?

Perhaps you've been dragged along here this morning by a family member. Well done for coming.

But perhaps that means you've been a bit like the religious leaders who have already made up their minds without really considering the evidence.

Or a bit like Herod who mocks Jesus. Or perhaps you're here this morning for the first time in a long time because your response has been a bit like Pilate and the people who gave in to peer pressure and went with the mob mentality of the world.

[23 : 04] Or your friends or work colleagues and what they think. Or perhaps you're like the women who wept for Jesus. You want to come today to show your sympathy for him, to pay your respects.

But you haven't really accepted him as your saviour king for every day. And perhaps won't think of him until Christmas. Whatever response you've had, it's clear the type of response we're meant to have, isn't it?

We're supposed to be like the criminal. By the way, that's the only time you'll hear a minister say, be like a criminal. We're to admit, believe, confess.

Admit we are guilty. Believe that Jesus can save us. Confess him as our king. In a moment, I'm going to lead us in an ABC prayer and give you an opportunity to respond like that if you would like to.

But for us who have already responded like that, then we are to continue to trust him as our saviour king. I mean, as nice as Doncaster is, it's not paradise yet, is it?

[24 : 17] We haven't made it to paradise. And so we're to continue trusting in Jesus as our saviour king. Even when the peer pressure and mob mentality of our world bears down upon us.

We're even to stand up for Jesus like this second criminal did. He told off the first one, didn't he?

Not that I'm suggesting you tell off others, but we're to lovingly stand up for Jesus.

Be known as Christian in our workplace or amongst our friends and family. And we're to let this king shape our words, our actions and our priorities in life.

But we're to do so knowing that our place in paradise is secure. For Jesus has already died in our place to secure a spot for us in his place.

So we need not fear missing out on anything in this life by following him. For we have eternal life waiting for us in paradise.

[25 : 20] I was actually sharing with the Wednesday at 2 service this week that, you know, there's some places in this world I'd love to go and visit. But I don't think I'm ever going to get there. But that's okay because I'm going to have an eternity to explore the whole world.

And it's all going to be free. But we have an eternity in paradise to come. So it will more than make up for missing out on anything in this life for following Jesus, won't it?

And when we fail, we're to come back to Jesus knowing that he's a gracious king. I mean, he even prayed that God might forgive those who drove those nails through his hands and feet.

Is that not extraordinary grace? It's extraordinary. That's a leader I'd vote for next month. If only. But that's certainly a leader worth following this month and for life.

And if you'd like to start, if you'd like a place in paradise secure for you, then I'm going to pray this ABC prayer now. Just echo it line by line in your head and heart to God and he will hear you.

[26 : 25] And if you already follow Jesus, then why not take this moment to recommit yourself to your savior king? Let's pray. Dear God. Dear God. I admit that I have rebelled against you, not living your way, but mine.

I believe that Jesus paid for my sins to save me from judgment. I confess and commit my life to him as my king.

Amen.