

"The Just for the Unjust" - Good Friday Service

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[0:00] Why do we celebrate the unjust death of an innocent man? It seems wrong. We live in a world where we want our justice system to punish the guilty and to protect the innocent.

! Even our outrage culture today springs up from this deep-seated human desire for justice. Today is Good Friday, a day when we celebrate the unjust death of an innocent man.

As we've heard the story told in the book of Luke, as He's unraveled the story, it was striking to me as I read it again how many times the innocence of Jesus was proclaimed.

Did you hear it as we listened? Pilate, the Roman governor, said not once, not twice, three times, three times, I find no guilt in him.

There is nothing worth punishing in what it...I'll beat him and let him go, but he is not guilty. He even sent him to Herod, and when Herod didn't find anything worth punishing him for, Herod sent him back.

[1:27] Think about this for a minute. Pilate was the Roman governor. He had no reason to protect this man. As a real fact, he was very ready and willing. He was about to execute Barabbas, who was a rebel, who was an insurgent against the nation of Rome.

He was ready to execute him. He had no problem with justice. But he could not say Jesus was guilty. The only reason he could not say that was because he was convinced that in fact Jesus was an innocent man.

But not only Jesus testifies to this, but did you hear as Jesus is hanging on the cross between two thieves, and the thieves are reviling, and one of them is reviling Jesus, and the other one responds. Did you hear the words he said? Do you hear the words he says, Do you fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And indeed, we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds.

But this man has done nothing wrong. And so God plants a second witness to Jesus' innocence on the cross as this man turns to Jesus and proclaims this to Him. And again, this man had no reason. He knew he was a thief. He knew he was justly being condemned. He knew his friend on the other side of Jesus was similarly justly condemned. And yet he testifies that Jesus was innocent. He had done nothing wrong.

[3:13] And then, of course, at the very end of the story, after Jesus gives up His spirit, breathes His last, and dies on the cross, the centurion, the Roman soldier who was the leader of the Roman guard, was he a part of the mockery that had happened earlier that the soldiers inflicted on Him? Did He hold the hammer to pound the nails into the wrists and feet of Jesus? Or did He simply oversee it all? As a centurion, He was a seasoned soldier who had overseen executions before eradicating the dangerous men who justly deserved their death in the Roman Empire.

And yet when Jesus dies, this hardened soldier looks up and He says, certainly this man was innocent.

Again, He had nothing at stake. He had no reason to say this except that He was deeply convinced that it was true because of what He saw. Jesus did not deserve to die. He had no guilt in Him.

He was testified by three people that He was innocent, which, of course, raises the question then, if He was innocent. Why then was He executed? And the simple answer is He was executed because of the injustice of human sinfulness. The people who cried for Jesus' death unjustly were those who

were threatened by Him. He had challenged the power of the existing religious establishment. They had set expectations about the Messiah who would come, who would come with great fanfare to restore the glory of Israel, to overthrow Rome, and by the way, to make sure they stayed in their positions of prestige and power in the world. And when Jesus came, He confounded all of those expectations.

He came from obscurity. He lived humbly. He did not claim their authority or support it, but He claimed His own authority. And He did not overthrow Rome, but said, My kingdom is not of this world. And Jesus did not conform to these expectations of what they thought He should be as the Savior and the Messiah of the world.

[5:54] And so they rejected Him, and in their rejection, they made Him an enemy. And when they couldn't find any other way to silence Him, they trumped up false charges against Him and took Him to the Romans because they didn't have the power to kill Him themselves. They publicly accused Him and turned Him over to Rome.

And Pilate, who had said He was innocent, in the end unjustly gives in to this demand and gives over Jesus to death. His power, His power, His position, His reputation, was threatened by the upheaval, by the loud crowds crying, Crucify Him! Crucify Him! And He didn't want to give that up. And when the crowd didn't back down or be quiet, He gave in. Jesus' death was unjust. It was wrong.

Friends, I hope you can see that it was not just in the first century that Jesus is treated unjustly.

How often do we bring our expectations to what we think Jesus must or should be for us?

We think Jesus is going to keep us out of trouble, give us a good and happy life. We think that following Him will be respected, that we will be praised, not increase conflict.

We want Him to come and right every injustice in the world, in our lives as well. We want Him to be our foxhole Savior.

[7:49] Jesus, just get me out of this jam. We too have lives that we don't want Jesus to mess with. We have positions and powers and plans in our careers, in our families, our desires for romance and relationship.

We have our own understanding of what's right and good in the world. We love boundless tolerance and freedom, or we love control and order at all costs. We don't want Jesus to come and actually be the Son of God, and actually claim the authority that He claims to have, and actually say, if anyone would follow Me, he must deny himself and pick up his cross and follow Me.

We don't want a Savior who imposes or interjects Himself into our lives like that.

And we need to be honest with ourselves. If I were there in the first century, I most likely would have been in the crowd. I would have gotten swept up in the fervor, the fear, whatever was motivating it. I would have been the one saying, crucify Him. Because I know my heart is a heart that wants to resist and rebel and reject Jesus so often.

[9:19] I remember, actually, when I was in high school and was first introduced to Jesus through some friends. As they talked with me, as they showed me by their lives how they lived, I came to be convinced that Jesus was the Son of God, and that He was claiming His authority over me and calling me to faith in Him.

But I resisted. I remember those few weeks. I could see Him right there, and I could see all the goodness in it. But I was so afraid to give up.

I was so afraid to let go. I was so afraid to let Him be who He said He was in my life. Maybe you are the same.

We recognize that it is our sin that put Jesus on the cross. On this day, Good Friday, we are called to soberly count how great the cost is of our sin.

It costs the death of an innocent man. An unjust death. And yet, friends, this is in fact the good news of the gospel, is it not?

[10:40] Because this unjust death is actually an expression of God's justice. Let me tell you how I get there from God's Word. 1 Peter 3.18 says, Christ also suffered once for sin, the righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring us to God.

This is God's intent, that a righteous man, Jesus, would come and suffer for unrighteous people like me and like you, so that we might be restored to Him.

This is what John read earlier from Isaiah 53. He was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. Upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace.

With His wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray. We have turned everyone to His own way. And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

Jesus came to step in to our place and be a substitute. This, friends, is the logic of the gospel that the Christian church has preached from the very beginning.

[11:51] A God who is perfectly just cannot simply overlook sin. Just like if we had police who just said, Oh, it's okay. You don't have to pay the fine for parking outside.

You don't have to go the speed limit. Well, actually, we do live in that world, don't we? But if we had a just society, the police would actually enforce the laws. Right? There should be and rightly is a consequence for sin.

Because sin is a rebellion against God who is the author of life, our sin means that the wages of sin is death, according to the Bible.

Separation from God spiritually and eternal death with Him. And because all of humanity has rejected God, all are under this sentence. So how then can a just God forgive rebel sinners like us? He provides a substitute, one willing to take our place, so that the justice of God is satisfied as Jesus takes the penalty for our sin. And we receive mercy through this justice that is satisfied.

[13:10] And so God gives us this amazing gift. The penalty is paid, and we are forgiven. Because the only one who could do this substitution was a perfectly innocent man.

Jesus alone could be our Savior and die in our place. And that's what we celebrate here on Good Friday. And so it is that Paul writes in Romans 3.

It was to show His righteousness at the present time so that He might be both just and the justifier of those who have faith in God. Friends, this is what we celebrate on Good Friday.

Jesus willingly stepping into the injustice of our world and of our sin so that we might be restored to God.

If you have not come to Him, if you have not surrendered your life and said, God, I don't deserve it, but I want your forgiveness.

[14:18] I want to be restored to you. I want a relationship with you. I want to be restored to you. And I encourage you tonight, confess your sin, your resistance, your fear to give your life to Jesus.

Repent of that and choose to believe. And if you're here and you've already made that decision to follow Him, may you find joy in this.

His innocence and His willing death for us means that your guilt and my guilt have been taken care of. And God embraces us tonight.

And this is the joy of our salvation. Let's pray. O Lord, what love you have shown to us.

You who did not spare your Son, but gave Him up for us all. Amazing love, how can it be that thou, my God, wouldst die for me.

[15:28] O Lord, fill our hearts with awe and wonder that we, the undeserving, have been given more than we could even imagine in Christ.

Lord, turn our hearts away from our sin and our rebellion, our independence, and our resistance.

Lord, as we sit at the foot of the cross and see your amazing love for us.

O Lord, we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.