

# Why 'Good' Friday?

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[0:00] We're going to start by reading an account of the crucifixion from Luke's Gospel. So from Luke's Gospel, it's the NIV version, if anybody has a Bible with them.

But with loud shouts, they insistently demanded that he be crucified. This was the Jewish leaders. And their shouts prevailed. As they 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. Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed.

When they came to the place called the Skull, there they crucified him, Jesus, 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. There was a written notice above him which read, This is the King of the Jews.

[1:15] One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him. Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us. But the other criminal rebuked him. 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. But this man has done nothing wrong. Then he said, Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.

Jesus answered him, I tell you the truth. Today you will be with me in paradise. It was now about the sixth hour and darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour.

For the sun stopped shining and the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Jesus called out with a loud voice, Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.

When he had said this, he breathed his last. Amen. May God bless the reading of his word. Amen. So, Veronica has already preached the sermon, so I'm going to stop here and wish you all a very good Friday.

[2:25] And we'll see you again on Easter Sunday. So, why, yes, as Veronica said, why good Friday? And I also want to look at who is Simon of Cyrene? And what can we learn from him?

This character who appears in the crowds and is forced to carry Jesus' cross part of the way to Calvary. Next slide, please, Josh.

So, how can we in the UK call today Good Friday? Germany, I understand from my research, calls it Karfreitag or Sorrowful Friday, which seems much more appropriate than Good Friday.

What were the facts of what we call Good Friday? Jesus was an innocent man sentenced to death. He'd done no wrong. He was an innocent man.

He was publicly shamed and humiliated on his way to death. He was beaten. He was stripped. He was insulted and sworn at by the crowds.

[3:27] He suffered extreme pain, physical, spiritual, and mental. And I just want to stop there. And we often talk about the physical pain, the crucifixion itself, the nails and the blood, and the pain that he was in, the crown of thorns.

But it's the spiritual pain that he went through when God could not look on him. God's eyes, as it says in Habakkuk, are too pure to look on evil.

And when Jesus was on the cross with all the sin of the world, God turned away from him. He could not look at his son. And that's the real pain, I believe, that Jesus suffered on what we call Good Friday, the pain of spiritual separation from his father.

Jesus was crucified, a profoundly shameful death reserved for slaves, rebels, and the lowest of the low. It involved public nakedness, extreme torture, and in Jewish tradition being cursed by God. Deuteronomy 21-23 says, Anyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse. And we've sung about the tree. The tree is the cross. It was made out of a tree.

[4:42] The tree was a shameful thing. A shameful thing. Anyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse.

Crucifixion was a public humiliation intended to destroy the victim's dignity, associating Jesus with the ultimate disgrace of sin.

Next slide, please. So why is it Good Friday? Well, it marked the culmination of God's plan to save people from their sin.

For years, the Jews had been sacrificing over and over and over again to atone for their sins.

Lambs and cattle and pigeons and doves and all sorts of animals were being sacrificed over and over and over again to atone for their sins.

And God's plan was to send His Son as a once-for-all sacrifice for our sins. For our sins. For everyone's sins that comes into this world.

[5:49] Yours and mine. Everyone in the past. Everyone in the future. And Jesus willingly suffered and died as the ultimate sacrifice for our sin.

Because Jesus traded places with us. We should have been the ones that were paying for our sin. For what we've done wrong.

The wrong things we've said. The wrong things we've done. The wrong attitudes we've had towards people. We should have been paying the price. Not Jesus. He was innocent. And because it also marked the beginning of the process whereby Jesus conquered sin and death.

And it was arguably the most crucial day in history. Now John might argue on Sunday that Easter Sunday was the most crucial day in history. And others may have argued at Christmas time that the birth of Jesus was the most crucial day in history.

One thing there. They're all linked with Jesus, aren't they? Those days. But arguably Good Friday when he took those sins. The sins of the world on his shoulders. Was arguably the greatest day in history.

[6:58] It was a good day for humankind. As it says in 1 Peter. For Christ died for sins once for all. The righteous, Jesus.

For the unrighteous. You and me, us. To bring you to God. And of course, without Good Friday, there would be no Easter Sunday.

And I'm not going to talk now about the resurrection. That's John's job on Sunday. But without Good Friday, let's remember, without Good Friday and the pain and the hurt and the sorrow and the shame, there wouldn't be an Easter Sunday that John will be telling us about in a couple of days.

And why is Good Friday good for us? We know we've done and said things worthy of punishment. We know that. We know we've said wrong things.

We know we've done wrong things. We need to be made holy. It says in Hebrews, without holiness, no one will see the Lord. We need a Savior.

[8:03] Ephesians says, at that time you were separate from Christ.

Excluded. Without hope and without God in the world. But now, in Christ Jesus, you who were once far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.

That's the power of the cross that we'll be singing about in a few minutes. The power of the cross. That Christ, through his death, through his taking our sins, did that marvelous job of becoming the bridge between God and us.

That's what he did. He made that bridge that could not be crossed between God, who could not look on us, and all our sin. He made that bridge for us.

Because if God was able to look at us with sin, he couldn't look at us with sin. He wasn't able to. But because Jesus made that bridge, now when he looks at us, if we've confessed our sins and asked Jesus into our hearts, he sees us as righteous.

We are made righteous in God's eyes through Jesus. Next slide, please. So, who is Simon of Cyrene and who carried Jesus' cross to Calvary?

[9:24] He came from Cyrene, a city of about 5,000 people in Jesus' day, situated in modern Libya. So, it was about 800 to 900 miles away from

Jerusalem.

So, he'd made a long journey there at some time. It contained a number of Jewish settlers and is mentioned on the day of Pentecost in Acts.

And it's likely that Simon was there to celebrate the Passover. That's the probable reason why he would have been in Jerusalem at that time.

He's mentioned in three of the four Gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke. And he's named, which helps give credence to the crucifixion story.

He's actually given a name. You know, they could have said they picked a man out of the crowd and made him carry the cross. Well, they didn't. They said Simon from Cyrene. Picked out, you know, there's something about being addressed by your name, isn't there?

[10:19] If somebody says, hello, Ruth, or hello, Andy, there's something about being addressed by name. And here, Simon is given a name.

He had two sons, Rufus, who may be the one mentioned in greetings in Romans 16, 13, and Alexander. And they were mentioned in Mark's account.

In Mark's Gospel account, it says Simon of Cyrene, whose sons were Rufus and Alexander. And again, it may have been that when the Gospel was being put together, somebody spoke to Rufus and Alexander and said, tell us the story of your dad.

You know, what happened? Why was he there? What did he do? So, you know, again, mentioned by name, those two men. And tradition, not Scripture, but tradition says that Simon went to Egypt, shared the Gospel there, and was martyred in about 100 AD.

Next slide, please. What else do we know about Simon of Cyrene? Well, everything in the Bible is factual, and everything has a purpose. A short account of someone like Simon is there for a reason.

[11:27] Simon was pressed into carrying the cross. He wasn't asked. He didn't sort of say, excuse me, old chap, could you carry this cross? No, he was told, you know, come and carry this cross. He was dragged, probably, out of the crowd to carry the cross for Jesus.

He carried Jesus' burden for a while. Our Savior, Jesus Christ, who carries our burdens, was humble enough to let Simon carry his burden through a time of awful public humiliation.

God temporarily lifted the burden on his son through Simon. What an amazing thing, to lift the burden on his son, just for a few moments, to let someone else take that cross up to Calvary.

It was important to the Romans that Jesus was delivered safely to his place of crucifixion. Those Roman guards probably would have been in trouble. If the crowd had got hold of Jesus and killed him on the way to crucifixion, then those Roman soldiers would have probably been in a lot of trouble and may have been executed themselves.

It was very important that the victim got to the crucifixion and went through the agony of crucifixion. To die on the way wasn't good enough.

[12:41] He had to die by being crucified. Next slide, please. So what can we learn today, this Good Friday, from Simon of Cyrene?

Simon carried the cross. Well, sometimes we talk about ourselves having to carry the cross. We carry a cross. Sometimes the burdens that we carry, that's our cross.

Whatever that might be. It may be burden of sickness or illness or depression or loneliness or fatigue. But we have to carry our cross.

It's not an easy journey being a Christian. Don't let anybody tell you that. It is an amazing journey, but it is not always an easy journey. And we have to carry our cross. Whatever that may mean to each of us.

And many people here will have stories about how they've had to carry or are carrying their cross. Simon did something he didn't want to do.

[13:40] He didn't want to carry that cross. He was told to carry the cross. And sometimes we have to do things we do not want to do, but which Jesus wants us to do.

And I remember when I first became a Christian, or when I became a Christian in 1984, we were living in Chippenham. I was in a tell management. We went to a church in Bath.

We'd been living in Bath. We had lots of friends. The church was great. A lot of young families in the church, just like ourselves. And it was fantastic. And then I thought, you know, if I'm going to live this Christian life, you know, maybe I need to look to work somewhere that's a Christian

organization.

Because, you know, I'd suddenly been catapulted into this life as a Christian. And so, long story short, I got a job at a place called the Athol Center, which was a Baptist holiday and conference center in Pitlockery.

Now, Pitlockery is not like Bath. Pitlockery has a population of about 2,500. It's very dependent on tourism, both winter and summer.

[14:52] It's on the tip of the highlands. And we went up there to see it. We went up by train. I'd had my interview. I'd been offered the job. And Anne and I went up to have a look. There were no young families in the church.

It was a small church. You know, humanly, I didn't want to go there. But I knew that Jesus was saying, this is where I want you. It was utterly clear.

As that train came into the station, Anne just said to me, this is where we have to be. And that was right. Now, I didn't want to go there. But that is where I knew I had to be.

And I had the most amazing two years there. And grew hugely as a Christian, thanks to the people I was in contact with there. Simon followed Jesus with the cross through a hostile crowd.

It's not always easy to follow Jesus. We hear stories of our brothers and sisters in other lands who are persecuted for being Christians.

[15:54] Who are put in prison, who are executed for being Christians. It is not always easy to follow Jesus. There are times when it is very difficult.

We're fortunate. We aren't persecuted in this country as people are in North Korea or in parts of Nigeria or parts of Sudan or other places, China and so on around the world.

But it can still be very difficult to follow Jesus. It can be very difficult for young people sometimes at school if their friends know that they follow Jesus.

Simon was probably taunted and maybe received offers of help or advice to distract him from his purpose. You know, people maybe said, oh, drop the cross. Oh, why are you doing that?

Come on, come away. We'll go and eat somewhere. Just drop the cross. Leave it down. And we have to face our Christian lives. We have to beware and to carry distractions and temptations.

[16:58] There are times we know when we are distracted from our Christian life and we have to get back on track. Or we face temptations that pull us away from our Christian life.

And we have to deal with those. We have to deal with those and say, sorry, Lord, put me right. Set me back. I want to follow you.

Set me back. So those are the things we can learn from Simon of Cyrene. And how do we do that? Well, it says in Hebrews, let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

And that's where he is today, right now, right at this time for us, interceding for us. He hears us and intercedes with God.

When we pray, Jesus says, that's one of mine. That's one of mine. Hear his prayer. Or hear her prayer. One of mine. Are you one of Jesus?

[18:12] That's the question for all of us this Good Friday. Amen.