

Good Friday Message

Introduction

We call this day Good Friday. But what makes Good Friday, good? At first glance, it isn't good at all. What is good about Jesus dying alone, humiliated, in excruciating pain, mocked and treated like a common criminal?

Hope has died.

We cannot live without hope. Without hope, we wither and fade. There is no purpose for living without hope. When someone says that they are hope-less, it implies that they have no reason left to continue on - there is nothing to look forward to. Life devolves into a series of meaningless days as we trudge onward toward...nothing.

Life has no purpose.

A life without purpose, with no hope, no meaning, is the most terrifying thing there is. Imagine the deep, unshakeable sense of fear and dread that accompanies the lack of hope. The moment that you realize that hope is gone, your purpose has abandoned you, and there is nothing left to live for. That type of fear makes every other fear pale in comparison.

That is the type of fear that Jesus' disciples experienced on Good Friday. Their king was dead, and with him the hope for salvation. The kingdom seemed to be destroyed, never to be rebuilt. The Son of God now hung lifeless on a cross, and with his death, their hope had been replaced with a deep sense of existential dread.

Good Friday doesn't seem that good at all.

Scripture

In verses 33-50 of Matthew 27, we read about the main event of Good Friday: Jesus' death. As we read, I want you to put yourselves in the shoes (or maybe sandals) of the disciples. I want you to embrace the hopelessness that accompanies this passage. Many of us (most of us) know the "rest of the story," that will occur on Sunday, but for right now I want you to immerse yourself in what happened on Friday.

33 And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull),
34 they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall, but when he tasted it, he would not

drink it. 35 And when they had crucified him, they divided his garments among them by casting lots. 36 Then they sat down and kept watch over him there. 37 And over his head they put the charge against him, which read, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews." 38 Then two robbers were crucified with him, one on the right and one on the left. 39 And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads 40 and saying, "You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross." 41 So also the chief priests, with the scribes and elders, mocked him, saying, 42 "He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. 43 He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him. For he said, 'I am the Son of God.'" 44 And the robbers who were crucified with him also reviled him in the same way.

45 Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. 46 And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" 47 And some of the bystanders, hearing it, said, "This man is calling Elijah." 48 And one of them at once ran and took a sponge, filled it with sour wine, and put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink. 49 But the others said, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him." 50 And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit.

Jesus is dead.

We need to allow that thought to linger in our minds for a moment. Again, almost all of us know what happens next, but in order for the gravity of this moment to weigh on us, we must focus on this part of the story. Allow the Scripture to create the picture in your mind of what the scene looked like.

Jesus has been tortured, mocked and humiliated, and now he is hung on a cross, an excruciating and shameful way to be executed in that time. For about six hours, he hangs there, naked, in the throes of pain and agony that are not just physical, but spiritual as well. But in this account, Matthew does not choose to focus on an explicit description of the physical agony he is in, instead, he paints a picture of how those around him are treating Jesus.

1. People come to mock his suffering.

The soldiers terrorize him, make fun of him, they gamble for his clothes. The Jewish people come by and yell “If you are the Son of God, come down!” The priests, scribes and elders ridicule him: “He saved others, but he cannot save himself!” Matthew says that even the criminals he is hanging there with taunt him. What a shocking display, as the Son of God, the Messiah, is executed like a common criminal.

This is Jesus’ darkest moment. And there is one other factor that is abundantly clear:

2. He is alone.

Where are the disciples? They have abandoned him. Only a few of his followers dare to stand at a distance to watch him die. All of the gospels make it abundantly clear that Jesus was abandoned by everyone. They all left him. He faced his darkest moment alone.

I want us to put ourselves again in the shoes of the disciples. We read in another gospel that they were hiding, in fear of the Jews. Obviously they thought that since they had executed Jesus, that they were next! They were hiding in fear, but in the type of hopeless fear that I referenced at the beginning.

Jesus has died, and with him the hopes of those that had followed him. Was he actually the Savior of the world? Or just a good teacher? A zealot? Was he the Messiah, the Son of God, or just a fraud?

I don’t know what the disciples were thinking at that point but I can only imagine. Fear, confusion, hopelessness, panic. It is clear from the ensuing narratives that they either did not believe that Jesus was going to rise again, or they had serious doubts that it was going to happen. They were preparing to try to slip quietly back into their normal lives, their hopes in the Messiah shattered.

As the disciples hid in fear, I wonder if any of them thought back to another incident in Jesus’ ministry that seemed frightening and hopeless. Earlier in Matthew, in chapter 8, we read about Jesus and his disciples nearly dying out at sea.

Read with me Matthew chapter 8, starting at verse 23:

23 As he got into the boat, his disciples followed him. 24 Suddenly, a violent storm arose on the sea, so that the boat was being swamped by the waves—but Jesus kept

sleeping. 25 So the disciples came and woke him up, saying, “Lord, save us! We’re going to die!” 26 He said to them, “Why are you afraid, you of little faith?” Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm. 27 The men were amazed and asked, “What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the sea obey him!”

The English translations do not do a good job of translating what is happening here. Apparently this is a HUGE storm, and their boat is literally sinking. Some of the disciples are fishermen, so they are used to handling bad weather, but this was too much for them.

And yet Jesus is asleep! So the disciples come and wake him up, screaming that they are going to die, and he is going to die, and that this is it, they are done. They are convinced this is it. Their final moments, out at sea, they are going to drown.

I love how Matthew organizes this story. It is a little different than the other gospel accounts. Matthew chooses to emphasize that Jesus stands up and says “why are you afraid, you of little faith?” Before Jesus does anything, he questions the disciples’ faith!

This order is perhaps intended to underline Jesus’ control of the situation (there is no need for panic action), but also serves to highlight the significance of the disciples’ failure in trust. - France, R. T.

Then Jesus quiets the storm with only a couple of words, and the disciples have no idea what just happened. They were convinced that they were going to die, and now they are alive because of Jesus’ miraculous, divine display of sovereignty. And yet, they still don’t know who Jesus is!

Now, Jesus has died, and it seems the disciples still didn’t really know who Jesus was. They still haven’t quite grasped his sovereignty and power over sin and death. Beyond that, I want to suggest that today, you and I can very easily forget who Jesus is.

Jesus’ death was a dark day. A day that felt hopeless. A day that felt like everything had been a waste. It was a scary day. Despair and hopelessness had set in.

But, consider Jesus calming the storm. **When Jesus asked the disciples “Why are you afraid,” he was not telling them, this situation is not scary.**

It is important to say that Jesus is not addressing fear as such (fear in the ordinary or necessary sense), but rather their “excessive fear.” Fear that pushes faith in God out the back door. Fear that doesn’t recognize who’s in control. Fear that doesn’t acknowledge who’s onboard the boat.

O’Donnell, Douglas Sean.

Jesus acknowledged that the situation seemed desperate and hopeless, that it appeared that there was no way out, that this was the end. And what does he say in the face of the certainty of death and failure?

WHY ARE YOU AFRAID?

Think about this! Jesus does not try to reason away their fear, he does not try to talk them out of the fact that there is something legitimate to be fearful of, he simply tells them not to be afraid!

We do not do this! Even today, we try to reason our way out of fear. There are many situations and issues in our world today that can cause us to be afraid. Whether it’s pandemics, terrorism, the economy, or climate change, there is much that can give us reason to fear.

The initial response from many people is to immediately downplay them. They will try to explain why none of those issues are *actually* a bit deal, and we all need to calm down. Even though this at times can be a measured response, if that is our reaction to everything it will cause us to miss the larger reality - EVEN IF our very lives, livelihood, or existence itself is threatened, there is no reason to be afraid! If our initial reaction is to downplay the crisis we find ourselves in, we rob ourselves of being able to rest in the reality that we have a Lord that can be trusted even in the most dire of circumstances. EVEN IF the worst-case scenario was not “worse-case” enough, we still do not need to be afraid because **JESUS IS LORD.**

In the boat, Jesus does not try to reason with the disciples by telling them the situation is not scary. He stands up, looks at them, and says “why are you afraid?” He looks directly at this desperate situation and does not deny that it is desperate, but declares that he is Lord over it.

In the same way, Jesus is on the cross, hope has died, the disciples have scattered, and it appears that God’s plan of salvation has been thwarted. In the midst of a

desperate and hopeless situation I have to think that Jesus would want to say to his disciples, “why are you afraid?” They have seen already how Jesus is sovereign over nature, sin, over all things including death!

So, why are they afraid? Why are you afraid? The situation may seem desperate but Jesus is Lord over all and his lordship and victory are on display even while he hangs dying on the cross, and this victory will soon be on display...

But that is what we are going to talk about in a couple of days. Today is still Good Friday, and we need to be careful that we don't move too quickly past Good Friday.

We don't really like it here. It's sad. It feels hopeless. This isn't the type of thing we like to dwell on or contemplate very deeply.

I think that is how we are in life as well. Instead of allowing ourselves to lament, we want to skip through the moments of pain in order to get to the other side. We want to read the end of the story without experiencing the difficult moments within it.

We are uncomfortable with lament. Our first inclination in times of pain, doubt and worry is try to find the escape route. We spend almost no time looking for God *within* the pain, but only how to escape it.

In our discomfort with lament, our rush to get past pain and suffering, we miss the opportunity for God's sovereignty to be on full display.

Communion

It is interesting that in passages like Luke 22, we are called to “remember the Lord's death.” Beyond that, we are called to remember his death in a specific way: the Lord's Supper. Not only that, but in 1 Corinthians 11 Paul says that through the Lord's Supper we also *proclaim* the Lord's death. We have the opportunity to take part in the Lord's Supper today, but before we do, we might ask *why* we are called to remember and proclaim the Lord's death. It seems like kind of a depressing thing to remember and proclaim.

REMEMBER AND PROCLAIM

Jesus dying was not God's plan B. God's sovereignty is evident not just in Jesus walking out of the tomb but also in Jesus up on the cross.

REMEMBER AND PROCLAIM

This was all part of God's plan of redemption. This means two things: first, Jesus going to the cross was not a mistake and second, Jesus' victory over death was assured before he went up on the cross.

John 10:17-18

17 For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. **18** No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.”

REMEMBER AND PROCLAIM

The Son of God laid down his life, it was not taken from him! He stepped into fear and despair, using the humiliation and suffering of the cross to display his divine sovereignty over all things and achieve for us the salvation that we could not earn.

I don't know what situation you are in, I don't know if you are hopeless and in despair, I don't know if you are afraid, but I do know that whatever your situation, Jesus looks to you from the cross, the midst of the most hopeless situation that mankind has ever faced, and says “why are you afraid?”

REMEMBER AND PROCLAIM

Jesus has overcome your sin and death itself. If you will confess your sins to him, and put your faith in him as the Son of God, you can be free. Free from your sin, and free from fear. With Jesus, there is nothing to fear as he has overcome the world and everything in it. The cross displays this victory over death, and the victory over fear.

In taking communion we remind ourselves Christ's sacrifice, and we proclaim his sacrifice. How in Christ God turned everything upside down. Death no longer equals defeat, the cross now signifies victory.

You can now have the power through Jesus to stand toe to toe with any scary, desperate, hopeless situation in your life and ask yourself, “why are you afraid?” because Jesus has won the only victory that matters.

Romans 8:31-39:

31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? **32** He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? **33** Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. **34** Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. **35** Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? **36** As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." **37** No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. **38** For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, **39** nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

And that is why Good Friday is good.