

March 21, 2008
Good Friday

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John 19:16-37

Why is it good?

So the soldiers took charge of Jesus. **17**Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha). **18**Here they crucified him, and with him two others—one on each side and Jesus in the middle. **19**Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross. It read: |sc JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS. **20**Many of the Jews read this sign, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and the sign was written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek. **21**The chief priests of the Jews protested to Pilate, "Do not write 'The King of the Jews,' but that this man claimed to be king of the Jews." **22**Pilate answered, "What I have written, I have written." **23**When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes, dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining. This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom. **24**"Let's not tear it," they said to one another. "Let's decide by lot who will get it." This happened that the scripture might be fulfilled which said, "They divided my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing." So this is what the soldiers did. **25**Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. **26**When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Dear woman, here is your son," **27**and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home. **28**Later, knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I am thirsty." **29**A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips. **30**When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. **31**Now it was the day of Preparation, and the next day was to be a special Sabbath. Because the Jews did not want the bodies left on the crosses during the Sabbath, they asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken down. **32**The soldiers therefore came and broke the legs of the first man who had been crucified with Jesus, and then those of the other. **33**But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. **34**Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water. **35**The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe. **36**These things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled: "Not one of his bones will be broken," **37**and, as another scripture says, "They will look on the one they have pierced."

Good Friday?

Tonight is Good Friday. Why do we call it good? I can understand Easter being called good. I can understand the resurrection being called good. I can even understand changing the name of Easter to Good Sunday. But why do we call this day good? Why Good Friday?

According to Webster's Dictionary, the word "good" can be used as an adjective, adverb, or noun. As an adjective, good can mean: 1) Having a desirable quality or outcome; "a good report card." 2) Morally desirable; "a good person." 3) Agreeable or pleasing; "a good day." 4) Financially sound; "a good investment." Synonyms include: beneficial, benevolent, effective, honorable, just, right, sound, and virtuous.

Do any of these definitions fit Jesus' crucifixion? Does it have a desirable outcome? Not for him. He dies. Is it morally admirable? No. He is innocent. Is it agreeable or pleasing? No. Just watch Gibson's *Passion*. Is it financially sound? Only for Judas! So why do we call it good?

To answer our question we should first see what is not good about the crucifixion. In verses 17-21, we are told that Jesus carried his own cross. It is true that Simon of Cyrene eventually carried Jesus' cross. But Jesus did carry the cross most of the way. The reason Rome did this was to humiliate Jesus and to send a strong message. Like the stocks in colonial America, the carrying of one's cross through the city was to send a public message. The message: "Do not mess with Caesar."

The sign above Jesus' head was also meant to send a message. The sign was Pilate's way of thumbing his nose at Jewish nationalism. The Jewish leaders wanted the sign to say, "This man claimed to be the king of the Jews." They wanted to keep the hope of the coming messiah alive. I imagine Pilate smiled when he said, "What I have written, I have written." In other words, "You have forced me into this mess. I will not cater to you. I am telling the world that the King of the Jews has been killed at the hand of Rome. Do not mess with Caesar!"

The irony is that Jesus is not only the King of the Jews but the King of the Universe. It is not good that the King of the Universe was humiliated.

Second, in verses 22-24, we see the soldiers gambling for the robe. This action fulfilled the words of Psalm 22:18, "They divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots." The gambling did more than that. By quoting a portion of Psalm 22, John is quoting the entire psalm. Psalm 22 begins with the words: "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me" (Psalm 22:1). The message of Psalm 22 is about the innocent suffering of a righteous man. The point is that Jesus was innocent. He did not deserve the death. It is not good for an innocent man to die.

Third, in verses 25-27, we find the women at the foot of the cross. I love these words because Jesus shows his love for his mother by making sure the Beloved disciple cares for her. This is a wonderful sign of love. We are called to love each other in this way. It is good that Jesus did this. However, it is not good for a parent to lose a child.

Nicolas Wolterstorff, a theologian who lost his son to a mountain climbing accident, tells about how terrible it is to lose a son. He writes:

"It's so wrong, so profoundly wrong, for a child to die before its parents. It's hard enough to bury our parents. But that we expect. Our parents belong to our past, our children belong to our future. We do not visualize our future without them. How can I bury my son, my future, one of the next in line? He was meant to bury me" (Wolterstorff, *Lament For A Son*, p. 16).

It is not good for a parent to lose a child.

Fourth, in verses 28-30, we hear Jesus' words from the cross: "I thirst" & "It is finished." There is great irony in these words. If you remember, the beginning (arche) of his ministry was to turn water into wine (John 2:1-11). Now at the end (it is finished - telos) of his ministry he drank sour wine. Jesus gives the best wine and received the worst wine. This is not good.

Finally, in verses 31-42, we witness Jesus' death, his side being pierced, and his burial in the tomb. As if Jesus had not lost enough blood. One final thrust into his side guaranteed his death. And then there is the burial. It is true that Jesus was anointed with the same amount of spices that was used for a king. Jesus is the King of the Universe. But does a nice casket make for a good death?

You see, the crucifixion of Jesus is not good. It is not good to kill an innocent man. It is not good to humiliate him. It is not good to separate a mother from her son. It is not good that Jesus who turned water into the best wine had to drink the worst. It is not good that he bled. It is not good that he was buried, even if it was in a nice tomb. These things are not good. They are the work of the devil and his work is never good.

So why is the death of Jesus good? The answer is given to us throughout the gospel.

The death of Jesus is good because it defeats the devil. The devil works in hatred, lies, and death. On the cross, Jesus confronts the devil's hatred with love. On the cross, Jesus confronts the devil's lies with truth. On the cross, Jesus confronts the devil's death with life as living water flowed from his side. That is why Jesus said, "Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out (exorcised). But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself" (12:31-32). The cross is good because Jesus defeats the devil.

The death is also good because it purifies us of our sins. It is not an accident that Jesus died at the same time the Passover lambs were slaughtered. Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. It is good because he died to forgive your sins. His blood covers you so that God passes over your sin.

There is a deeper reason still. The death of Jesus is good because it clearly and definitively declares the love of God. "For God so loved the world that he gave (divine gift) his only son [why] that who believes in him may not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

John 3:16 is usually the first verse a child memorizes. Because of this, we associate this verse with preschool. There is adult strength in this verse. The reason is not that God so loved the world of the rising sun and the waves that lap on the sea shore. Anybody can love a world like that. I love a world like that. John 3:16, is speaking about God loving the world that hated him, rejected him, and crucified his son. God loves that world. He is willing to go to any length to communicate his love for us.

In fact, if the sign over Jesus' head was meant to say, "Don't mess with Caesar!" It really says, "One greater than Caesar is dying to tell you that He loves you!"

That is what makes this day good. It is not the scandal, humiliation, or even the blood. These things are necessary, but they are not good. What makes this day good is God's love for you. A love that defeats the devil for you, forgives your sin, and calls to you so that you would believe. That is why today is called good. God loves you!

**In Jesus' Name,
Amen**