

Good Friday 2023 – Just As I Am

The Son of suffering died on a cross of suffering. And on Good Friday, we come to that cross. That’s essentially why we gather. We come to *reflect* on death of Jesus, we come to emphasize its importance, we come to renew our repentance, and we come to rest in his forgiveness. On Good Friday, we come to the cross.

And one of the many blessings, is that we can come just as we are. It doesn’t matter what we’ve done, it doesn’t matter what we’ve said, it doesn’t matter what we’re thinking. There’s enough mercy and grace at the cross to cover every last one of our sins. And the sin of the world.

So we come just as we are. *Trusting* that mercy. *Counting* on that grace. That God will stay his justice for our present sin, just like he’s done for our past sin. Because he already poured his justice and wrath out. On the very cross we approach.

So we come just as we are. Just as I am. At least we should.

Except we often feel guilty and stay away. We often feel ashamed and avoid it. We feel unworthy and miss the point that that’s the point. That Jesus is worthy for us, and our lack of worth only serves to magnify his.

We miss that, and avoid the cross altogether sometimes. Instead of rushing the cross, we hide in the shadows; the shadows of our heart. Instead of falling at its foot, we look on from a distance. Instead of moving forward, we hold back.

Meanwhile, Jesus beckons. Said so well in that old hymn.

***Just as I am**, without one plea* [without one good reason of my own]
But that Thy blood was shed for me [that’s my plea; the death of Jesus]
And that Thou bid’st me [call me; beckon me] *come to Thee* [just as I am]
Oh, Lamb of God, I come, I come

I sang that hymn every Sunday from the time I can remember to about 12 years of age. It was the standard invitation song for someone to receive Christ. And rightfully so. It captures the essence of humbling yourself before God and receiving the grace of eternal life perfectly.

But over the years, I recognized it captures the essence of *all* repentance. At salvation and every day. And especially so on Good Friday. It captures the essence of repentance when we *focus* on the blood of Jesus “shed for me.” The *reason* we can repent. And the reason we should.

Just as I am, without one plea
But that Thy blood was shed for me
And that Thou bid’st me come to Thee
Oh, Lamb of God, I come, I come

It’s the essence of repentance. And Good Friday.

“That thou bid’st me come to thee” captures the words of Jesus in **Mt 11:28** – “*Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*” (ESV) Notice he doesn’t say come to me all you who have your act together. All you who need *nothing*. All you

whose burden is light and rest is great. But *all who labor and are heavy laden*. All who struggle, and are weighed down by the burdens of life. Burdens of your soul.

It’s a call to the cross, just as you are. And if that describes you, make it your heart this evening. Your commitment.

Burdened and heavy laden, I come just as I am.

Instead of shrinking back, make that your vow. If the cares of this world are bogging you down, bring them. If *many a conflict* or *many a doubt* are heavy on your heart, bring them. If the issues of our day are a burden to your soul, bring them. If fightings within or fears without are nagging at your soul, bring them. Just as you are.

Bring them just as *you* are, and leave them just as *they* are. That’s where the relief is. That’s where the rest is. Bringing your burdens to the cross, and leaving them there. Make that your heart. *Oh, Lamb of God, I come.* (**Summary**)

➤ Or maybe your obstacle is weakness. You’re just exhausted. Physically so. So tired you can barely think, let alone keep going.

The Apostle Paul was like that. With some sort of thorn in his flesh, he *pleaded* with the Lord to relieve him (**2 Cor 12:9**). And instead, he heard the words, “*My grace is sufficient for you; for my power is made perfect in weakness.*”

My *grace* is sufficient God said. “You don’t *need* relief. In fact, you don’t want it, Paul. Because your weakness is the perfect state for my power. The perfect setting for me to *strengthen* you in your difficulty. The perfect greenhouse for my blessing. Something *far* better than relief.”*****

Good Friday is a good time to *remind* yourself of that. To come just as you are, waiting for nothing. Waiting not for strength and waiting not for relief. Not even waiting to rid your soul “of one dark blot.” Because it’s only at the cross where that’s found anyway.

Don’t *wait* for the strength to come. Don’t *wait* for the hope. Don’t *wait* for the forgiveness. Come and get it. Strength for today *and* hope for tomorrow. Forgiveness now *and* later. And more power than you could ever need. Good Friday is a good time to remember that.

A good time to make this your heart:

Weak and needing strength, I come just as I am.

Many of you are struggling with chronic pain, and this is for you. Many, with illness or injury, and this is for you. Many with a debilitating disease. You’re not only tired, you’re weak.

And it’s not only *okay* that you come to the cross, it’s imperative. You must. There’s no other way. No other way to find strength, no other way to find hope, no other way to overcome, and no other way to persevere. Because God’s grace is sufficient for you, too. His power is made perfect in your weakness, too.

So come just as you are. And if Jesus chooses to heal, praise the Lord. But if he doesn't, if he chooses to give you the grace of his power instead, the grace of his strength to keep on keeping on; praise the Lord for that as well. Either way, come. **(Summary)**

➤ And last, I think the biggest obstacle of all, is shame. Shame due to sin in your life. Certainly unrepentant sin. But even shame over sin you've confessed. Especially if you keep trying and failing. Trying and falling. Your path littered with so many reminders of failure it looks like a garbage dump. Shame is *massive* obstacle to the cross.

If that's you, can I encourage you with something? Two things actually. First, at least your shame indicates that your soul hasn't become numb. Calloused to the point of not caring. Praise God for that. Your spirit is still tender.

And second, be encouraged by the fact that you haven't so quenched the Holy Spirit, that he's left you to your own devices. Be thankful. On both counts.

But don't try him. And don't flirt with disaster regarding your soul. Whatever the cause of your shame, don't let it keep you from the cross. Don't let it keep you from the table. Don't let it keep you from exposing your soul to the life-changing presence of Jesus.

Ashamed and desperate for grace, I come just as I am.
Adopt that mindset. Shame and all.

And while you're at it, recognize that shame is a liar. Telling you that "you *can't* approach. You're too far gone. And it's not worth fight even if you aren't." All lies.

And the only way to overcome them, the only way to remove your shame, is to throw yourself at the mercy of the cross, and admit your need for grace. Grace to wash over your soul and cleanse from within. Grace that is greater than all your sin.

It's the only way. Otherwise, your heart will harden, the Spirit will recoil, and pretty soon you won't care.

So make come just as you are, shame and all. Trusting Jesus to receive you, arms open wide. To *welcome, pardon, cleanse, and relieve*. **(Summary)** Just as you are to the old rugged cross, to emphasize its importance, renew your repentance, and rest in his forgiveness.

Prayer – Lord, we come just as we are and we couldn't be more grateful. Bless you. Thank you for our grace, your mercy, your sacrifice, and your forgiveness. We remember you now for all you've done, and worship you for it.

The Lord's Table

We're going to approach The Lord's Table a bit differently this time. Instead of passing the elements, we're going to invite you to come get them. To come to the cross, if you will, just as you are.

So let me encourage you to take a few minutes to get right with God and reflect on what this day means, and then go to one of the stations to receive the bread and cup. The bread symbolizing the *death* of Jesus for our *sin*; and the cup symbolizing the *salvation* of Jesus for our *life*.

Then, when you've returned to your seat, hang on to them, and when everyone is ready, we'll sing *Just As I Am* together. After which we'll eat and drink together.

The Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, [24] and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. (1 Cor 11:23)

Representing the death of Jesus for our sin, and his sustenance for life – *Do this* [he said] *in remembrance of me.* (Eat)

In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood (1 Cor 11:25). This cup and what it contains, is symbolic of God's promise of salvation, the New Covenant, bought and guaranteed by the shed blood of Jesus.

Do this [he said], *as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."* (Drink)

Close – (Stand) While on the cross – *Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), "I thirst." [29] A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth. [30] When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, "It is finished," and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. (Jn 19:28–30)*

You are loved