

Why Is Good Friday Good?

I write these words on Friday of the Easter week. This is the week that we commemorate the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And Good Friday is the day we mark as the day of Christ's crucifixion. Some scholars insist that the death of our Lord had to take place on Wednesday to get three whole and entire days in the tomb. Although some of these arguments have validity, I believe the common historical Christian tradition has the correct day of our Lord's death as Friday, because of the timing of the Passover and, suffice it to say, in the Hebrew tradition, any part of the day was considered a whole. One other point, Dr. Ed Reese, who started his biblical education many years ago at Moody Bible Institute, who sat under the greatest Bible teachers of the twentieth century and who has spent a great portion of his life editing *The Chronological Bible*, believes our Lord was crucified on Friday. We had some detailed talks about this during my tenure as a junior professor with him in Indiana.

The reason for this writing is to ask, why is Good Friday good? In the German culture this day is called *Karfreitag*. The *Kar* part is an obsolete word, the ancestor of the English word *care* in the sense of *cares and woes*, and it meant *mourning*. So in German, it is Mourning Friday. And that is what the disciples did on that day—they mourned. They thought all was lost. The Church has called this day Holy Friday, Black Friday, as well Great Friday.

Etymology may give us insight in the naming of this day. An archaic meaning of "good" is something akin to "holy." Thus, it used to mean "Holy Friday." Another archaic meaning of "good" is "God," just as "good-bye" means "God be with you." Thus, it could be used to mean "God's Friday." We can see why some would say it was God's way of saying, "Good-bye" as He, through Christ dies on the cross. This thought bears a tender touch to the day. It was recognized that the evils of that day lead to the greatest good, the salvation of mankind. Thus, despite the bad, the day was truly good.

Chris Armstrong in *Christianity Today* writes, "Of course, the church has always understood that the day commemorated on Good Friday was anything but happy. Sadness, mourning, fasting, and prayer have been its focus since the early centuries of the church. A fourth-century church manual, the Apostolic Constitutions, called Good Friday a 'day of mourning, not a day of festive joy.' Ambrose, the fourth-century archbishop who befriended the notorious sinner Augustine of Hippo before his conversion, called it the 'day of bitterness on which we fast.'" *Cadre* comments, "Many Christians have historically kept their churches unlit or draped in dark cloths. Processions of penitents have walked in black robes or carried black-robed statues of Christ and the Virgin Mary. And worshippers have walked the "Stations of the Cross," praying and singing their way past 14 images representing Jesus' steps along the Via Dolorosa to Golgotha.

Yet, despite—indeed because of—its sadness, Good Friday is truly good. Its sorrow is a godly sorrow. It is like the sadness of the Corinthians who wept over the sharp letter from their dear teacher, Paul, convicted of the sin in their midst, hearing of their distress, said in II Corinthians 7:10, '*For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death*.'

Yes, I will call this day good for three good reasons.

1. It is good because Christ died in our place.

Every year at the time of the "*This is the LORD' doing; it is marvellous in our eyes. This is the day which the LORD hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it. Save now, I beseech thee, O LORD: O LORD, I beseech thee, send now prosperity. Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the*

LORD: we have blessed you out of the house of the LORD. God is the LORD, which hath shewed us light: bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar.” (Psalm 118: 23,24). We see from the wording, the binding of the sacrifice to the altar. In this, we have the understanding of the Passover lamb, a vicarious substitute who would be in our stead. Yet, a mere lamb would not be able to truly bring this joy to one’s heart. When Isaac was traveling up Mount Moriah to be sacrificed, he queried, “...*My father: and he said, Here am I, my son. And he said, Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering? And Abraham said, My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering...*” (Genesis 22:7,8). You remember the story, when Abraham was about to sacrifice Isaac, God stopped him and brought his attention to a male lamb, caught in the thorn bush by his horns. Abraham took the lamb and sacrificed the lamb in the place of his son. This was prophetic of what God, our Heavenly Father would do. He would allow thorns to be placed upon His Son’s head and Christ would die in our place as the sacrificial Lamb who would be our Atonement on the Passover. God performs a play on word by saying in Scripture, “...*God will provide Himself a lamb for a burnt offering...*” God literally declared His plans, which would be that God Himself would die in our place. *Jehovah Jireh*, “God will provide.” And the provision was Himself, our Lamb!

So Christ dies on this Good Friday. The righteous, for the unrighteous. The Sinless One, for the sinning ones. The Holy One, for the unholy ones. Crucified for the condemned. Cut off for the cast outs. Therefore, our response to this magnificent exchange is: “...*we will rejoice and be glad in it.*” (Psalm 118: 24). We would have no hope and no chance to ever be saved unless Christ took our place on that cross. Others could love us, even enough to die for us, but the only offering the Holy Father would take is the sacrifice of perfection. Only one could do this: “*Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his (Christ’s) own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us*” (Hebrews 9:12).

2. It is good because all our sin was paid in full.

When Jesus died on the cross He said, “...*It is finished...*” (John 19:30). Imagine, if you will a Rembrandt having just lay down his paintbrush for the last time after applying the finishing stroke to *The Mona Lisa*. Imagine Da Vinci finally stepping back because he was done with *The Last Supper*. Imagine Michelangelo placing his mallet down or whatever instrument he used last to be done with his *David*. Imagine also them saying to a loved one or friend, “I am finished.” If I were there I would be tempted to ask, “Gentlemen, do you realize what you have finished? For centuries to come, thousands will stand in line just to get a glimpse of what you finished on canvas and marble.” I am sure they, who had the artist’s eye knew better than anyone, the masterpiece before them. But I dare say that Rembrandt, Da Vinci and Michelangelo did not have a clue to the magnitude of their accomplishments. When Jesus died, He undertook better than any, the masterpiece He had accomplished. His finished work was not left in canvas or marble; it was inscribed on our hearts and in the changed lives that Christians have the ability to live all because of the finished work of Calvary. “*For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him*” (II Corinthians 5:21). “*Having abolished in his flesh the enmity...for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace*” (Ephesians 2:15).

3. It is good because it is not the end of the story.

If all ended at the cross, it would have most definitely been a bad Friday. But to use the phrase of an old minister who said it best, “It was Friday; it looked bad; the disciples were sad...but that was Friday...Sunday was ‘a comin’!” And Resurrection Day - Easter Sunday came! It dispelled the doom and gloom and gave us the promise that because He now lives we too shall live with Him! There never could or would have been an Easter if it had not been for Friday. Christ had to die in order to conquer death. So, it was Good Friday after all! “*For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled*

to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life” (Romans 5:10).

- Pastor Pope -

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