

The Four Deaths of Good Friday

On the day that Jesus died, four very different deaths occurred and were recorded for us.

The first was the death of Judas. Judas had sinned against Jesus in a big way. In Judas's mind, Jesus was a disappointment who didn't live up to the expectations that Judas had of Him (Mark 14:3-11). When given the choice of serving the Lord or pursuing wealth, Judas chose the money and turned against the Lord (Luke 22:4-6). However, the guilt of that eventually caught up to Judas, and he realised exactly how evil his actions had been. But then Judas made another terrible decision and sought escape from his guilt by taking his own life (Matt 27:3-5). He died by gruesome suicide and became the icon of betrayal, guilt, and death (Acts 1:16-19).

Another man who died that day was the psychological opposite of Judas. This man died on one of the crosses next to Jesus. He was a criminal who deserved the death penalty (Lk 23:41a). Instead of dealing with his guilt through psychological flight ending in suicide, this man suppressed his guilt by fighting. He cursed Jesus who had lived a better life than he had. Instead of acknowledging his guilt, he only wanted relief from the consequences of his wrongdoing, demanding of Jesus to end his suffering (Luke 23:39). Later, he died (John 19:31-32), full of guilt, experiencing the just punishment of his sin, persisting in his anger against God.

On the other side of Jesus, on the third cross, was a criminal just like the first. He too was receiving the just punishment of his sinful life. This criminal had the same guilt as the first criminal, but dealt with it very differently. Instead of hating God for how his life was lived, this man had come to fear God

for His righteous justice (Luke 23:40). Instead of fighting the punishment of his sin, this man confessed it as just (Luke 23:41a). Instead of hating the truth about Jesus, this man confessed it as his own conviction (Luke 23:41b). Instead of demanding deliverance from Jesus, this man asked Jesus for mercy regarding life after death (Luke 23:42). He did not hide his sin. He did not reject the truth about Jesus. He entrusted his soul to Jesus, and when he died later that day, he was transported to Paradise where he was reunited with Jesus (Luke 23:43).

Then, most important of them all, Jesus died that day. He died, not for his own sin, but for our sins (Isa 53:5; 1 Cor 15:3). He died not as a sinner, but as a substitute for sinners (2 Cor 5:21). Jesus died to absorb all the wrath of God directed at us (1 John 2:2) Jesus died to save us from the wrath of God (Rom 5:9). Jesus died so all who believe in Him will not perish, but have eternal life (John 3:16). Jesus died to reconcile us to God (1 Pet 3:18). Jesus died to represent us before the Father (Luke 12:8-9; 1 John 2:1). Jesus died to redeem us from the punishment of our sin (Heb 9:15). Jesus died so we might die to sin and live righteously (1 Pet 2:24).

On that day, four deaths have been recorded. One died shamefully trying to rid himself of his guilt. One died angrily trying to suppress his guilt. One died acknowledging his guilt, believing in the Lord Jesus, and received eternal life. Jesus died, not as a guilty sinner, not as an angry sinner, not as a sinner needing mercy, but as a sacrifice for sin.

Since God has provided the sacrifice for our sin, let us confess our sins, for He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).