

DCF:

Were you there? Were you there on this day that Christians around the world are observing? Were you there on that first Good Friday so many years ago? At first, that seems like a rather silly question. That day happened years and years ago. We weren't even a twinkle in our greatgrandparents eyes. Perhaps you're thinking the answer is pretty obvious. But before you answer, consider the following.

We know some of the people who were there when they crucified our Lord. Some Roman soldiers were there. They had to be. It was their job, and they carried it out with brutal efficiency. None of them realized that when they drove home the nails and divided up Jesus' clothes, they were fulfilling prophecies that were hundreds of years old. But one of the soldiers, a centurion, did recognize that the man hanging on the middle cross was different. He confessed that Jesus was the Son of God.

Two other criminals were there, and they didn't have a choice either. They were being punished for their crimes. One of them even acknowledged that they were getting what their deeds deserved. But after he confessed his sins, he also confessed his faith by asking Jesus to remember him. And Jesus assured him that they would soon be reunited in paradise.

The Jewish leaders were there, perhaps to make sure that Pilate would follow through on his pledge to execute Jesus. They had waited a long time for this. They were going to enjoy this. In their minds they had won a great victory, but instead of being gracious winners they got nasty. They taunted and jeered and challenged Jesus to come down from his cross, totally oblivious to the fact that at any moment he could descend and destroy them all.

Even if Pontius Pilate was not physically present at Golgotha, he made his presence known by having a sign posted above Jesus' cross. It read, "JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS" (Jn 19:19). When some wanted him to change what he wrote, the Roman governor suddenly grew a backbone and denied their request. But for Pilate it was too little, too late.

It would be nice to be able to say that all the disciples were there to give support to their Lord in his dying hours. But they weren't. They had deserted Jesus the night before in the garden. They had abandoned him in his time of need, just as Jesus had predicted. Only one disciple, John, had come to Calvary. And another person Jesus dearly loved stood by his side.

Jesus' mother was there on Good Friday, and what Mary witnessed must have made her heart break. As a young girl she had received the amazing news from the angel Gabriel that God had chosen her to give birth to the promised Messiah. But not long after that child was born, she received some news that wasn't so good. In Jerusalem, in the temple, while holding her perfect child in his arms, Simeon predicted that a sword would pierce Mary's soul. And as she watched her son slowly dying before her eyes, Mary could fully understand what those words meant.

Every one of the people we mentioned had a part to play on that first Good Friday. And sadly, so did we. Were you there? Physically, the obvious answer is no. You and I are separated from that day by thousands of miles and thousands of years, so unless we have access to a time machine it would be impossible for us to be there.

But spiritually, we were. Sadly, not in a good way. Not in a way that would bring honor and happiness to any person. We were there, in a sense, because of our sins. We didn't come up with the charges that were used to convict Jesus. We didn't hand down the order to crucify Jesus. None of us wielded the hammer that drove the nails through his hands, but we were there because our sins were there. Every single one of our sins - the ones we've already committed and the ones we will in the future - were on Jesus' shoulders as the anger of God rained down on them. Jesus carried them there, and on the cross he bore the crushing burden of the sins of humanity.

That means our sin is the reason God's Son had to suffer and die. That means you and I are no less guilty than the people who were directly responsible for Jesus' death. If you are having a hard time accepting that, if you want to put that charge to the test, don't look around and compare yourself with the Roman soldiers or the Jewish leaders or the AWOL disciples or anyone else who was there on Good Friday. Look up at the cross. Look deep inside and examine your heart and compare yourself with Jesus.

God commands that we love Him with all our heart. Have we? Or are there times we pushed Him aside? Times when we surfed the internet rather than read His Word. Times we talked to our friends but didn't talk to our Lord in prayer. Times when our minds wandered during worship and we zoned out during the prayers. Times when we didn't follow God's will because we just didn't feel like it.. I start thinking about the times-way too many times-when I withheld forgiveness and held on to grudges instead. We all are in desperate need of a miracle to be rescued from our sins.

The man who performed so many miracles during his ministry didn't look like a miracle worker on Good Friday. He looked weak and helpless. Stripped of his clothing. Stripped of his dignity. Bloodied. Beaten. Unable to carry his cross. Barely able to stand. Jesus had been defeated. The devil thought that he had won the day. The Son of God is dead! Little did he know that he was playing right into God's hands. All the events of Good Friday were integral events in God's plan of saving us from hell. It may look to many as if Jesus lost the battle against sin. After all, He died. But in truth, His death and resurrection prove that He won the greatest battle this universe had ever seen. It was the battle for eternity for you and me.

It was a couple days after Good Friday. The disciples, the same people who were nowhere to be found on Calvary, gathered together behind locked doors. They were confused about what had just happened. They were fearful about the future. They became even more afraid when what they thought was a ghost appeared among them. But this was no apparition. It was the Lord, and he brought them a message of peace. And then Jesus did something else, something special, something personal, something that instantly allayed their fears. He showed them his hands.

Scars are not usually attractive, but for the disciples those nail marks were the most beautiful thing they had ever seen. And the beauty of those scars is not lost on us either. Those wounds remind us of the high cost of our redemption. Jesus took on our flesh. Jesus felt our pain. Jesus endured the righteous wrath of God in our place. Jesus prayed for our forgiveness on the cross, and he suffered and died on the cross to earn it.

The unconditional, sacrificial love of Jesus is what makes this day good. When your sins condemn you, He intercedes for you. When Satan seeks to devour you, Jesus will defend you. When you are feeling guilty, spiritually empty, totally unworthy of God's love, remember what Jesus has done to save you. Remember that he will never leave you or forsake you. Remember that he has ascended into heaven to prepare a place for you.

**“WERE YOU THERE?”** Oh, not physically, but spiritually because of your sins you were. And now, because of your faith in Him as your Savior, you are there as well. And that's a good thing. Here's what the Holy Spirit has to say about this through the apostle Paul in Romans 6:3<sup>3</sup>***Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? <sup>4</sup> We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. <sup>5</sup> If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection.***” Thank God you were there!

Amen.