

GOOD FRIDAY: THE MEANS OF GOD'S LOVE

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Here is what I want to do with you guys briefly tonight: I want to increase your joy on Easter morning. You see I was raised in a Christian home and I remember the dichotomy between Good Friday and Easter. On Good Friday you waste a Friday night at church, you talk about death, sing some old songs, and then you go home.

But on Easter Sunday, you wake up to an Easter basket, you go to church and have some breakfast, everyone is dressed in bright springy colors, you go home and there is a baked ham, if you're lucky, the Masters on, and everything is good. But I can tell you this, the true celebration of Easter, the sustainable joy of a resurrected Christ comes from the somber reality of this Good Friday.

The good news of Easter is better in light of the bad news of Good Friday. Good Friday is where we remember the brutal death of our savior and Jesus' death matters.

The death of Christ should be really important to us as Christians, because it was really important to God. It took all of three chapters of scripture for God to talk about Jesus' death. When cursing Satan the serpent, God said to him: **Gen 3:15**. God was going to bring about an offspring of Eve, and that offspring was going to destroy Satan, but in the process he was going to be bruised.

In the Old Testament you see stories like Abraham almost sacrificing his son, acting as a sort of analogy, a foreshadowing for things yet to come. And then you get to the Psalms we see the man after God's own heart, David, King of Israel from the line of Judah, saying in Psalm 22 that God had forsaken him, that he was handed over to his enemies. The very Psalm that Jesus himself recited as he was dying on a cross.

Then we get to the prophets, specifically Isaiah 53. Isaiah is speaking of this suffering servant and look at the language God himself is using to describe him: verse 4, **smitten by God and afflicted**, verse 5 **he was crushed**, verse 8, **By oppression and judgment he was taken away**, the most stunning comes in verse 10, **Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him; he has put him to grief**.

Do you see that? Not only does God care about Jesus' death, but it was God's will that Jesus die. Not just that he die, but that he be smitten, afflicted, crushed and oppressed.

This doctrine is a hard one to swallow. It has been called cruel and barbaric. To the secular eye the idea that God would willingly kill his son stands in direct opposition to the idea that God is love. Some have even called the cross of Christ "cosmic child abuse." Why is it that an all powerful God had to send his son to die? Why couldn't he come and establish love and peace forever through a perfect example of right living? Why did Jesus have to endure pain, suffering, mockery, nails, thorns and jeers? Why did Jesus have to die? He didn't. You did.

Jesus didn't have to die. We did.

Ever since Eve sinned in the garden, we are born sinners. God said eat from this tree and you will die. We ate from the tree. We became enemies of God. The apostle Paul describes our state as dead in our trespasses and by nature children of wrath like the rest of mankind.

Because sinners deserved death, the people in the Old Testament instated all sorts of sacrifices. They would kill animals like they were going out of style because they knew that death was necessary due to their sin.

But here was the problem. They would sacrifice animals on a Monday, and come next Monday they needed to offer a new one again. And then the next week and then the next week. In Hebrews the Author talks about these sacrifices. In **Hebrews 9:9** we see that these sacrifices didn't deal with the problem. They could offer sacrifice after sacrifice but they would still never be satisfied because their conscious would still condemn them, they were still sinners, and their sin was simply being covered.

Look at **Hebrews 10:3-4**. Unless sin is dealt with, you are still condemned. Unless sin is dealt with we are still objects of wrath.

The bad news of Good Friday is that it stands as a signal of our brokenness. If you want to see how good of a person you are, look at the cross. That wood was hewn for you. Those nails shaped for you. That death meant for you.

But...look at what Hebrews says: **Hebrews 11-12, 25-28**

You see the cross isn't a sign of God's love. If the cross was just a sign, God would be cruel. If the cross were simply proof of love, then God is not loving. You see the cross isn't simply the sign of God's love, it's the means of God's love.

God showed his love for us in this, that he sent his son to die on a cross in place of us, so that those who believe in him, might live with him. When you look at the cross, you have two options. You can either look at the cross and choose to die on it for your own sins, spending eternity in hell. Or you can choose to look at the cross and gaze at the innocent lamb who died so that you might live.

This is the sustaining joy of Easter. We carry with us this reality that Christ died for me. On Good Friday we weep over our sinful brokenness, but we rejoice over Christ's sacrificial brokenness for our sin.

I just want to close with one brief passage from Jesus' trial. **Matthew 27:24-25**. You see what I love about the cross is that it is the great reversal. And as we close with communion and song, I want us to sing the redeemed words of this crowd. In bloodthirsty rage this crowd cried for Christ's blood to be spilled on them and their children. What they cried in anger, we cry in hope and worship. The hope that Christ's blood paid for our own on that cross. And the worship that we get to spend eternity with him to the glory of God the Father.

This is what makes Good Friday good.