

Good Friday Devotional

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Seriously about the events of our Lord's crucifixion. It's sobering because the transaction that took place on that cross between God and his Son was a payment for sin; our sin, not his; our transgressions, not his; our guilt, not his. So as we come together on Good Friday, standing as we do in the shadow of the cross, it is good and it is right for us to pause, to think, to pray, to consider, the wonderful sacrifice that our Savior gave for our sin.

So tonight we're going to have meditations on the theme of God's Son coming to do what other sons throughout biblical history could not do. We're going to sing together of the cross, of what Christ has accomplished for us there, and we're going to have meditation and prayer. And at the end of that time, you can stay as long as you will, Trish will continue to play or you can get up at any point that you want to and quietly make your way home, and then let's prepare for the great announcement of Easter Sunday morning that this crucified Savior is raised again.

Let's begin in prayer.

Our Father, as we do every year at this time, we take a moment out of our schedules, we pause, we reflect, we meditate upon the sacrifice that you have given in our place, the just for the unjust, he who was righteous and without sin for those of us who were anything but righteous. Father, we thank you for the gift of our Savior and we recognize that we stand before you accepted and adopted into your family solely because of the transaction, the great transaction that took place on Calvary. We relish the thought that our Savior came into this world with such condescending love for us that he should give of himself freely, happily, and for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross despising the shame, and is now, having accomplished all that he set out to do, seated at your right hand. So Father, remind us of our sin and remind us of your great forgiveness, that there is now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus because of what has been accomplished on the cross of Christ. For it is in his name that we pray this. Amen.

Thousands of years before Good Friday, a man and a woman stood facing each other with the realization that their lives would never be the same. There was a look in each of their eyes of sadness and fear that revealed that they had betrayed one another and they had betrayed their God. Their marriage had been perfect, literally it had been perfect. No bitterness. No jealousies. No pettiness. No bickering. Their future together was brighter

than any of us sitting here today could ever imagine. They would raise their children who would be everything any parent could hope for, talented and attractive, respectful and obedient, with all the right priorities. Their grandchildren were destined to be a joy. There would be no black sheep in their family to bring them heartache. Their finances were secure, no debts, no unpaid bills. Their home was lavish. Their health perfect.

But now all that had changed. This couple would become the prototype for all humanity. They were the original dysfunctional family. One of their sons would kill his brother and have to leave home to wander the rest of his life in nomadic exile. And while their descendants would create cities and culture and show a small inkling of their potential, they also spiraled downward into every sort of moral deviance. In time, God would say that he was sorry that he had created any of them.

As they stood on this day looking at one another, something terrible had come between them. Their eyes had been opened to see their own frail humanity. They realized in that moment that they had squandered every good thing that the Lord had given them. They had been ungrateful. They had been unbelieving. They lost sight of all that God had provided for them and had become fixated on the one thing they were denied. They had turned in rebellion against a good and gracious Creator who had made them his representatives in this world.

Foolishly, they have allowed themselves to be seduced by a cunning imposter, the ultimate con artist, the confidence man who would convince them to give up all that they had for what he was offering. They wouldn't be the last humans to fall for his tricks. On this fateful day, they had a new word enter their vocabulary: shame. Now, thousands of years before Good Friday, Adam and Eve need a new Son to destroy their enemy, cover their nakedness, and take away their shame.

Let's stand together and sing our first hymn.

Two thousand years before Good Friday, a man and his son walked quietly up a mountain. They had been traveling for two days and now on the third, they had arrived at their destination. It would be the first time in biblical history that something momentous happened on the third day. It would not be the last. The young man looked at his father. He was serious. He had the look of someone who was carrying a great burden and yet he wouldn't speak of it. His father's faith was great but even great faith can be tested severely.

There was a special bond between these two. The boy had been born into his home when his mother and father were quite old. He had brought them incredible joy, all the more so now that his older half-brother was gone. He had been named Laughter. Their home had been filled with much laughter but on this trip, not so much, for you see, the father knew what waited for them up on Mount Moriah. God had spoken to him and asked him to do the hardest thing imaginable, the Lord had commanded him to sacrifice his own son. We know that he believed that God would be true to his covenant promises and that if the boy

died, God would raise him from the dead, but that knowledge didn't ease the strain of what he now had to do.

So now on the morning of the third day, these two trudged up the mountain carrying almost everything they would need for a sacrifice. The boy unsuspecting and completely trusting, turns to his father and asks a simple and yet prophetic question, "Father, I see the wood and the fire but where is the lamb?" On that morning, 2,000 years before Good Friday, Abraham needed God to provide another Son as his sacrifice.

Please stand to sing.

Fourteen hundred years before Good Friday, a Jewish family was scampering around their home gathering up all of their possessions and preparing to move. They didn't have much. They didn't need to list their home with a realtor since they had always rented, they had never owned. In fact, no one in their families had ever owned a title deed to property, not their parents, grandparents or any generation before their own. They had been taught that God had given them property but for 400 years they had lived in another nation on the wrong side of the tracks as an increasingly despised race of people. After such a long time, it's easy to forget who you are and where you belong, and if their landlords had not treated them so badly and constantly reminded them that they belonged to an inferior race, they might have lost all of their identity as it was.

They were slaves under the ownership of a very cruel master. They were working long hours for little pay. Their size made them a threat to their owners and to curtail intimacy that led to more children, the men were kept working at very hard labor. But now they were moving and quickly. A series of unexpected and miraculous events caused their owner to grant their freedom; there were acts of divine judgment against the master including the death of his firstborn son. It was as if God was saying, "Israel is my firstborn. You have tormented him long enough and the penalty of your crimes is the death of your own son."

On this night while Egyptian families were weeping from the deaths of thousands of young men, this Jewish family gathered around a table to eat roasted lamb and bitter herbs and unleavened bread in a home where blood had been sprinkled on the door. Fourteen hundred years before Good Friday, this Jewish family needed a firstborn Son to die that they might be freed from their bondage.

One thousand years before Good Friday, the father sat motionless at the bedside of his infant son. He was a great man who in so many ways embodied all that God wants from us. He was a leader of men, courageous and daring. He was a military genius who inspired unbelievable loyalty from his troops. As the nation's highest leader, he had brought her to the zenith of her power. He was a poet. He was a musician. He was writing some of the world's greatest hymns; we sing them still today.

He was known to be a very open lover of Israel's God but his greatness can do nothing for this little boy. As he watches the infant struggle to breathe, his heart breaks. He knows that his son's illness is the direct result of his own sin. He had drifted, like so many of us do. While his army was at war, he remained home. While men were dying on the front lines, he was having an illicit affair with the wife of one of his soldiers. When she became pregnant, he tried to hide his sin and then he compounded it when he had her husband killed. In judgment for his sin, God would take the life of his son.

For a full seven days, the boy struggles to live. For that time, his father will not eat, will not receive any comfort from any of his friends. They try to console him. They beg him to eat but he is almost comatose. He doesn't reply. Instead, he lies on the hard pavement of his palace and he prays. He confesses his sin and he prays these words, "Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love. According to your abundant mercy, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin." One thousand years before Good Friday, King David needs another Son to die so that he might be cleansed from his sin.

Six hundred years before Good Friday, a Jewish exile in Babylon stands in a vision before the carnage of thousands of Israel's sons. Her great army has been destroyed and all that is left of her young men is a valley full of dry bones. This vision was meant to communicate to this young prophet the utter hopelessness of Israel's future apart from a sovereign work of God.

Many years after her exodus from Egyptian slavery, she is now again in exile, this time in Babylon. Tragically, her history has now come full circle. Israel has lost her land, her freedom, and her temple.

In another vision, the prophet sees the glory of God exit from Jerusalem. If she has lost God's presence, she has lost everything and it's her own fault. She had substituted idols for Yahweh, even setting them up in his own house. She had intermarried with the unbelieving nations around her. Despite repeated warnings and years of judgment, she remained unrepentant. Now the best and the brightest of her sons had been taken away from her and the nation is just a morbid collection of dry, dusty, lifeless bones.

This should not have come as a surprise. Moses had warned Israel many years earlier that this is precisely what would happen if she neglected to do all that God's covenant had required. "You are unmindful of the Rock that bore you and you forgot the God who gave you birth," he wrote. The Lord saw it and spurned them because of the provocation of his sons and daughters and he said, "I will hide my face from them. I will see what their end will be, for they are a perverse generation, children in whom is no faithfulness."

Is there any hope left for these exiles? Will God's people live again? Will their future be different from their past? Can their stony heart be replaced with a heart that beats after God? Can they break free from the disastrous cycle of repentance, sin, and judgment? Is

there any possibility that they will ever live under a covenant that produces life and not death? Or, as God asked the prophet, "Son of Man, can these bones live?"

Now, 600 years before Good Friday, as Ezekiel stands and looks at the dry bones of Israel's sons, his only hope is the resurrection of another Son whose body would lay lifeless in a grave, a new Prophet who would bring a new covenant and grant a new heart to a dead people.

On Good Friday, the Father turns away from his Son. It is an act of justice. It is an act of love. It is the culmination of thousands of years of redemptive history, a divine drama set against the backdrop of sin and rebellion and judgment and promises. The sacrifice of Jesus, God's only begotten Son, replaces shame with confidence and covers the nakedness of Adam's children. He is the God-appointed sacrifice for all, who like Abraham, trust in the promises of their God. For every great sinner like David who has been crushed under the weight of their sin and guilt, God's Son brings the restored joy of salvation. He gives a new heart to the spiritually dead who would never live apart from the life-giving Spirit. That gift, coming in a new covenant, has written God's law on our hearts and assures us that we will return from our own exile to the land that he has promised us.

"For while we were enemies, you were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. He has taken, by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh. For those whom he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things. I have been crucified with Christ, nevertheless, I live but it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and who gave himself for me. But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, that he might redeem those who are under the law."

So now, our Father, we are grateful to you that your Son made flesh, taking on the form of humanity in all of its weaknesses and its frailties, suffering in order that he might taste death for every one of us, has been raised gloriously from that grave and even now is seated as our great Advocate and Mediator between us and you, the man Christ Jesus. We thank you that you desired to have him as the firstborn of many sons and daughters, and we who were ruined by Adam's fall, who like Abraham struggled with our own faith, who looked and saw our sin and our guilt like David, who needed desperately a new heart like Ezekiel's dead army, have come to see in him the hope of the nations, the only hope that we have. We thank you that we can call you our Father and that your Spirit has been shed abroad in our hearts to display to us your love, to make it known to us all, and to remind us of who we are, sons and daughters of God, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ. We who were made a little lower than the angels have been crowned with your

glory and with your honor and one day we will rule and reign with Christ Jesus. In this hour, and this weekend, help us to think of him often; to meditate on his work for us; to ponder it so that we might both confess our sins and acknowledge our guilt and rejoice in your forgiveness which is abundant and free, for where our sin has abounded, your grace has super-abounded and that's our hope. On this solemn occasion when we quietly ponder the work of Christ, lead us back to the cross and then to the empty tomb and then to your right hand to see our Savior exulted in all of his glory, given a place of preeminence in the universe, and know that he is ours and we are his, and that means everything for us. All of this we ask in his blessed name and for his sake. Amen.