

Good Friday, the Great Eucatastrophe

1. What is “Good Friday”?¹

What is Good Friday? Good Friday is an oxymoron, a day of irony, of painful paradoxes. Irony makes us... laugh and think more clearly. Irony makes us see familiar things with fresh eyes.

But Good Friday is not just a day of ordinary irony. It is THE day of the THE Ultimate Irony. It is the most **catastrophic** day in all of history! But it's a **good** catastrophe. It is a Eucatastrophe, the Great Eucatastrophe. The execution of Jesus on that Roman Cross on that Friday afternoon nearly two thousand years ago was the greatest, most complete, the ultimate Eucatastrophe ever and that will ever be.

J.R.R. Tolkien coined this phrase to explain how good things can come from catastrophes, how **unpredictable redemption can be won in the midst of unimaginable loss**. But Tolkien's standard was not fiction or fantasy like his Lord of the Rings. He believed all of the happy endings in all of our fairy tales were but faint echoes of the real gospel of the real good news. Speaking of the story of Jesus' life, ministry, death and resurrection, Tolkien said: **“There is no tale ever told that men would rather find was true...But this story is supreme; and it is true.”**

Tonight we stare into the day of irony, the day of Eucatastrophe, this Good Friday. With God's help let us stare into the good catastrophe of the cross with fresh eyes.

- First we will see how Good Friday is a Eucatastrophe for Jesus.²
- And then we will see how Jesus' Eucatastrophe is good news for us.

2. Jesus' Eucatastrophe (Mark 14-15)

Jesus' death is filled with irony. Tonight we'll only look at five of them by walking through Mark 14-15.

a. The Greatest Friend is betrayed and abandoned by his friends.

You would think that Jesus' last night with his disciples with his friends would be special. It was but in an astonishing way. That night he would be betrayed and abandoned by his friends. We see in Mark 14:10 that Judas had already made plans to sell Jesus out—to trade the Messiah for

¹ Preached to Atmosphere Church, Oak Hill Campus, April 10, 2009 Good Friday Service.

² Particularly helpful and influential to my preparation of heart, mind and sermon were C.J. Mahaney, “The Scream of the Damned” in his book *Living the Cross Centered Life*, 89-95 and John Piper, “The Incomparable Sufferings: The Anguish of Jesus Christ,” in his book *Seeing and Savoring Jesus Christ*, 73-78.

money. But Jesus knew all about. He even brought it up as they ate the Passover Meal together.

Mark 14:17-19

And when it was evening, he came with the twelve.¹⁸ And as they were reclining at table and eating, Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me."¹⁹ They began to be sorrowful and to say to him one after another, "Is it I?"

Jesus knew it was Judas. And later that night, Judas would betray his friend with, of all things...a kiss (Mark 14:44-46).

**Why did it have to be a friend
Who chose to betray the Lord
And why did he use a kiss to show them
That's not what a kiss is for
Only a friend can betray a friend
A stranger has nothing to gain
And only a friend comes close enough
To ever cause so much pain.**
—Michael Card "Why?"

Not only was Jesus betrayed by Judas but he was also abandoned by Peter and the rest. In Mark 14:30-31 Jesus tells Peter, "You'll deny 3x." Peter shouts back, "No I'll die with you!" Then everyone else chimed in "Yeah, what Peter said! We'll die with you Jesus!" They would deny him. They did. They could not stay awake for their friend when he needed them the most (Mark 14:32-42). When the guards arrived with Judas to arrest Jesus we read these sad words "**And they all left him and fled**" (Mark 14:50).

Jesus had told them that night "**Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends**" (John 15:13). He was the Greater Friend who for his friends would lay down his life.

b. The Innocent is falsely accused by the guilty

Following Mark's account we see another aspect of Jesus' Eucatastrophe—Jesus, the Innocent One is falsely accused by the guilty. The Jewish leaders wanted Jesus dead. The problem was that they didn't have a good reason. He was innocent. They were guilty.

Mark 14:55-56

Now the chief priests and the whole Council were seeking testimony against Jesus to put him to death, but they found none. ⁵⁶ For many bore false witness against him, but their testimony did not agree.

As they tried to get their lying-story straight, you'd think that Jesus would speak up and defend himself?! But their loud, false accusations were smothered by Jesus' silence of truth. Yet they blindfold Jesus and spit on him and beat him with their fists and ridicule him "Prophecy! Tell us who hit you?!"

Years later, years after Peter's denial, he would reflect on Jesus' joke of trial.

1 Peter 2:22-23

He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.

Why didn't Jesus speak up? He knew his Father would have the last word.

c. The True King is mocked as a Court Jester

A third irony is the True King is mocked as a court jester.

When the Jewish leaders finished up their illegal, bogus trial they sent Jesus to the Roman leader in charge of Roman-Jewish Relations—Pilate. Pilate questioned him "**Are you the King of the Jews?**" (15:2). Jesus simply replied "**You have said so.**" (15:3). But then the Jewish leaders hurled all their best lies at Jesus. He refused to answer.

Pilate knew Jesus was innocent! John's gospel records Pilate saying "**I find no guilt in him**" (John 18:38). He even ceremonially washed his hands so that he wouldn't be guilty of Jesus' blood. But the leaders incited the crowd to shout "**Crucify him**" (Mark 15:14). And so he delivered Jesus to the most trained group of executioners.

Mark 15:17-20

And they clothed him in a purple cloak, and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on him. ¹⁸ And they began to salute him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" ¹⁹ And they were striking his head with a reed and spitting on him and kneeling down in homage to him. ²⁰ And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. And they led him out to crucify him.

Jesus, the true and rightful King of Heaven and Earth was reduced to a court Jester!

They stripped him nearly naked except for a royal purple robe. Instead of a crown of jewels and gold, they twisted a crown of thorns and crushed it into his skull. They played with him like a cat might play with a mouse or a lion might play with its prey just before devouring it. "Hail, King of the Jews." They teased and laughed in scorn. They gave him a staff for a scepter but then took it from his hands and beat him and beat him with hit on his head. They spat on him like he was trash. And they had the audacity to bow before him on their knees as if to worship him.

But it didn't end there. They led him to a hill outside the city, a place called Golgotha—Skull Hill. And it was there that the Great Eucatastrophe took place. Like the hundreds and thousands of thieves and rebels and the scum of the earth Jesus was crucified. Beaten and barely alive. Humiliated, naked. Hands and feet nailed to the cross. Between two robbers. With a sign over his head "The King of the Jews"—it was true, but it was meant as a joke.

d. The Savior of the world can't save himself.

As Jesus hung on that torture tree, bleeding, suffocating, dying a 1000 deaths...those passing by and those who gathered around had not pity. And here we see the fourth irony of Good Friday: The Savior of the world can't save himself.

Mark 15:29-31

And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days,³⁰ save yourself, and come down from the cross!" So also the chief priests with the scribes mocked him to one another, saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself.

"Without their knowing it, the mocking words these onlookers utter do in fact reveal the uniqueness of the Savior's death and why it mattered. In their spiritual blindness they in effect express sublime spiritual truth. For Jesus cannot both save Himself and save you and me. It's precisely because He refused to save Himself that He's able to save others."

--C. J. Mahaney³

Nails did not keep Jesus on the cross. No! His absolute trust in his Father's rescue plan kept him there. And the joy—oh, the joy of knowing that by refusing to save himself, he was saving us and all who have believe and will yet believe.

e. The True Son is forsaken by His Father

My friends, I don't think that we are even capable of grasping what's next. **"Nowhere in all the bible," writes one author, "do we encounter any mystery that so staggers the mind and**

³ Living the Cross Centered Life, 90.

shocks the Christian consciousness as this tortured cry from the lips of our dying Savior.”⁴ As excruciating and horrifying as Jesus’ physical suffering was, he experienced a suffering of the soul so much greater than we can imagine, a suffering more intense than anyone else has ever experienced. As Jesus was suspended between heaven and earth, the sky turned black and darkness engulfed the city in the middle of the day (Mark 15:33). No longer does Jesus pray to his “Father.” Instead He screams out **“My God, My God! Why have you forsaken me!”** (Mark 15:34)

The true Son of God is forsaken by his True Father! The infinite love and acceptance and fellowship that Jesus has enjoyed from eternity past is ripped away!

Jesus drank from the cup that he prayed that his Father would take away. He drank the cup of the Father’s full and furious wrath that had been stored up from Adam’s sin to the end of time.

**Till on the Cross as Jesus died, The wrath of God was satisfied.
For every sin on him was laid, Here in the death of Christ I live!
--Getty and Townend, “In Christ Alone”**

He received what every human in history has deserved and he alone did not deserve!

But Jesus is not confused. He is fulfilling his great, great great...grandfather’s prophecy. Hundreds of years before, King David prophesied this cry of the God-forsaken Savior in Psalm 22. And while Psalm 22 begins in despair, it ends in hope! We know from Hebrews 12:1-2 that Jesus **endured the cross and despised its shame for the joy that was set before him.** The joy that his suffering would bring healing, his death would bring life, his violence would bring peace.

Psalm 22:27, 30

All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations shall worship before you....Posterity shall serve him; it shall be told of the Lord to the coming generation;

Ironically it is Jesus, the one who is crying out in despair, who actually trusts God.

Just hours ago, Jesus was betrayed and abandoned by his closest friends. Now Jesus is abandoned by his Father. Have you ever felt alone? Like God had forsaken you? Well, Jesus did not just feel forsaken by God, he was forsaken by God! As our substitute, Jesus drank the cup of God’s wrath dry and was forsaken by God so that we could be brought to God, rescued by God, loved by God.

⁴ Richard Allen Bodey, quoted in C.J. Mahaney, *Living the Cross Centered-Life*, p. 92.

Jesus punishment brings us peace. His blood has brought us home. His death brought us life. He took God's wrath so that we might receive God's mercy!

And here is the *good* news of the gospel. Our sin is so great that Jesus had to die for us. But God's love is so much greater that Jesus was glad to die for us!

This is greatest catastrophe of the world, of the universe! But...it's a Eucatastrophe! Because the betrayal, the abandonment, the mockery, the suffering, the torture, the death and the wrath of God that Jesus experienced should have been ours!

But it was not!

This catastrophe is good, it's Eucatastrophe because it means good news for us. It is gospel!

3. Good News for Us

The ironies of Good Friday are for our good. The gospel itself is a paradox: on one hand we are far more full of sin and wrecked by sin than we think, and on the other hand, in Christ, we are far more loved and accepted and empowered by God than we can imagine! Stand amazed at the foot of the cross and behold why Good Friday is so good. Listen to God speak through his Word.

Because the Son of God was forsaken...

a. God's enemies are adopted as children.

Romans 5:6

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.⁷ For one will scarcely die for a righteous person--though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die--⁸ but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Because the only Innocent one was condemned...

b. The guilty are forgiven.

Isaiah 53:4

Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.⁵ But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and

with his stripes we are healed. ⁶ All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned--every one--to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

2 Corinthians 5:21

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Colossians 2:13-14

And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, ¹⁴ by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.

Because Lord of life was executed...

c. The ones who are dead are made alive

Ephesians 2:1, 4

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins...But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ--by grace you have been saved--

Because Jesus bore God's just judgment...

d. The ones who are rebels are transformed into lovers.

1 John 4:9-10

In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. ¹⁰ In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

My friends' Good Friday is good because Jesus' lived the life we could never live and died the death that we deserve...to bring us to God!

4. Good Friday, Everyday

We must never take our eyes off the cross. Yes we should and must celebrate Easter—Christ the Lord is risen today! God raised him from the dead! He conquered sin and death for us! He is (right now) the risen and exalted Savior and Judge. And he's coming back for us! But eternity will never forget the cross. And so we mustn't! We will forever sing the praise of the Crucified!

So let us learn to sing today and all our days! Warm your hearts by the fires of God's love that we see at the cross. Sing with the angels, sing with God's rescued ones throughout the ages.

Revelation 5:9-10

And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation,¹⁰ and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth."

Prayer

Father we thank you that Good Friday, really is good. Because...

**Christ was all anguish that I might be all joy,
cast off that I might be brought in,
trodden down as an enemy that I might be welcomed as a friend,
surrendered to hell's worst that I might attain heaven's best,
stripped that I might be clothed,
wounded that I might be healed,
athirst that I might drink,
tormented that I might be comforted,
made a shame that I might inherit glory,
entered darkness that I might have eternal light.
My Saviour wept that all tears might be wiped from my eyes,
groaned that I might have endless song,
endured all pain that I might have unfading health,
bore a thorny crown that I might have a glory-diadem,
bowed his head that I might uplift mine,
experienced reproach that I might receive welcome,
closed his eyes in death that I might gaze on unclouded brightness,
expired that I might for ever live.⁵**

Thank you Father, for you lovely sovereignty in redeeming us.

Thank you Jesus, for your joyful, obedient, wrath-satisfying sacrifice—for us.

Thank you Spirit, for your opening of our eyes to the beauty of the catastrophe of the cross.

Amen.

⁵ *The Valley of Vision*, 42.