

**Jesus' Final Week**  
***Good Friday***  
**Luke 4:16-30, 23:32-43**  
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We conclude our journey through Jesus' final week today with the day we know as Good Friday—when our Lord and Savior was crucified. Have you ever thought how odd it is that we designate the saddest day in the life of Jesus and his 1st Century followers as Good Friday? We remember it as good, because of what Jesus did for us that day, but the Friday of Holy Week was anything but good as it was occurring. Good Friday was a horrific day for Jesus and his 1st Century followers, and yet on the cross, he displayed incredible love and forgiveness for others.

I have an ambitious goal for my sermon this morning. I hope to reframe how we view what Jesus did for us on the cross. To do that, I want to compare and contrast a time when Jesus was nearly executed with what eventually took place on Good Friday. As I begin this message, I want to again give credit to Jason Porterfield, author of the book "Fight Like Jesus," for his insights about Jesus' final week and specifically for his thoughts about Good Friday.

I invite you to follow along as I read a passage from Luke 4:16–22.

He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, <sup>17</sup> and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

<sup>18</sup> "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

<sup>20</sup> Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. <sup>21</sup> He began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

<sup>22</sup> All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. "Isn't this Joseph's son?" they asked. (Luke 4:16-22)

Luke presents this event as Jesus' first public sermon—and what a sermon it was. Jesus quoted from a well-known known Messianic prophecy of Isaiah, which foretold good news for the poor,

freedom for prisoners, recovery of sight for the blind, deliverance for those who are oppressed, and the arrival of the year of the Lord's favor. It wasn't surprising that Jesus read this passage. What was unexpected was his claim, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." On that day in the small, obscure town of Nazareth, Jesus announced Himself as the Messiah who would fulfill this well-known, centuries-old prophecy.

The audience was stunned by Jesus' claim, and they spoke well of Him. They understood what He had just said, and they were ready to accept Him as their Messiah—but just like the tie between Palm Sunday, when Jesus was viewed as a hero, and Good Friday, when He was crucified as a rebel, the crowd quickly turned on Jesus. However, instead of the change in public sentiment taking five days, this time the crowd turned in just a few minutes. Listen to what Jesus said immediately after announcing, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." In verses 23–30, we read:

<sup>23</sup> Jesus said to them, "Surely you will quote this proverb to me: 'Physician, heal yourself!' And you will tell me, 'Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.'" <sup>24</sup> "Truly I tell you," he continued, "no prophet is accepted in his hometown. <sup>25</sup> I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah's time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. <sup>26</sup> Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. <sup>27</sup> And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed—only Naaman the Syrian."

<sup>28</sup> All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. <sup>29</sup> They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him off the cliff. <sup>30</sup> But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way. (Luke 4:23–30)

What happened? How did the synagogue audience turn so quickly from wanting to crown Jesus Messiah to trying to push Him over a cliff to his death? On the heels of his powerful sermon, Jesus reminded the Jews how poorly they treated God's prophets. He pointed out that when Elijah called forth a famine in Israel and there was no food, it was a Gentile woman—not a Jew—who was blessed by God with an unending supply of oil and flour so she could feed herself and her son. And when Elisha the prophet performed a great miracle (healing a man of leprosy), it was the Syrian general Naaman—not a Jew—who was healed. There were many widows in need and many people with leprosy in Israel, but God chose to pour out his grace on pagan Gentiles rather than on his own people, the Jews. Jesus had

the audacity to suggest that God's grace and mercy and healing—and Isaiah's prophecy He had just quoted—weren't reserved for Jews alone. God's grace and forgiveness was available to all people—even Gentiles—and for that, the Jews in the synagogue that day tried to kill Him.

The attempt to push Jesus off a cliff to his death brings to mind a common religious ritual from that era: the sacrifice of the scapegoat. Each year on the Day of Atonement, the High Priest would take a goat, lay his hand on its head, and transfer all the sins the Israelites had committed that year onto the goat. The goat was then led into the wilderness, where it would wander, presumably to its death. At times, however, Jason Porterfield tells us, a strange thing happened: the goat found its way back to Jerusalem and wandered through the city. The symbolism of all of Israel's sins returning back to them as the goat found its way back to Jerusalem was problematic, and so a new practice was established in which the scapegoat, after having Israel's sins transferred to it, was led over a cliff to its death.

If God's only purpose in having Jesus die was to atone for our sins by having an innocent man's death satisfy God's great wrath, Jesus could have been pushed off the cliff that day near the synagogue, and everything would have been taken care of, but instead He died on a cross during Passover, the festival celebrating God's liberation and freedom of his people. My observation is that our tendency to focus almost exclusively on Jesus' death satisfying God's wrath and the need God had for sin to be atoned for obscures the love and grace and forgiveness of God that was demonstrated so powerfully by Jesus on the cross as He was dying.

To explore what took place on the cross on Good Friday I'd like us to read Luke 23:32–49.

Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left. Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.

The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is God's Messiah, the Chosen One."

The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar and said, "If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself."

There was a written notice above him, which read: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.

One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!"

But the other criminal rebuked him. “Don’t you fear God,” he said, “since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.”

Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”

Jesus answered him, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Jesus called out with a loud voice, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” When he had said this, he breathed his last.

The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, “Surely this was a righteous man.” When all the people who had gathered to witness this sight saw what took place, they beat their breasts and went away. But all those who knew him, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things. (Luke 23:32-43)

As we think about Jesus’ crucifixion through the lens of freedom from sin, new life, and restoration of relationship with God, I want to highlight three events from the verses I just read. First, in verse 34, we read these amazing words of Jesus: “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” Amidst all of his pain, the incredible weight of carrying our sins, and his sense that God his Father was distant, Jesus did the unthinkable: He asked his Father to forgive those who were crucifying Him. Jesus’ act of forgiveness is consistent with the Lord’s Prayer, which He taught us to pray when He said, “Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.” Forgiveness is the posture Jesus’ followers are encouraged to embody and embrace as we walk through life, where we will inevitably be wronged and hurt.

The second occurrence on the cross I want us to focus on is Jesus’ exchange with one of the criminals who was crucified beside Him. One of the criminal’s taunted Jesus with the words, “Aren’t you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!” In response, the other criminal rebuked his fellow criminal with the words, “Don’t you fear God since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.” Then speaking to Jesus, he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” And Jesus received him with the words, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.” I find it remarkable that on the cross, with all that was going on, Jesus extended grace and forgiveness to a criminal moments before the man was executed.

Finally, while Jesus was still on the cross—just before He breathed his last breath—we read these words: “It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two.” As Jesus was on the cross, the sun stopped shining for three hours. We could easily skip over this detail, but another event that occurred was the spontaneous and miraculous tearing of the temple curtain in two from top to bottom. This curtain separated the Holy of Holies—the inner circle, where only the High Priest could go just once a year to offer sacrifices for Israel—from the rest of the temple area. According to the Jewish historian, Josephus, the curtain was 60 feet long, 30 feet high, and four inches thick. It took 300 priests to move it, but just before Jesus breathed his last breath, God split it from top to bottom. The message was clear. The way to God is no longer reserved just for the High Priest. Following Jesus’ death on the cross, people could now be restored to relationship with God.

On the cross, Jesus extended forgiveness to his enemies rather than calling for them to receive what they deserved. On the cross, Jesus forgave a criminal who was being executed for his life of sin and promised him he’d be in paradise rather than landing in the hell he deserved. And just before Jesus died on the cross, God miraculously split the temple curtain in two, communicating to anyone who was paying attention that the way to God had now been opened to all people. Remember Jesus is the perfect and complete representation of God’s nature and character. Jesus’ actions on the cross provide us with a clear picture of who our Heavenly Father is.

Why do I think it’s important for us to view Jesus’ death on the cross through the lens of the life and freedom that God made available to us rather than strictly through a lens that says an angry God’s wrath needed to be satisfied and so it required that an innocent human being be killed? I believe this understanding is critical for us if we’re going to rightly understand God’s nature as loving and compassionate as opposed to wrathful and venge-filled. In the Old Testament, while God is presented as loving and compassionate and kind, we frequently read about God’s wrath and judgment. But in the New Testament, Jesus, who Paul tells us in Colossians 1 is the perfect and complete representation of God, is portrayed almost exclusively as loving, gracious, compassionate, forgiving and kind.

All analogies have their limits and eventually break down, but perhaps it’s helpful to think about the portrayal of God we see in the Old Testament as a father or mother might be perceived by their small child. Hopefully our small children view us as loving and kind, but they also probably have a healthy level of fear and respect and awe that comes as we try to guide and shape and protect them when they are incapable of protecting themselves and making their own good decisions. As our children grow in age and become more independent, a healthy relationship between us and them will transition,

and our love, support and encouragement will take on a more prominent role than fear and awe. I believe that at least partially describes the view of God we're given in the Old Testament compared with the view we're given of our Heavenly Father through Jesus in the New Testament.

As we think about God's nature and Jesus' purpose on the cross, it's helpful to reflect on Jesus' portrayal of his Heavenly Father not only on the cross but throughout the New Testament. In "Fight Like Jesus," Porterfield points out that three times in Luke 4 when Jesus quotes the passage from Isaiah, which I referenced earlier, He changes the quotation. Isaiah's prophecy in Isaiah 61:2 says, "to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God." When Jesus references Isaiah 61:2, He stops with, "to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." That's not to say God's wrath against sin doesn't exist, but Jesus clearly wanted to communicate his Heavenly Father's favor, love, compassion and forgiveness over his wrath, vengeance and anger.

Again, you might be wondering, "Pastor Layne, why is this so important for us to grasp?" That's a great question. God's nature as it is portrayed through Jesus is critical for us to understand, because it's primarily through our lives that people who don't know God get their picture of who He is. If our primary picture of our Heavenly Father is of a vengeful, angry God who needed to have his great wrath appeased and so He killed Jesus, how will that play out in our lives? We'll come off as stern, critical, and judgmental, and most people who don't know our God will say, "No thanks. I don't really need any more criticism and judgement in my life." But if we grasp the incredible love, forgiveness and mercy Jesus displayed on the cross as embodying who God is, we'll be marked by Jesus' love, grace, mercy, compassion and forgiveness. We'll be able to fulfill the mandate Jesus gave his disciples on Maundy Thursday: "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:34-35).

As we walk through Holy Week over the next six days before Easter, I encourage us to remember Jesus' suffering and the supreme sacrifice of his life on the cross for us. It's true that Jesus died for our sins so we wouldn't have to experience spiritual death as a consequence of our sin. He was our sacrificial lamb. But as we focus on all Jesus endured, let's also remember the love, grace, mercy, compassion, and forgiveness of Jesus and of our Heavenly Father, who willingly gave his Son for us. As we think of Jesus' death on the cross, remember his forgiveness of his enemies, his acceptance of the criminal who placed his faith in Him, and the miraculous tearing of the temple curtain from top to bottom, signifying to all of us that the way to God is now open. And as we look ahead to the day of Jesus' resurrection on Easter, remember that because of Jesus' death and resurrection, we're free, no

longer bound by sin, able to live our lives with joy and hope, extending Jesus' love and forgiveness to everyone we meet. I invite you to declare these words of Jesus from John 10:10 aloud with me:

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life and have it to the full. (John 10:10)