

# Good Friday Service

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 18 April 2025

Preacher: Reuben Hunter

[ 0 : 00 ] Well, please turn up Luke 23. If you've closed your Bibles, Luke 23, 8, 8, 8, 3 in the Black Church. in the Black Church Bibles. And as it was read for us, the sense of injustice and suffering are two of the things that really stick out.

It starts with Pilate in verse 4. I find no guilt in this man. And it finishes with Centurion, verse 47. Certainly this man was innocent.

And yet, between those two, he is beaten, he's mocked, he's flogged, and he's murdered. You can imagine the Newsnight segment.

They've managed to get his mother in. She was there and they interview her. Mary, thanks so much for joining us this evening. Tell us, what happened on that night in question?

My son was brought by church leaders to the governor who had the power to kill him. Right, okay, and how did you feel? It was terrifying.

[ 1 : 13 ] Yes, go on, give us a bit more. Well, the governor listened to their charges and he threw them out straight away. He said he was innocent. That wasn't the end of it, was it?

No, the governor then turned my son over to another jurisdiction because he didn't actually come from the city that they were in. And what happened then? Well, it's the same thing. Innocent.

No charges. So tell us, why did that not mean that he was free to go? Well, the religious guys got a crowd together and they protested the government buildings and they kept shouting, I can hardly say it now, crucify him, crucify him, and they wouldn't stop.

They just kept going. And the authorities in the end gave up and gave in to the mob. He's an innocent victim.

It is gross injustice. If it was today, it would be in every paper. Social media would light up. No doubt there would be protests all over the place.

[ 2 : 16 ] And yet, look at verse 28. The one at the center of it all says, do not weep for me. Don't weep for me.

Why not? This is terrible suffering, terrible injustice. Why would we not make a huge fuss? Write to our MPs. Make sure that there's an inquiry. Make someone pay for this.

Well, because actually, when we look again, we realize there's something bigger going on in the midst of all of this chaos on that first Good Friday. Once the sentence is passed, as he is led to the cross, Luke records Jesus speaking four times.

There are lots of voices. When you read this account, it feels noisy. It feels chaotic. It feels like people are going here and there. It feels like there are groups of people that are trying to hatch plans over here and push them off over there.

It feels like there's just a huge amount going on. It feels noisy. And yet, on four occasions, there is one voice that punctuates this melee. And it is really the one voice that matters in the whole story because it reframes, this voice reframes all that is happening.

[ 3 : 31 ] So this morning for a few minutes, let's listen in. Here's the first word. It is a word of assurance. Verse 28. Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.

For behold, the days are coming when they will say, Blessed are the barren and the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed. Then they will begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us and to the hills, cover us.

Jesus is warning about coming judgment for all that's going on here and what it will feel like at the time. People will say, I want the mountain to fall on me.

That would be better than my experience here. He's saying that those who are rejecting him, the religious establishment, those who are treating him in this way are going to be a whole lot worse off

when the consequences of all of this come back on them.

But the disciples shouldn't weep for him because none of this surprises Jesus. None of this is outside the plan.

[ 4 : 32 ] All that is happening, all that is going on and these terrible events has been on Jesus' mind throughout his ministry. It was crystallized back in Luke 9, 51 when he set his face for Jerusalem, when he set his face to this moment.

He knew what awaited him there. In fact, there are several places where we get a glimpse in this narrative. There are several places where we get a glimpse of just how far back the plan actually stretches.

So when it says that he doesn't speak in verse 9, he's silent, that is a fulfillment of Isaiah 53, 7 and 8. The mention of the criminals alongside him in verse 32 is a fulfillment of Isaiah 53, verse 12.

These events have been foretold by God centuries before, and here they are taking place. Jesus came to this moment for this injustice and to embrace this plan of suffering.

It is all according to his design. And that gives us confidence. It reassures us. Not just that we go away thinking, ah, okay, good, the Bible story, I can see it all hangs together.

[ 5 : 44 ] And not just, well, I'm glad that the cross wasn't just a terrible accident in an out-of-control world. But that when we see God's hand in the innocent and unjust suffering of Jesus, it sheds light on our own experiences of suffering and injustice.

You see, what we have here, what we have on Good Friday in the punishment and death of Jesus is the greatest act of evil and suffering the world has ever known.

Because of the infinite value of the one who suffers, but as we come to see that what the religious leaders and Pilate and Herod and the soldiers meant for evil, those very same actions God meant for good, namely the salvation of billions of people, look at verse 45, the curtain is torn down, the barrier between God and humanity is removed.

When we come to see that all of this, the purpose of God is being worked out, it can reframe and provide assurance in our own suffering. When you suffer, it can really easily feel unfair and meaningless, and you can doubt the goodness of God.

But if in His infinite wisdom, God intended the greatest act of evil and suffering there has ever been for good, He can then, in principle, use your lesser instance of suffering for good as well.

[ 7 : 20 ] Now it might not feel like that at the time when the darkness won't lift, when the pain won't leave, when the hurt seems to continue. But if you bring your pain, if you bring your suffering, the injustice that you experience to the cross of Christ, that is, if you stop in Good Friday, don't rush past it to Easter Sunday, but stop in the suffering and the injustice and the darkness and think deeply about what is going on as you look at the cross, it will give you the perspective that you need in your circumstances to trust Him and to endure.

Some of you know suffering much better than you'd like to. Many of you know suffering much better than you'd like to. We'll go again to the cross. Look at what is going on there.

Meditate deeply on that and be assured that your suffering is not for nothing. Well, Jesus speaks first a word of assurance, but He doesn't just speak to the suffering.

If we keep listening, we hear Him secondly speak a word of mercy. Number two, mercy. Verse 34, Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.

That is a prayer for God to have mercy. But the question we have to ask is who are the they that Jesus has in view here?

[ 8 : 55 ] Father, forgive them for they know not what they do. Verse 32, just go up a couple of verses. Two others who were criminals were led away to be put to death by Him.

And when they, that is the soldiers, came to the place that is called, sorry, they were led away to death with Him, not by Him. And when they, that is the soldiers, came to the place that is called the skull, they, the soldiers, crucified Him.

And the criminals, one on His right and one on His left. And Jesus said, Father, forgive them for they know not what they do. And they, the soldiers, cast lots to divide His garments and the people stood by watching but the rulers scoffed at Him saying, He saved others, let Him save Himself if He is the Christ of God, His chosen one.

Who are the they that Jesus is praying for? Definitely the soldiers. This is an astonishing thing as they hammer the nails through the tendons and the nerves and the bone in His hands and feet.

He's saying, Father, forgive them. It's astonishing mercy. But it isn't clear that it's only the soldiers that are in view here. It seems more open-ended.

[10:12] C.H. Spurgeon said he loved the indistinctness of this prayer. And I think we're supposed to see this spirit of mercy is extended to everybody present. The rulers who are mentioned here, Father, they don't know what they're doing.

Please forgive them for their dreadful treason. The criminals on either side, the crowd who look on, they're all mentioned in this little section. He's saying, Father, forgive.

One scholar says this, So the Savior prayed for the priests as well as the soldiers. But in praying for these Jews and Gentiles, Jesus was showing on the cross how He prays for us all.

Even if He were only praying exclusively for the people who actually crucified Him, it would still give us hope for our own forgiveness because here we see the heart of the mercy of God.

The open-ended nature of the prayer is supposed to draw us all in. You see, although we weren't physically present on that day, it is our sin that put Jesus on the cross.

[11:15] One author speaks about us carrying His nails around in our pockets. He's not there for His own sin. We know that. He's there for your sin and for mine.

Now, we don't like to think of ourselves in that way. We don't like to think when we're forced to confront the reality of our sin as we see it on the cross. And it is true that I suspect not many of us have perpetrated innocent suffering and injustice.

But our nature, our nature is to turn our back on God and His world. That is the essence of sin. And so, the wonder of Jesus' prayer here is that this indistinctness, as Spurgeon says, invites everyone who hears these words to receive that forgiveness.

That is the Good Friday appeal. Come to Jesus for mercy and forgiveness. Come and find rest for your soul. Come and find a restoration to the God you were created to serve and enjoy.

Listen to Spurgeon again, plead with you. Here he is. Now into that pronoun them, I feel I can crawl. Can you get in there? Oh, by humble faith, appropriate the cross of Christ by trusting in it and get into that little big word them.

[12:37] That's what it means to be a Christian. To hear that promise of mercy from Jesus and come to faith in Him. Put your faith in Him. In fact, it even happened that same day as one of the criminals crucified beside Him trusted in Jesus.

One of them railed against Him. You saw that. If you're the Christ, save yourself. Of course, in order to save others, He couldn't save Himself. But the other criminal, He shut Him up.

Verse 40, do you see? Do you not fear God? Don't talk like that. We're the guilty ones here. We're here and we deserve to be here for what we've done, but He's innocent.

And then, verse 42, He cries out, Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom. It's said that true wisdom consists in two parts, knowledge of God and knowledge of ourselves.

And it is obvious that therefore this is a wise man. He sees Jesus and He sees Himself clearly. And when you see Jesus clearly and when you see yourself clearly, when you see Jesus as your Savior and yourself as a sinner with no hope apart from Him, you do what He did.

[13:55] You turn and you plead and you find forgiveness. Here is Christ's enemies putting their faith in Him. Here is Jesus' prayer for mercy being answered and God has been answering it across continents and nations ever since.

We can see that here this morning. Look around and see the diversity, the backgrounds, the ethnicities being brought in under the mercy of the Lord Jesus.

Jesus brings mercy for you. But that's not all. We go back, we listen again. This time, verse 43, can you see?

Here, the Lord Jesus speaks a word of grace, assurance, mercy, thirdly, grace. Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.

Truly, literally, I am putting my word on this. I will bring you to paradise. If mercy is not getting what we do deserve, grace is getting what we don't deserve.

[15:00] And we've seen that this guy knows, he knows what he deserves. He deserves to be crucified. It's the worst form of execution, due reward for his deeds.

And yet, from the agony of the cross, this is about to become the best day of his life. Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom. This might be the only time in Luke's gospel that anyone calls Jesus by his name.

But at this point, it makes perfect sense that that would be the case. Why were Mary and Joseph, do you remember, told to give their baby the name Jesus? Because he will save his people from their sins.

The name Jesus means God saves. And that is exactly what this thief discovers. And note, it's personal. Jesus is asked to remember this man and his reply, he says, I say to you, today you will be with me.

He's so personal, Jesus may as well have used the man's name. It's not just personal, it's also immediate. The moment this man's life gave out, the second he breathed his last breath, he would find himself with Jesus in paradise.

[16:11] Here's J.C. Ryle. That word, today, tells us that the very moment a believer dies, his soul is in happiness and safekeeping. His full redemption has not yet come.

His perfect bliss will not begin before resurrection morning. But there is no mysterious delay, no season of suspense, no purgatory between his death and a state of reward.

In the day that he breathes his last, he goes to paradise. Any hour that he departs, he is with Christ. And you know that paradise is paradise for that reason.

Psalms 16 verse 11 tells us that it is at the Lord's right hand where there are pleasures forevermore. The believer who dies trusting Christ goes to paradise because they go to be with the Lord who is at the place of eternal pleasure.

This is the wonder of the gospel. One for us through the mercy and grace of Christ. And we can stand firm on this because of the last time he speaks in this narrative.

[17:16] Jesus lifts his voice one last time. Verse 46, one final shout with a word of hope. Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.

He gives up his life. It isn't taken from him. He's in control the whole way through. But the point is his work at this point is done.

He kept the law of God perfectly. He bore the wrath of God sufficiently and so he can give himself to the Father finally. And as we hear these words, they are words that assure us that the mercy and grace that he has purchased for us through all of this injustice, they're not just a nice idea but they are real and they are really ours if we put our faith in the Lord Jesus.

This is a cry of completion and a cry of victory and therefore it gives all of us who put our faith in him hope.

Assurance, mercy, grace and hope. The question for us this morning is as Jesus calls out how will you respond?

[18:31] The truth of the matter is that we will all of us respond we'll follow the example of one of these two dying thieves. We will either on the one hand focus on our circumstances and refuse to trust God when life is hard and we'll rail against Christ as a result.

Why are you not doing what I want you to do? If you were really good as you say you are if you were really loving as you say you are you would do things differently.

You wouldn't put me through this. That's one option. We keep them at a distance. We focus on our circumstances. We keep ourselves at the center of everything.

The other thing gives us a better model and that is that we see ourselves as sinners in need of a savior and we cast ourselves on the mercy and grace of Jesus who is the only one who can save us.

Only one of those options will take you to paradise. Luke is urging us to trust our lives and our circumstances and our hardships to a God who is in complete control of history.

[19:43] He's a God who has made us for himself and he has made a way for our deepest problem to be put right. Through the death of his son there is mercy and grace for all who will receive it.

One thief was saved that no one should think that they are beyond this mercy and grace. Whatever your life has looked like up to now you can find the same favor that this man found even today. One thief was saved that none of us would think that we are beyond this mercy and grace but only one thief was saved that no one might presume.

It is only those who trust themselves to the mercy and grace of Christ who will be saved. So here is hope. Here is the hope of Good Friday for a world that feels very thin on hope at the minute.

Jesus Christ the innocent Son of God suffered gross injustice in order to bring any who trust Him in order to bring you if you will trust Him to paradise.

[ 20 : 55 ] So come and welcome to the Lord Jesus.