

# Good Friday Service

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Preacher: Reuben Hunter

[ 0 : 00 ] We've come together this morning to remember a death. And in occasions like that,!

And if it's an older person, we ask, well, why now? Or why like this? And often that question lingers, whether spoken or unspoken.

It lingers, it hangs around in our minds. And we're really asking the question, why death? Why does this exist? The why question hangs over every death.

Please turn back in your Bibles to Mark 15. Because there is something about this death that we're remembering this morning that I think we have to ask the question, why about?

Because Good Friday is no different to any other death in one sense. Because there are why questions hanging over the whole thing.

[ 1 : 22 ] It is the most studied and the most talked about and the most sung about and the most written about death in history. And yet, Good Friday, no matter how familiar we are with this day, it rolls around every year.

We may have been to one. We may have been to none. This may be your first Good Friday service that you've attended. We may have been to many, many of those. And yet, the story is familiar. But there are why questions that hang over it all. There are bits of the story that perhaps we haven't stopped to ask why about, when in fact we really should.

Because there are a number of things in the story, that narrative that was read for us, that are unusual and that really need an explanation. So, my goal in the time that we have this morning is to walk through what we had read from Mark chapter 15, the account of Jesus' death, and ask why four times.

Here's the first one. Why could the Jewish authorities not see their Messiah? It is a striking thing when we read the account of the lead-up to and the crucifixion of Jesus.

[ 2 : 38 ] The story of history is that despite the rebellion of those whom He created, God would send a Savior who would crush Satan and who would push back the powers of evil and who would bring in a new world.

That is the story of history. And the story of the Old Testament, the first big chunk of the Bible, is in many ways a story of expectation. We're expecting this promise.

We're expecting this story to unfold. And it's an expectation as the description of this sin-killing serpent crusher that has been promised, what he will be like.

And that story takes shape. And it's a bit like pieces in a jigsaw slotting into place. We get a picture of what the Messiah would look like. And we see that through the history books and through the prophets of the Old Testament that He will be a man, but also God.

One who will heal the sick and overturn evil and even have the power over death itself. And as the Old Testament has us on the lookout for this man, when Jesus arrives onto the stage of history, we should be ready.

[ 3 : 54 ] And Mark, who wrote this gospel, begins his gospel right back in chapter 1 with the words, the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Mark is telling us that this is his account of the coming of God's Messiah, the one that we've been waiting for.

And he records how Jesus opens his ministry. Jesus' first words in his public ministry, the time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe the gospel.

So with the very first words of his ministry, Jesus is telling everyone that he is the long-promised Messiah they've been waiting for. And particularly for the people of God, the ones who have been looking for him all the way through the Old Testament, expecting God to come through in his promises, Jesus says, here I am.

He's telling the world on his arrival that God's King is here. But we know that there are crackpots in every era who make high-blown claims about themselves.

Talk is, of course, cheap. It's one thing saying these things, it's quite another proving those claims to be true. But we read on, and that's exactly what Jesus does in his ministry.

[ 5 : 05 ] The early chapters of all the gospel accounts record him behaving exactly how it was predicted that he would. Teaching with unrivaled authority. Healing the sick.

Even raising the dead. He's showing himself to have all the power and all the restoring compassion of God. And yet here we are, verse 10.

Pilate perceived that it was out of envy that the chief priests had delivered him up. But the chief priests, the religious authorities, the leaders, the religious leaders, who were the experts in God's Word, who were waiting for his Messiah, verse 11, chapter 15, the chief priests stirred up the crowd and have him release for them Barabbas, a known criminal, instead of this man.

And Pilate again said to them, Then what shall I do with the man you call the king of the Jews? And they cried out again, Crucify him. We go to verse 31.

Jesus hangs on the cross. So also the chief priests, these religious authorities, chief priests and the scribes, mocked him to one another, saying, He saved others.

[ 6 : 22 ] He can't save himself. And they go on, Let the Christ, the King of the Jews. They use his title with their very lips. The religious leaders, his own people, these experts in God's Word, who had been looking for God's long-expected Messiah, here he is, and they can't see him.

Why? The reason is because by nature, humanity, we are suppressors of the truth.

That is our condition. The world was created by God, and it reveals his glory. His Word is truth, and it reveals his character, and it describes our corruption. And what we have done is taken the glory, and taken the truth about God, and we have suppressed it.

Because our nature despises being under his authority. We instinctively want to be God in our own worlds. We want to be in control of our own lives.

We don't want to submit to anybody's authority. That is the essence of sin. We are selfish. We want life on our own terms. So what we do is we choose blindness.

[ 7 : 37 ] Blindness to reality rather than submission to what is true and beautiful and good. And we'll do anything to maintain that status quo. We will deny what is obvious.

We will believe what is incredible. All for the sake of self-preservation and self-glory. We want to be in control of our own lives. When you see a politician say something one day, and then say something completely the opposite the next.

And it's clear to you that they're simply doing that to try and hold on to their own power and their own fame and their own recognition. When you see that, you see Pilate and you see the chief priests because you see the human heart.

That is all of us. Why could the Jewish authorities not see their long-promised Messiah? Because they had the same condition we all have. And that is a truth-suppressing heart.

A heart that wants oneself to be an authority rather than God. And that is a reminder why we need Good Friday. Why we need the cross. Left to ourselves, we would have been there nailing Jesus to the cross.

[ 8 : 51 ] As Martin Luther says, we carry His nails around in our pockets. John Stott says, before we can see the cross as something done for us, we have to see it as something done by us.

Why could they not see? Because like all of humanity, they rejected the truth. Well, let's keep going. Second question, second head-scratching moment, why did everything go dark?

Verse 33, when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. Between noon and 3 p.m., the brightest part of the day, the sky goes completely black.

It's a really unusual darkness. I remember about 25 years ago, there was an eclipse in the UK. I remember where I was in Belfast. At the time, it wasn't that significant actually, but there was no mistaking what was going on.

All of a sudden, everything felt very strange. It was dark and it was cold in the middle of the day. It got my attention. So why has this happened when Jesus is on the cross?

[ 10 : 09 ] Well, because the darkness is a visual aid to what is happening. Look at verse 34. At the ninth hour, Jesus cried out with a loud voice, Eloi, Eloi, lemma sabachthani, which means, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Jesus is quoting the first line of Psalm 22 in the Old Testament. And what He's doing there is identifying Himself with the King who suffers and who feels abandoned by God. This is the darkness, the supernatural darkness of divine judgment.

It's like the ninth plague on Egypt in Exodus chapter 10. It's like the prophet Amos had announced in Amos chapter 8, I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight.

As Jesus hung on that cross, He wasn't just experiencing the verdict of a crazed crowd and a rigged court. He was being judged by His Father.

He didn't deserve it. But this is what it took to deal with our suppression of the truth. This is what it took to deal with our sin.

[ 11 : 21 ] Because of His love for His people, the triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit forged this plan to judge the Son in our place.

Jesus experienced this agony. He cried this cry so that we need never go there. That's why it went dark. William Cooper, the hymn writer, scholar, he was a friend of John Newton.

He also suffered with chronic depression and had real bouts of deep darkness in his own life. About a century after Cooper, in the mid-1800s, Elizabeth Barrett Browning wrote a poem called Cooper's Grave.

And in that poem, she discusses his influence, which was vast, and his scholarship, similarly vast, and alludes to his faith. And then she writes this, Yea, once Emmanuel's orphaned cry, His universe hath shaken.

It went up single, echo-less, My God, I am forsaken. It went up from the holy's lips, amidst his lost creation.

[ 12 : 30 ] that of the lost, no son should use those words of desolation. Jesus Christ experienced the darkness and cried out on the cross, My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?

So that for all eternity, William Cooper, wrecked with torment and darkness, wouldn't have to. He cried out on the cross, My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?

So that for all eternity, anyone who will trust Him wouldn't have to. I love this quote from the Puritan John Flavel. He says this, My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?

If Jesus had not said these words, we must have howled out this hideous complaint in the lowest hell forever. Jesus Christ cried out these words on the cross in the darkness so that for all eternity you wouldn't have to.

Left to ourselves, we deserve to be completely forsaken by God. Our sin, our rebellion, our self-government deserves nothing less, but because Christ went there in our place, we need never utter those words.

[ 13 : 48 ] And that's true even when our day-to-day experience leads us to doubt. So when the darkness in our lives closes in, when we feel like we're forsaken by God, when we feel forgotten or alone, or when we feel that there isn't any hope, well, while we might feel that way, we can trust, as John Calvin says, quote, the grace of God which is hidden from the eye of sense and reason.

What he's saying is that when the darkness threatens to overwhelm us, we go to the cross and we go to the cry from Jesus' lips because those remind us that He took every drop of divine judgment.

And that means, quite simply, that there cannot be any of that left for us. So whatever we are experiencing, it isn't, it can't be God's judgment because that all fell on Jesus on Good Friday.

It must be something else. It must be something that as yet is hidden from the eye of sense and reason. So if that's you this morning, as you sit in the pain, can I say, remember that because Christ went into the darkness, that pain will one day lift.

And our next question actually helps us understand this more. Jesus' cry has ripped through the darkness. people are confused. Look at verse 36. Is it Elijah?

[ 15 : 19 ] I don't know. What do you think? Well, let's, I don't know. Let's see. And then he breathes his last, verse 37. And then, we're told what the centurion who's standing in front of him says.

See that? Well, no, that's not exactly what happens, is it? Have a look. Despite being out on Golgotha Hill, verse 38 tells us about something that's going on back in the temple.

So here's our third question. Why the curtain? And why did it tear? 37, Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last, and the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.

And when the centurion who stood facing him saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, truly this man was the Son of God. God was said to dwell in the heart of the temple.

And this building had levels of access for people and the Holy of Holies was only accessed once a year by the high priest after he had made all kinds of ritual cleansing. Unclean people cannot enter the presence of a holy God.

[16:24] Sinful people have no business in the presence of a holy God. And so there was a massive curtain that served as a barrier cutting off sinful people from God. It was a huge no entry sign in the temple.

Now Mark doesn't tell us what Jesus said when he breathed his last but we know from John's account exactly what he said. His last words were it is finished. He's crying out from the cross I've done the work that I came to do.

The Messiah has come to earth to deal with our sin problem to take our judgment in our place and that work has been accomplished. And just as the darkness was symbolic arresting people's attention to the judgment of God.

So the curtain in the temple is torn in a symbolic depiction of what has been achieved through the death of Jesus. Because he was forsaken on the cross atonement for sin has been made and full and free access to God has been achieved.

That is why Good Friday is good. In the end that is why Good Friday is good. The cross is the doorway to our reconciliation with God.

[17:40] And we're being restored in that relationship restored to the humanity that was supposed to be ours in the beginning that we forfeited through our sin. Jesus recovered it all for all who turn in repentance and faith to him.

That is the offer of Good Friday. Forgiveness for every sin every single one and reconciliation with the God who made you for himself. Don't miss the Roman centurion verse 39 look at him.

When the centurion who stood facing him saw that in this way he breathed his last he said truly this man was the son of God. He sees who Jesus is and he puts his faith in him.

The man has just been involved in Christ's murder and yet Mark records for us how even he can receive this salvation. The grace of God that is held out to us in the cross is for all people.

It is for everyone no matter what you've done no matter what your past involves. This offer is for you. We want to ask ourselves well is this even possible?

[18:54] Sounds too good to be true. Well one last question. Question four. Why does he mention the women? Verse 40 It seems so out of place with all of the emotion of the crucifixion the declaration of the centurion it's a chaotic scene and then Mark insists on telling us about who it was that witnessed all that went on.

Verse 40 There were also women looking on from a distance among whom were Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joseph and Salome. When he was in Galilee they followed him and ministered to him and there was also many other women who came up with him to Jerusalem.

Seems a bit random. Why do we need those details? But the reason Mark includes this detail is so that we know that these events actually really happen. When you hear all of this when you recognize that there is there is this kind of grand picture of our sinfulness in the hard-hearted rejection of the chief priests when you recognize that there is a divine judgment that is depicted in the darkness as the wrath of God falls on Jesus and we realize that it's falling on him not for his sake but for our sake.

And when we recognize that this picture in the temple shows us that there is a way into God and that all are invited we think it can't possibly be true this must have been made up and yet Mark gives us this detail so that we know that it's not.

These women were among the first eyewitnesses of these earth-shattering events. They are named so that the first readers of this document could check with them. But the important thing is that at the time women's opinions weren't considered credible.

[20:35] A woman's testimony was not admissible in law. So the only reason that you would record this detail was if these women were actually there. There have always been people who argue that the gospel accounts are made up to suit the story that these Christians wanted to promote.

But if you were making this up you would not have said that women were the first eyewitnesses because no rabbi would take it seriously. It is hard to believe that God would come to earth in His Son.

It's hard to believe that He would take our sin upon Himself and step into death for us. If we're honest with ourselves we know that's incredibly difficult to believe because if we're honest with ourselves we know that our hearts do not deserve it.

We know that the way we've lived our lives in God's world does not deserve someone else to rescue us from that. But Mark tells us that this is exactly what God has done. And when we consider why things happen the way they did on that first Good Friday these ladies give us confidence that it's real and it's reliable and we can trust it and we can stake our lives on it. Let's pray together. Amen.