

**Jesus For Us**  
John 18:28-19:37  
Good Friday, April 22, 2011

**I.**

The Bible tells us that Christ died for us, that his death washed away our sins, and that if we accept Jesus in that way and try to lead holy lives, we will live forever in God's presence.

And of course the last part of the promise, the gift of our resurrection to eternal life, is confirmed by Christ's resurrection as we celebrate it on Easter. But the first part, the forgiveness of our sins that makes it all possible, is grounded in Jesus' sacrifice two thousand years ago on this day we now know as Good Friday.

And to back up one step, this is the reason for Lent. Lent has focused on the meaning of the crucifixion. It has invited us to confess the ways in which we have not done God's will. And I pray it has helped to assure us that on that final day, when we all must account for the content of our lives, Jesus will stand beside us and say to God, "It's OK, they're with me."

Isn't that the most comforting feeling we ever could have? "It's OK, God, they're with me." It leads to the promise that God then will say, "Welcome, come on in."

**II.**

And we could just leave it at that, and accept those truths at face value. But if we love our Lord as he wants, and if we love God as he commands, it might be only natural to ask some more questions. One of them might be, "Why did Jesus have to die; wasn't there another way?" And then we also might ask, "How did Jesus' death actually accomplish our salvation?"

Let's look at the first one. Why couldn't God just have forgiven everybody on his own, without Jesus being involved? He could have forgiven Adam and Eve. He could have forgiven the disobedient Israelites. And surely he could have forgiven us, couldn't he? After all, we aren't that bad, are we? And he's supposed to love us, isn't he?

Or why couldn't God have treated us like we treat our own children. When our kids do something wrong we discipline them. We say, "Let that be a lesson to you," and then go forward without dwelling on it. Couldn't God have done something like that? Couldn't he just have disciplined us and then let us start over with a clean slate?

In fact, God's history with the Hebrew people in the Old Testament shows several examples where God extended forgiveness, or pardon, or withheld his wrath, for a time.

But we also know that God's grace and mercy did not stop the Hebrews from returning to their disobedient ways. There's a country western song recorded by Vince Gill, among others, where a fellow pleads with his angry girl friend to give him just one more last chance.

Well, God being holy and righteous, could not forever keep giving us just one more last chance. And we, not being holy and righteous, forever would find ourselves having to ask for that one more last chance.

So something had to happen. There were two likely possibilities. Either God could have turned away from us and separated himself from us for eternity, or in his grace he could have chosen to restore our relationship with him; the relationship he intended from the beginning.

But there was a problem. Because God is perfect he could not permanently accept sin among those he loves. It would have compromised his perfection. And because we are imperfect, we

cannot completely eliminate our sin. Certainly we can repent time and again, but the sins we have committed, and by nature will commit, always would be abominations before God's holiness.

So, three things had to happen for humanity to be made right with God while at the same time God could continue to be God. First, our sin had to disappear; not just be set aside, and we were and are powerless to accomplish that. It had to be done for us.

Second, our repentance had to be divinely guaranteed; not just humanly promised. Our track record of promises has been flawed from the beginning. The guarantee had to have credibility with God. We could not offer that.

And third, the sins of future generations had to be absolved in advance, for eternity. Otherwise, our separation from God would exist for eternity. Obviously, we could not do anything on our own to bring about future salvation.

This is where Jesus came in. It is why Jesus was born. And it answers the question of why he had to die. God never intended that Jesus would live to a ripe old age. God did not plan for Jesus to live among us for a while, and then retire to a house along the Sea of Galilee.

Jesus' birth and death solved our dilemma with God. Because Jesus was both fully human and fully divine, born of a human mother and the divine Holy Spirit, he could offer himself to fulfill humanity's need for forgiveness while also meeting the requirements of God's own righteousness.

He was human, like us, but was without sin, like God. Through his humanity he eliminated our sins by absorbing them into himself. And through his divinity his sacrifice forever removed them from the world and God's presence, to the end of the age. Jesus was the only way for us.

### **III.**

But how did that work? We know what Jesus did, but how could his death help us with God? We might think of it this way. What if we owed the bank one million dollars and never could pay it? The bank would not be pleased. A cloud would be over our futures. And then assume this wonderful person came along, without even being asked, and paid it all for us.

It would mean that another person, to whom we owed nothing, would have paid our debt. We no longer would owe anything to the bank. The bank no longer would be unhappy with us. Our futures would be bright. That's like what Jesus did to pay the debt of sin we never could pay.

Jesus, the perfectly innocent Lamb, voluntarily assumed upon himself all the sins of humanity for then and for all time. Our sins became his sins, and he stood in our place to take God's wrath for us. He suffered the death that rightfully should have been our death. Jesus could do this because he was human.

But Jesus' destruction also destroyed our sins and removed them from God's memory. Jesus could do this because he also was divine. And thus his death created a perpetual reservoir of reconciliation upon which we can draw and in which we forever can be cleansed in God's eyes.

### **IV.**

So, as we think about Good Friday, we can begin to grasp the full extent of what God our Father did for us through Jesus Christ on the cross. Even though we walked away from God's plans for us and served our own selfish needs, God was willing to allow his Son to redeem us.

And now, for us and for all humanity, Christ's work on the cross has created a New Covenant that people didn't have two thousand years ago. Now we can know the truth, and if we believe and have faith we can look forward to the blessings of eternity with God. *Amen*