

## **Good Friday: is it good for me?**

2 April 2010

Dear friends,

Today is Good Friday. You may be wondering why is it called Good Friday. Why is this particular Friday called “good”? To us, as Christians, it is called Good Friday not because it is a public holiday that we can sleep in a little longer and have breakfast in bed, or we have more time to spend with our family or go for a vacation or to catch up with our homework. Rather, it is good because of the spiritual benefits that come to us as a result of the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. You might say, what good could possibly come from such a terrible death on the cross. But, good came especially for the saving of sinners from their sins for people like you and me. Now, I am going to take you on a journey. The destination is in the city of Jerusalem about two thousand years ago. But, I must warn you that this is not a very nice scene: it is a scene of pain and suffering: it is a scene about three men hanging on the cross and left to die.

And imagine in your mind’s eye, that you have come to the place of crucifixion, where you see three crosses or three Ts. Those men are hanging on crosses because they have committed some great crime against the Romans or the Jews. The middle cross has a title on the head of the cross and it is the offence that the man has committed and it has the words, “This is Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews”. And it is written in three languages: Greek, Hebrew and Latin. So, his name is Jesus. He is from the town of Nazareth and his crime is that he is the king of the Jews. And on his right and on his left are two thieves. And you will also notice that at the foot of the cross are a few women crying. And nearby, you will hear voices of mockeries. You will see the spectators, jeering at Jesus saying, “he saved others; let him save himself, is he be Christ, the chosen of God”. And the Romans soldiers also mocked at him, coming to him and offering him vinegar, saying, “If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself”. What you will be hearing are the conversations of those three men hanging on the cross, but especially note the attitudes of the two thieves towards that middle man Jesus. Listen carefully for you will be able to identify yourself in one of the attitudes of the thieves so that you will know where you will stand before that man Jesus. And probably what you are going to hear is the most important message that you will ever hear in your life and it might change your life forever!

So, Good Friday: is it good for me? There are three things we will look at: first, it is good to the repentant thief. Secondly, it is good because of Christ’s death on the cross and finally, Good Friday is good to me.

First, Good Friday is good to the repentant thief. But, first, let us look at the unrepentant thief. He is the one who said, “if thou be Christ, save thyself and us”. Though there are only eight words, they say plenty about his attitude towards Jesus Christ. Verse 39 says he blasphemed Christ. Before the record of the actual words of that thief, Luke records that the thief railed at Jesus, which literally is blaspheme. And it means to speak evil of God. How did he blaspheme Jesus Christ? He challenged Christ by saying. Let me paraphrase,

“aren’t you the Christ, save yourself and us” or “if you are the Christ, save yourself and us”. And what they were saying “If you indeed are the Christ, prove yourself by coming down from the cross and save yourself and us”. “And if you do come down and save us, we will believe you that you are indeed the Christ.” And so his attitude towards Christ was one of unbelief. He merely wanted Jesus to serve his own purpose. And from the rebuke of his fellow thief that hung on the cross with him, we know that this thief did not have any concern for his own soul for very soon he will be dead. His fellow thief rebuked him for showing no fear for God when he stands condemned. And summing up, this thief did not acknowledge his crime. Neither did he confess his sins and therefore, did not repent or turn from his sins. This is the key point in this story. And this is the reason why he is called the unrepentant thief. He spoke in a way that showed that he neither knew the existence of God nor did he believe in God. He blasphemed God and though this passage does not say, he did not go to paradise but to hell.

Now, let us go to the other thief which we call the penitent thief. After hearing what the other thief spoke, he rebuked him saying, “do you not fear God, seeing that you are in the same condemnation. And we indeed justly: for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man has done nothing wrong”. From what he said we learnt a few things about this thief. He confessed that he deserved to die by hanging for his crime. And that this man Jesus was innocent of the crime that he was charged with. And he has a plea: remember me when you come again in your kingdom. His faith is outstanding. He not only believed in the spiritual kingdom of Christ, which is not of this physical world but also in the glorious coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. And he asked that he would be able to share in the glory of that coming kingdom, sometime in the future. And it was a simple prayer, “remember me”. Now, why did this thief believe in Jesus and the first thief did not? Was it because he was morally more upright than the other thief? No, he was no better for he too must have committed a serious crime like the other thief and faced capital punishment by hanging. And this method of punishment is the most cruel for a man to endure the most painful, tremendous suffering and it was a slow death. Was it because that this man exercised his will to believe in Jesus? No, for in Matthew 22.44 tells us that he too blasphemed Christ. If it were according to his own will, they would not believe. Then, what made all the difference? Definitely, not in himself and in fact, he realised that he was hopeless and helpless to help himself and had no hope. But he hoped in Christ and he prayed, “remember me”. In other words, God made all the difference. God in his mercy and grace removed the spiritual blindness from his eyes so that he saw Jesus as indeed the king, the Messiah or Saviour. And to that plea, Jesus answered his prayer, “TODAY, you will be with me in paradise”. When will their man go to paradise? Today, not sometime time in the future. And that he will be in heaven with Christ. The good news is that there is no middle place or holding place, no purgatory, no different levels of hell, and no reincarnation or coming back as another person as a prince or a soldier. But, we will have immediate fellowship with Christ and God in heaven. Heaven is a place where God dwells. No more tears nor sorrows, heartaches and pain but only joy and happiness in the presence of God. And the beautiful thing about heaven is that we can have fellowship with Christ, whom we love

and will forever be with Him. And so, the death of Jesus Christ, which is the event of Good Friday, is indeed good for the penitent thief. Now, we have a number of questions in our minds. Who is this man, Jesus that he can answer that prayer? And on what basis can Jesus answer that prayer?

This man Jesus is the Son of God. God sends his only begotten Son to die for us on the cross. But why must Christ die for us. The two thieves hung on the cross as a punishment for their crime but why is Jesus on the cross? What crime did he commit? In fact, he absolutely committed no crime but he died on our behalf. But, what crime did we commit? You see my friends. When God created the world, he also created the first parents, Adam and Eve. And God put them in the most beautiful garden with trees with beautiful green and luscious leaves, big colourful flowers with red and blue and animals that roamed freely like tigers, lions and the lamb. And God gave them a command that of every tree they can eat but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil they must not eat, for in that day that they eat of it, they shall surely die. And they were tempted by the serpent, which was an instrument of the devil to eat of that tree. And the result is that not only did they rebel against the clear command of God, but their children and children's children have also sinned, including you and I. And so, man has lost fellowship with God and bore the wrath of God, and will finally die and spent eternity in hell. What good did Jesus achieved by dying for us on the cross? On his body, he bore our most dreadful punishment for the curse of our sins and the guilt of our sins. And positively, through Christ, we can be forgiven for all our sins: no more curse, no more punishment, no more guilt of our sins and we regained our fellowship with God. And because of spiritual blessings earned by the death of Christ on the cross, today is called Good Friday. But, we have not gone far enough in the question, we were asking at the beginning of this message. The question that is still unanswered is: Good Friday - is it good for me?

Good Friday is good to me when I believe in Jesus Christ. When you admit that there's nothing you can do to save yourself and only God can save you. When you admit that you have offended God by your sins. And in the way of confessing your sins, saying that you are sorry for committing those sins, asking the Lord to forgive your sins and at the same time making this prayer, "remember me". You will make this prayer when God gives you a conviction that you have offended God by your sins and this is a simple prayer that anyone can make. That even a child can make this prayer. And look to Jesus, the one who hung on the cross. He alone is my Lord, my King and my only Saviour who died for my sins. And I wholeheartedly believe in what he has done for me on the cross. And throughout my life, I look to him to sanctify me and caused me to walk in obedience to His Word. And I find a good church to worship Him and to enjoy the fellowship of other Christians. And then, only then, will Good Friday is indeed for you. Amen.