

Easter at Traders Point: Good Friday Service

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Well, good evening Traders Point. It is good to be with you. You sound great. Tonight is all about setting our hearts and our minds for celebrating this weekend. This Good Friday service is all about setting our hearts and our thoughts on celebrating the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Each year we love celebrating Easter because we are convinced that it is the greatest thing that has happened in the history of the world. Now I don't say that with any exaggeration or hyperbole. I am not over-blowing this. The most important person who has ever lived on the face of the earth did the most important thing that has ever been done. That is why we celebrate.

We think this is incredible news. In fact we have a word for it and it is called the "gospel". The gospel is the good news of Jesus Christ. The gospel says that Jesus lived, and He died, and He rose again. It says we had a debt to pay because of our sin and Jesus paid it, and not just a little bit of it, but all of it. That is why we celebrate.

We are going to do that, all out, this weekend but tonight we set our hearts and we set our minds to remember that precious gifts often require great sacrifice. You may know this. You may know this in your own life. Maybe it was a birthday present you did not expect. Maybe it was a sparkling engagement ring. Maybe it was a large inheritance you did not see coming. But no matter how precious the gift, it required some great sacrifice. Someone gave up their time, and their energy, and their resources to provide that gift for you.

So for us to fully celebrate the good news we have to first understand the bad. That is what we focus on tonight. You see the bad news is our sin has corrupted the world. Our sin has corrupted our lives. Someone had to pay that debt and tonight we will find out who that was. If you have your Bible I'd love for you to turn with me to John 18.

Over the last few months our church has been studying through the Gospel of John and our study has led us to this point: John 18. Thus far in the Gospel of John Jesus has done things like invited a group of ordinary fishermen to be His disciples, His students; just ordinary guys. He said, "Follow Me."

Then He bailed out a newlywed couple when they ran out of wine at a wedding reception. Then He engaged in conversation with a highly educated skeptic in the middle of the night. Then in the noonday He found Himself at a well and He extended the hand of grace to a woman with a big reputation. He healed the sick who had no hope in sight. He fed 5,000 of His hungriest listeners. And He raised one of His good friends, Lazarus, from the dead.

Now you would think with a resume like that Jesus would be elected to a high public office or His face would grace the cover of a national magazine. But what we read in John is that this behavior actually earned Him the resentment and the ire of the religious leaders of the day. They were not fans of Jesus.

You see Jesus had these statements. He had these, "I Am," statements where He would say things in a certain way. He was claiming that He was God, not that He knew God, but that He was God. When He would teach in the public areas, people would come from all over the area to hear Him because He taught with authority like no one had taught before.

So as the religious leaders watched this from the sidelines, they saw that the people were leaving them to follow Jesus. They were losing their power. They were losing their influence. So, instead of converting, instead of seeing the true Messiah who was standing in front of them right there in their day, they developed a plan to eliminate Jesus.

In John 18 we will read their plan for execution. If you will, join me in verses 1-4, "When Jesus had spoken these words, He went out with His disciples across the Kidron Valley, where there was a garden, which He and His disciples entered. Now Judas, who betrayed Him, also knew the place, for Jesus often met there with His disciples. So Judas, having procured a band of soldiers and some officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees, went there with the lanterns and torches and weapons. Then Jesus, knowing all that would happen to Him, came forward and said to them, 'Whom do you seek?'"

For a moment let's press pause and allow me to further illustrate this scene. You see hours before this very moment Jesus had dinner with His disciples and He released Judas to go and do what he was going to do. If you are at all familiar with the Bible you know Judas was the great betrayer of Jesus. Now we have to know Jesus knew what Judas was going to do and He released him anyway.

You see if we're not careful we are going to read this whole trial, and arrest, and crucifixion and we are going to come to the conclusion that this kind of happened to Jesus. Maybe He was standing in the wrong garden at the wrong time and was an innocent bystander. But as you will note the details: Jesus was not taken; He was not out of control; He was calling the shots the entire time.

So He released Judas to go and betray Him. Judas shows up to this garden, the garden of Kidron right next to the brook of Kidron. Now if Jesus was trying to run away from His captures, He chose a terrible place to do it. This was a garden they had been to over and over again. Judas knew where He would be. This is not happening to Jesus; Jesus wants this to go down.

And Judas brings hundreds and hundreds of soldiers and officials with Him. In fact this would have been over 600 men who came to one garden for one man. We know the garden was lower and the high priest's home was higher so they could have felt the thumps of the soldiers' feet coming down that hill to get them. They would have seen the glow of their torches. They would have heard the clang of the swords and the shields. Imagine that, as a disciple, you are standing in this garden in the dead of night and here comes this mob to take the One you follow.

Jesus had been saying some weird things trying to prepare them for the moment when He would leave and now they were staring it in the face. You have to notice those last few words at the end of verse 4. It says, "Jesus came forward." Jesus came forward. Now Jesus was not turning in the other direction. He did not run away. He did not hide Himself. He came forward. This is Jesus who is completely in control. He knows this is what needs to happen.

So we are in the garden and the soldiers and officials have come. In verses 5-8, "They answered Him, 'Jesus of Nazareth.' Jesus said to them, 'I am He.' Judas, who betrayed Him, was standing with them. When Jesus said to them, 'I am He,' they drew back and fell to the ground. So He asked them again,

‘Whom do you seek?’ and they said, ‘Jesus of Nazareth.’ Jesus answered, ‘I told you that I am He. So, if you seek Me, let these men go.’”

Again Jesus has the opportunity here to deceive His pursuers. He could have cloaked His identity. It was dark, after all, and He could have gotten away. Instead He stepped up and said, “I am who you are looking for.” In verse 6 we see that the soldiers fall back off their feet when He says these words. This is not an uncommon occurrence. In fact, when God reveals Himself people have a hard time standing up. It happens in Ezekiel, and it happens in Daniel, and it happens in Acts, and it happens in Revelation. When God shows up and He tells you who He is you are going to have a hard time standing up.

Once they had dusted themselves off and stood back up Jesus came forward, He identified Himself and all along He protests His disciples. This is not Jesus out of control. This is Jesus calling the shots. He said, “You came for Me, let them go.”

So once the disciples scattered they bind Jesus and they take Him away. Jesus is arrested. So they take Him to two different places. They take Him to the house of Annas and to the house of Caiaphas. Annas was the former high priest. Caiaphas is Annas’ son-in-law and is now the high priest.

They make a complete mockery of the judicial system. You see the rules are really clearly laid out. If there was an accused man he was supposed to get a fair trial. First there would be witnesses in his favor. They would call people to attest to his character and why they don’t think he did the thing he was accused of doing. Then they would bring in witnesses who would accuse the man. They would say, “Here’s what I saw,” all occurring in a public forum in front of a judge. Jesus gets none of that.

He is thrown into the house of Annas, thrown into the house of Caiaphas, in the middle of the night in the privacy of their homes. They are not looking for objective truth. They are looking to accuse Jesus. When they demand that Jesus defend Himself, He says, “Why don’t you just go ask all the people outside? They were there. I did everything in public. I am the same man in private as I am in public. They heard all My words. They saw all My miracles. I was not doing this behind the scenes. I was doing it in the public. You know who I am.”

That was not good enough. These men were not interested in due process. They were out for blood. They wanted to kill Jesus. But there was this small problem. Legally speaking, they were not allowed to execute anyone. They needed the help of the government they hated.

So enter Pontius Pilate. Pilate was the governor in the city of Jerusalem in the region of Judea. Pilate was there to represent Rome to the Jewish nation and they hated Rome. They hated that they were occupied by a foreign government. They hated that they were not in charge. On top of all that, Pilate had made some very big political missteps leading up to this moment.

At one moment Pilate installed the Roman banner, the Roman flag, into the city. It had infuriated the Jewish people. So they organized a sit-in around his home in protest. When he came out and threatened to cut off their heads, they leaned back and offered their necks. They were not intimidated. Eventually Pilate relented. But he wasn’t done yet.

Second, Pilate tried to install the Roman shield in Jerusalem and it again caused a revolt. When Pilate’s sons petitioned the emperor, the emperor told him to knock it off and leave those people alone. But Pilate was not done yet.

Third he stole money from the temple to build aqueducts and then he fashioned coins in the image of pagan gods, further infuriating the people.

It is easy to say the Pilate's approval rating was very low. And the Jewish leaders, they knew this. But they wanted something from Pilate and they were going to lean into this weak leader and get what they wanted. So they bring Jesus to Pilate's home and they throw Him in front of Pilate but they know they won't get a hearing in front of a Roman governor if the charges remain theological. You see the problem was that Jesus claimed to be God but they knew Rome didn't care. So they shifted the charges from theological to political.

They said, "Jesus here says He is a king, and He says He is an insurrectionist and He is going to take over. And that is a threat to Caesar. They knew that would get Pilate's attention. So they throw Jesus in front of Pilate and Pilate begins to ask questions. Pilate is not about to just execute this man without finding out for himself.

So he goes to Jesus and he says, "Are you a king?" In verse 36 we see Jesus' response, "Jesus answered, 'My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world.' Then Pilate said to Him, 'So you are a king?' Jesus answered, 'You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to My voice.' Pilate said to Him, 'What is truth?'"

Pilate here is trying to get to the bottom of this. He has a mob outside his home wanting to kill a guy but He doesn't seem threatening in the least. They are accusing Him of terrorism but He doesn't seem harmful. And Pilate asks Jesus point-blank, "Are you a king?" But Jesus' answer is a little more abstract. He says, "My kingdom is not like the kingdoms of this world. My kingdom is not defined by borders and armies. My kingdom is not defined by My riches."

In fact He is a king but He is not a king like anyone else. He does not sit on an earthly throne and lord His authority. He is a king who is willing to die for His people and not force them to win His battles. He is a king that loves His people like a shepherd loves his sheep. He is a king who is like the father who has a prodigal son who has not returned home. Jesus is a different kind of king. Jesus is a better king.

Jesus tells Pilate He came to stand for the truth. Pilate scoffs and he dismissed Him, not because Pilate really wants to know about the truth, but because he is cynical, and he is beaten down, and he is tired. Pilate really doesn't believe in truth. He is not looking for truth. In fact he doesn't wait to hear Jesus' response. He goes back to the mob.

Pilate didn't want to kill Jesus in this moment so he hoped to end this whole scene by negotiation. You see, during the Passover feast one of the traditions was that the Roman governor would release a prisoner. So Pilate stands in front of the mob and he says, "I will give you Jesus or I will give you Barabbas." Now we know from John that Barabbas was a thief. We know from the other gospel writers that Barabbas was a murderer. He was the terrorist they had accused Jesus of being.

In an inexplicable turn of events the crowd denies freeing Jesus and they choose Barabbas. Barabbas the thief, the murderer, the terrorist. They choose him. So Pilate heads back into his home with that failed attempt. Then he attempts to try a different angle.

Look in chapter 19, verses 1-3, "Then Pilate took Jesus and flogged Him. And the soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on His head and arrayed Him in a purple robe. They came up to Him, Saying, 'Hail, King of the Jews!' and struck Him with their hands."

Pilate's plan was to humiliate Jesus and hopefully create compassion in the mob. So first they flogged Him. This was Jesus' first. It was before His false conviction. There was a more severe flogging coming and Jesus knew that too. So they beat Jesus up and they put this purple robe on His beaten up back to make Him a joke of a king. He was not the king of the court, He was the jester.

Then they make up this crown of thorns and place it on His head. This was no small feat. These thorns were up to 12 inches long. And they would jam it down on His head. This was meant to hurt. This was meant to deform Jesus' face. And Pilate brings Jesus, beaten up Jesus, embarrassed Jesus, harmless Jesus to the crowd and says, "Still?" and instead of compassion they yell out, "Crucify, Crucify!"

And the religious leaders, they threaten to end Pilate's political career right then and right there. And they sell out their allegiance saying no longer was God their King, Caesar is their king and Pilate, having nothing left to give, gives up.

Chapter 19, verse 16, "So he delivered Him over to them to be crucified. So they took Jesus, and He went out, bearing His own cross, to the place called The Place of a Skull, which in Aramaic is called Golgotha. There they crucified Him, and with Him two others, one on either side, and Jesus between them."

We know from the other gospel writers that Jesus was beaten more severely after His false conviction. They used straps implanted with pieces of bone and rocks. They laid it over His back and ripped off the flesh. And then they placed the horizontal beam for the cross on His back and demanded He carry it up the hill. We know from all the gospels that Jesus was unable to carry it the entire way. He needed help.

When the procession made their way to the foot of the cross they nailed Jesus to the horizontal beam. Then they hoisted Him up, nailing the two beams together, and finally nailing Jesus' feet to a small platform at the bottom. Now this platform may be interpreted as an act of mercy, but instead it was actually a tool of further torture.

You see the crucified would lose their upper body strength making it hard to take in a breath. So that platform allowed them to push up with their feet to gain another breath. The only problem is it never saved anyone. It only furthered their agony.

So there is Jesus, the Son of God, hung on a cross. This is Jesus who, in perfect community with the Holy Spirit and the Father, created the world. This is Jesus who taught His followers to love their enemies. This is Jesus who revolutionized the relationships between husbands and wives. This is Jesus who called listeners to a greater obedience and holiness. This is Jesus who reached out and touched the untouchable. This is Jesus who healed the sick and raised the dead. This is Jesus who hung on a cross to pay the sins of the world. This is Jesus who died for my sin. This is Jesus who died for your sin. This was the cost. There was a great debt owed because of sin. But Jesus paid it all.

In chapter 19, verses 28-30 we see Jesus' final moments on the cross. It says, "After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the scripture), 'I thirst.' A jar full of sour wine stood there, so

they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to His mouth. When Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, 'It is finished,' and He bowed His head and gave up His Spirit."

Jesus had one more thing to say but He needed a drink first. Someone grabbed a hyssop branch. A hyssop branch is a plant that would grow between the cracks in the wall of a building. In Exodus 12:12 we read about another hyssop branch. This hyssop branch was used to spread the blood of the lamb on the doorposts during Passover. This was the tool that provided temporary salvation for the people from the angel of death.

You see the lamb was sacrificed and the hyssop branch spread it. That first lamb provided temporary sanctuary from impending doom. The Lamb of God provides eternal salvation for all those who believe. The first lamb was good and the second Lamb was better. So Jesus, now with His lips wet, was able to say His last three words, "It is finished." There is power in those words.

It is finished forever. This isn't something that needs to be done again. This isn't something that anyone else could ever do. This is the greatest person in the history of the world doing the greatest thing that has ever been done. "It is finished." It was finished on a hill 2,000 years ago and it is still finished today.

If you notice the last few words that we read say, "Jesus gave up His Spirit." Jesus gave it up, again alluding to the voluntary nature of Jesus' participation in these events. You see it does not say the religious leaders took Jesus' Spirit. It does not say Pontius Pilate was able to grab the Spirit from Jesus. The Roman soldiers were not able to steal Jesus' Spirit. He was still in control even while He hung on the cross. He gave it up for you. He gave it up for me. Jesus was in control the entire time. Jesus is a king. He is the best King.

We read that two followers took Jesus down off the cross and they buried Him in a rich man's tomb. Jesus is now beginning the transition from death and humiliation to burial with respect and honor. They wrapped Him with linens and put scents on Him to kind of mask the stink of decay. What you and I know is that while those linens and those scents were well intended, they were completely unnecessary. You see Jesus had no plans to stay in that tomb for very long. He was not going to decay. He was going to defeat the greatest enemy here on earth. "Death where is your sting?"

Tonight in this moment right here we remember the gift of grace and the incredible cost that was required. Jesus in this tomb, these were some dark moments for His followers. The man they had followed, the man that they had trusted, the man they believed in had just been killed. Now He is buried and they don't know what to do. But you and I, we get to know that Jesus wins. He is not staying in that tomb for long.

Tonight you have the opportunity to take communion and it is our opportunity to remember the price that was paid. At different stations throughout the room there is bread and there is juice. The bread represents the body of Jesus and the juice represents His blood. Once I pray for us you can come to these stations. You can take the elements back to your seat and take them in your own time as we continue to worship.

Here is my request. There are a great number of you who have heard this story before. And it is familiar. Maybe you could have told it even better than I have. What can happen is the familiarity of it can numb us to the reality. It can numb us to how incredible this really, really is: The greatest thing that has ever happened done by the greatest person who has ever lived.

So I pray that Jesus would make us sensitive to this again. That the magnitude of Jesus' death on the cross will become a reality unlike it has ever been before. We will see with crystal clarity. Tomorrow and Sunday we celebrate. Tonight we remember.

Let me pray for us.

God we are so grateful for this reminder. We are so grateful for this moment where we can press pause and we can remember. God I pray that if we are numb to this truth, this is all too familiar to us, that You make us sensitive again. That we would not ignore the reality that it took the death of the only perfect person who has ever lived to cover up for my sins. The fact is that You paid the price that only You could pay and turned around and gave me the reward that only You could earn. Let us not look past that. Let us not ignore it. Father we come to You to remember. This weekend we come to celebrate. It is in Your incredible name I pray. Amen.