

Good Friday

Prayer for illumination: please join me in prayer...

Sermon introduction:

I have not been to the Grand Canyon. Although I hear that pictures, videos, and descriptions of others cannot do it justice. I hear that you really have to see it for yourself.

Every year, “Hundreds of thousands of people from all over the world drive into the park and stare in silent wonder at the vastness and beauty of this part of God’s creation.

But not everyone who comes to the Canyon is a visitor. Some of those standing around are the men and women who work at the national park. Some of them are park rangers who have studied the Canyon and the history of the park. It’s their job to be there every day. They get to tell eager people about the wonderful sight before them. They get to see eyes light up and witness the jaws dropping at what is presented to them.

They no doubt know that they have a cool job... However, after a period of months, or certainly years, that Canyon can become, emotionally speaking, a simple hole in the ground. How can it retain its emotional grandeur after seeing it a thousand times?” (Croft, *The Pastor’s Soul*, 92)

Many of us are like the park workers. We have become very familiar with the gospel of God’s free grace. The death of Jesus no longer amazes us like it once did. We see it every day. Going to church and reading the Bible feels like work.

This evening gives us a chance to slow down and refocus on the death of Jesus Christ.

This evening is called good Friday. It is called good Friday because it is good that Jesus died for us. It was good because Jesus’ suffering had a purpose. What was that purpose? This is the question we will explore tonight. To do that we will look at 1 Peter 3:18 under two headings.

First, the pain of Christ’s suffering

Second, the purpose of Christ’s suffering

First, the pain of Christ’s suffering

1 Peter 3:18- “For Christ also suffered...”

Christ’s suffering on the cross was painful for many reasons.

There was the pain of physical suffering!

Crucifixion was excruciatingly painful. In fact, the word excruciating comes from the word cross. Since none of us have seen someone crucified we need scholars to help us understand what was involved.

One scholar writes-

“A criminal who was crucified was essentially forced to inflict upon himself a very slow death by suffocation. When the criminal’s arms were outstretched and fastened by nails to the cross, he had to support most of the weight of his body with his arms. The chest cavity would be pulled upward and outward, making it difficult to exhale in order to be able to draw a fresh breath. But when the victim’s longing for oxygen became unbearable, he would have to push himself up with his feet, thus giving more natural support to the weight of his body, releasing some of the weight from his arms, and enabling his chest cavity to contract more normally.

By pushing himself upward in this way the criminal could fend off suffocation, but it was extremely painful because it required putting the body's weight on the nails holding the feet, and bending the elbows and pulling upward on the nails driven through the wrists. The criminal's back, which had been torn open repeatedly by a previous flogging, would scrape against the wooden cross with each breath." (Grudem, 572)

Crucifixion was so horrible that it was reserved for the worst of the worst criminals of society.

There was the pain of physical suffering. But there was more pain...

There was the pain of substitutionary suffering.

Look with me at verse 18 again. "For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous"

Peter proclaims that Jesus suffered for the unrighteous.
He did not suffer for his own sins, since he was innocent.
He suffered for the sins of all those who would trust him.
He paid the penalty for their sins.

This means that on the cross Jesus Christ bore the wrath for the sins of

the murderer,
the pedophile,
the drunk,
the wife beater,
the racist,
the self righteous,
the proud,
the sexually immoral,
the manipulator,
the child abuser,
the thief,
and the adulter,

This was the greatest scandal in the history of the universe. The guilt of billions of people was imputed to the sinless Christ and then he was punished for them. As a result, we will not be punished for our sins, ever!!!

Sadly, some church goers don't like the idea of Jesus dying in the place of sinners. But if Jesus did not die in the place of sinners his death accomplished nothing.

Illustration:

James Denney, a 19th century British theologian, asks us to imagine two scenarios.

Imagine that someone is sitting on the side of pier, perfectly happy, content, and safe. A total stranger sees him sitting there. This total stranger starts sprinting towards him. While he is sprinting towards him, he shouts, "Because I love you, I'm going to die for you." Then he runs right past him and leaps into the water and drowns. This death was pointless, it did not accomplish anything. This crazy guy drowned for no apparent reason.

This is how many non-Christians think/feel about the death of Jesus.

On the other hand, imagine someone sitting on the end of a pier. He falls asleep and then falls into the water. Since he can't swim, he starts to drown. His friend sees him drowning from 30 yards away, he sprints down the pier and jumps in the water to save him. He risks his own life to save his friend. But, in the process of saving his drowning friend, he drowns. This death is a tragedy, but at least the death accomplished something. His death accomplished the salvation of another.

If Jesus did not die in our place, paying the penalty for our sins, his sacrificial death was pointless. It accomplished nothing.

On the other hand, if Jesus died in our place, paying the penalty for our sins, then we never have to fear being punished by God.

Objection! But why did Jesus need to be punished in our place for us to be forgiven? Can't God just forgive us? Isn't it God's job to forgive? God is love, right??? Yes, God is love but God is also a God of perfect justice and righteousness. If we think it is God's job to forgive us we will never be amazed by his grace. In order for us to be forgiven someone has to pay our penalty. Otherwise, justice would not be served. God is just as committed to his justice as he is committed to his love.

There was the pain of physical suffering.

There was the pain of substitutionary suffering.

Finally, there was the pain of relational suffering.

This was probably the most excruciating pain Jesus experienced. Because Jesus took on his shoulders the guilt of the world his father rejected him. He had too...

Jesus had experienced incredibly close fellowship with the Father for all eternity. This was the greatest joy of his life. It is hard for us to imagine this because all of our relationships, even our very closest relationships, are scarred by sin. The father and the son for all eternity did everything for the joy of the other. Theirs was a perfect relationship.

But we read in...

Mat 27:45-46 ESV Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. (46) And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

God forsook Christ because Christ, in that moment, bore the sins of the world. In that moment it was as if the father loved us more than his own son. Wow!!!

We have looked at the pain of Christ's suffering... but what was the purpose of the pain?

This brings us to the second point...

First, the pain of Christ's suffering!

Second, the purpose of Christ's suffering!

Christ's suffering was very purposeful. How???

Christ's suffering demonstrates God's love!

If you are like me, you sometimes wonder if God loves you?

Maybe you have experienced a significant trial,
maybe your broke,
maybe your stuck in relational conflict,
maybe your still single,
maybe you can't have children
maybe your car broke down
maybe your child has a severe disability
maybe one of your children is out of control
maybe you can't find work
maybe you have been physically or sexually abused.

In situations like these it is easy to doubt that God loves you. When you find yourself doubting God's love, remember that God loved you so much he sent his son to be crucified in your place.

Christ suffering demonstrates God's love...

In addition...

Christ's suffering destroys fear!

If Jesus took the judgment, you deserved than there is no more judgment or wrath left for you. It would be unjust of God to condemn you on judgment day because he has already condemned his son in your place. So, approach God's throne of grace with boldness and confidence. Don't let sin keep you away. If you sin confess your sin to the Lord, he will forgive you. But you must confess and believe...

*Christ's suffering demonstrates God's love
Christ's suffering destroys fear*

Finally, Christ's suffering brings us to God

1 Peter 3:18 "For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God,"

But why do we need to be brought to God? Because our sins separate us from God. We can not be friends with God and God will not be friends with us if we are not forgiven of all of our sins...

The purpose of Christ's suffering was to bring us to God!!!

What if the Bible said...

Christ suffered to give you a month long vacation to Bermuda... would this excite you?
Christ suffered to give you a happy marriage... would this excite you?
Christ suffered to ensure that your children would turn out... would this excite you?
Christ suffered to give you a perfect body in this life... would this excite you?
Christ suffered to bring you 10 billion dollars... would this excite you?

What is that thing that you want with every fiber of your being??? Think about it for a moment (pause)

What Jesus accomplished for you through his suffering is far better than all of these things combined. He brings us into relationship with God the Father...

Psa 16:11 ESV You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Psa 63:3 ESV "...your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you."

Conclusion:

We have looked at the pain and purpose of Christ's suffering...

How do we know that Christ accomplished his purposes when he suffered? The resurrection!

1 Peter 3:18 "For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit,"

Jesus died and was buried. But then he was made alive by the Spirit. Jesus Christ did not remain dead, but he rose from the grave three days later by the power of the Holy Spirit. His resurrection from the grave is proof that the power of sin and death have been broken.

Come back on Sunday, to learn more about the resurrection.

Christ suffered for a purpose. Ultimately, He suffered to bring us to God.

Do remember the first time you held your spouse's hand?

Do you remember the first time you saw your newborn child? You probably took tons of pictures...

Sadly, 30 years later, a shock of electricity probably does not go through your body when you touch your spouse's hand...

Why?

Slowly over time, your passion cools.

Time, familiarity, and repetition erodes passion.

The same thing can happen with the gospel of Jesus Christ. The key to keep this from happening is to remember the pain and the purpose of Christ's suffering....

lets pray...