

GOOD FRIDAY - Victory!

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[0 : 00] Father, we do pray that you would help us. Our Father and Lord, we pray that you'd open our eyes, that we might behold wondrous things from your word, that you'd soften our hearts, that we might receive it, that you might transform our wills, that we might be doers of your word, and you might lose our tongues, that we might proclaim it.

And we ask this for the glory of your Son, in whose name we pray. Amen. Friends, well, I thought I'd begin today with just two comments.

One is to tell you a little bit of a story. I learned a great lesson about 20 years ago, and that lesson was that if your sermon is not prepared well, don't preach it. And so I got to the stage yesterday where I realised I had not done enough preparation for the sermon I was going to preach today, so I'm preaching one that I'm very familiar with and love, and it's an Easter sermon.

So it fits with today's theme and so on, but I thought it was much better to do that than to revert to something that was not fully prepared. Second thing is, I'm basing today's sermon on three passages, and I'm not actually going to refer to them as we go.

Well, I will actually tell you where I'm up to with them, but I'm going to paraphrase them and turn them into a story. And so let's get underway, and I want you to imagine there is a small village.

[1 : 25] It's somewhere in Israel about, let's say, a thousand years before Christ or thereabouts, and the elders of the city have been called in, and a makeshift court is in session, and a young man is dragged in before the court.

All the villagers are gathered around, and this young man, as he's dragged in, his language is foul. He swears and curses, and his eyes are flashing with anger, and his wild eyes rest on this old couple.

And this young man stands facing his father and his mother, and the charges are read out to the whole courtroom, and witnesses are called. Their testimonies are clear. They are unanimous.

And then finally the father is called, and he stands facing his son, and the anguish of that moment in my mind's eye is written all over his tear-streaked face. And the court grows silent.

It's broken only by the mother's quiet sobbing, and the man speaks, and his voice cuts the air like a knife, and he says, I can't understand it. When he was a child, we loved him so much.

[2 : 26] He never wanted for anything. I can remember taking him in my arms. I can remember teaching him to walk. I can remember those first faltering steps he took toward me. The pride that I felt when we walked down the street with his small hand in mine.

I was always there for him, always ready to catch him when he fell. You all know the love that we gave him. You know we couldn't have loved him any more than we have.

But it simply hasn't been any good. It seems that the more that we love him, the more he abused us. He has always been stubborn, always rebellious. He's never done what we wanted.

He won't obey us now. And it's not as though we haven't disciplined him. I mean, you all know that we have. But now he's a drunkard and his life's out of control. And he's made life hell for us and he's made life hell for you, our fellow villagers.

And we can't take it anymore and nor can you. And the law is clear. It can't go on any longer. We don't want it this way, but it has to end. And so the father's eyes then turn to face his son and eyes of love meet those of hatred and scorn.

[3 : 33] And the old man chokes on the last few words. He says, I love you, but it has got to be this way. And judgment's been passed and all that remains is the sentence. And so the men of the city take that young man and they go out by the city wall and they bend down and they pick up rocks and he is stoned.

It is a, and the pile of rocks will remain outside this village as a continual reminder to all rebellious sons. This is the law of the rebellious son. It is the law that God gave his people in Deuteronomy 21.

It is there in the passage you have in front of you. But I want you to picture another scene and this time there's another court in session and another young man stands in the court and the young man this time has a name.

His name is Israel. And he represents the people of God. And as he stands there facing the court, the charges are read and witnesses are called. And finally, the father is brought in and he stands facing the son.

But I need to tell you a bit about this father. You see, he's no ordinary father. This father is God. He is no ordinary God either. You see, this is the God who gave that law of the rebellious son in Deuteronomy.

[4 : 41] He's the God who gave such laws to his people. He said, you live by them. This is the God who created the world. He's the Lord of all the world. The one who created human beings to live rightly before him and in relationship with him.

He's the one who demands that humans recognise this right of his. What's more, this God is a holy God. That is, he's a God who won't give his glory to another. He's a God who will not tolerate people saying that any other God is a real God.

In one sense, he's an intolerant God. He opposes those who will not recognise him as God. He's a God who's serious about himself. Who cares whether or not people recognise him.

Who cares whether or not they obey him. He's concerned about whether truth or falsehood prevails. He can't tolerate falsehood. He's a jealous God, a holy God. He's the God who gave his law in Deuteronomy and in Exodus.

He's a God who will not be mocked. And this God is the Father who faces a rebellious son in Hosea 11. Now what do you reckon this God is going to do?

[5 : 46] This Father, what will he do? And the whole courtroom waits to see. They listen in expectation. They think, what's going to happen here? How will a holy God treat an unholy people, a rebellious and idolatrous son?

And into their consciousness comes the voice of this Father and his words cut through the silence and he says, When Israel was young, I loved him. And I called my son out of Egypt.

Yet the more that I called to him, the more he strayed from me. He went off and he sacrificed to other gods, to the God Baal, to images. And he didn't even, he did this even though he was my son.

Even though it was me who taught him to walk. Even though it was me who took him in my arms. But he just hasn't understood and he hasn't understood my care for him and I led him with cords of human kindness and with ties of love.

I was like a father who lifts up a child to the cheek. I bent down to feed him. And even though I did this, he's continued to rebel. And even now, while he's suffering the consequences of having left me, the nations and the nations are surrounding him and they're tearing him to pieces.

[6 : 57] Even now, he still is bent on turning from me. Determined to cling to gods who cannot save. Now friends, when you hear this, the rebellion is clear and the judgment is obvious.

The law of the rebellious son from Deuteronomy has been more than broken. It has been shattered. And no further witnesses are needed. All that remains is the inevitable punishment.

And God does promise punishment here in Hosea 11. But then, something strange happens. For the punishment does not arrive. And the father halts the proceedings of the court.

And he silences the court. And the God who gave that law over the rebellious son speaks again. And not to the court this time. No, instead he faces his son. And the anguish shows through in this passage.

He's distraught. Emotion overtakes him. And the words he speaks, I think, are some of the most magnificent in the Old Testament. He says, how can I surrender you to judgment? How can I give you up?

[8 : 03] How can I devastate you? How can I annihilate you from the face of the earth like I did to Sodom and Gomorrah and the sister cities of Admar and Zoboim? My heart is churned over within me.

That's what the verse says. It says, God's heart is actually turned over, overturned within him. He cannot let it happen. It says, God is saying, though you deserve this Israel, I cannot permit it.

I will not execute my burning anger. And then he turns to the court and he says, though my son deserves this, I cannot permit it. I won't do it. I will not destroy him for this is my son.

I love him and I will not become enraged. And then he says, why? For I am God. Can you hear what he's saying? He's saying, I'm not a mere man. I am God, the Holy One in your midst.

In other words, I'm far above humans. I am the Lord and I will not execute the fierceness of my anger and destroy this my people. Now that's how the book of Hosea sees it.

[9 : 03] God has loved his son like no father has loved his son. And though he's been disappointed time after time after time, he will continue to love. Though he's been rejected, he will keep going back.

And as the Old Testament tells us, he'll be rejected again. And he is rightly angered. His son has done much worse things than the son in Deuteronomy.

But what happens within these verses is something great. You see, as this holy God faces a son who deserves punishment, he does in one sense what no human being can do in the same way. He decides to take the suffering and hurt upon himself.

And in a struggle which appears to upturn and tear at the very depths of God, he turns his anger into a new expression of love. As it were, that upturning of his anger occurs within his own being.

The words used for the overturning of Sodom and Gomorrah are used for what happens within God's own being here. God contains his smoldering anger by turning it upon himself. And his love emerges to overpower it and mercy triumphs over judgment.

[10 : 08] And I want you to picture a third scene. Another court's in session. There's no rebellious son this time. There's no rebellious Israel.

There's instead you and me. And we stand there. We stand before the God of all the earth. And remember, this God is not just any God. This God is the holy God, a jealous God and an intolerant God in one sense.

A God who opposes those who will not recognize that he alone has the right to be God. He opposes those who don't bow down to him and worship him. He demands total dependence by his creation upon him.

Now, if we're before such a God, we are really exposed, aren't we? The blazing heat and light of God's holy righteousness leaves us exposed, even naked before him.

And our sin shouts out for recognition. You see, before such a God, it is clear that our lives have not been lived in recognition of him as God. We have been our own gods, our own deities.

[11 : 12] We have asserted, well, even if not continually, certainly at key points in our lives, that we don't need this God, that we can do things our own way without his help.

We have, all of us, acted independently of him. Whether in thought or word or action or lifestyle, we have so often considered him an irrelevancy.

Now, before this holy God, the truth shouts out for recognition. He is right. He is justly angry.

We deserve the heat of his anger and his holiness. We deserve the fierceness of all we have spent our lives wanting, absence from his presence and influence. And there can really only be one thing awaiting for us, the heat of his anger and the fierceness of his holiness.

And then the judgment comes. And just as in Hosea he speaks of love, of rejection and of anger, and just as in Hosea he cannot let his anger loose on us, just as in Hosea he promises to take the suffering and hurt that we deserve into his own being, as it were.

[12 : 20] You see, this is truly God. He is a holy God. And then, in my mind's eye, the courtroom scene becomes a little clearer. And there in the darkness you see the most unusual courtroom ever.

There, a man hangs on a cross. God in the flesh, nailed to wood. And as all the heat of God's anger is spent on him, this God in the flesh cries out in our place, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

As it were, you know, speaking metaphorically, the very core of God's being is sort of torn apart. These two, who had never been separated from each other, one feels estranged from the other.

And in one sense, for the first time, he stands somewhat alone. And this father looks away while his son, who's never known death, dies the worst of deaths. He hangs in the darkness while life ebbs out of his body.

And in this one act, which we remember this day, with that symbol, in this one act, our sin is proclaimed and forgiven.

[13 : 33] You see, our sin is shown to be utterly sinful by the cross. Our sin is so sinful that it could only be dealt with by another taking our place for us, by Jesus taking our punishment.

It could only be resolved by Jesus himself feeling that desolation that we ought to face. And as he takes our punishment, he also proclaims forgiveness.

And that is why Matthew, in the account that we've read, records the temple curtain being ripped open. You see, that temple curtain stood in that part of the temple, in front of that part of the temple where God's presence was thought to be.

It was a constant reminder, a sign that access to God was impossible. Its presence was a sign that forgiveness was not available. And so, at the very point at which the core of God's being is ripped apart, as it were, as Jesus cries out in desolation at God having, at God, at feeling God's absence, at this very point, the curtain is ripped open and forgiveness is possible.

You see, what that curtain being ripped open means is access to God is available. And so, we see in Jesus what Hosea had just glimpsed at, into the future. God loving us in a way that no human could do.

[14 : 59] God loving us so much he took the reality and fierceness of his anger upon himself, as it were. God in the flesh dying in our place. God in the flesh taking that isolation in our place.

Friends, only God can be holy like this and only God can love like this. But what's the point of all of this? What does it mean? What relevance does it have for us this day?

Well, the relevance it has is profound. You see, what is being said and what we remember this day on this Good Friday is that in some sense our judgment has already taken place.

When we face God as we inevitably must, we will be taken back to that sort of metaphorical courtroom set up on a Friday so long ago and there will be no hiding on that day.

As we face the cross it will clearly expose us. It will shout out the sinfulness of our sin. It will proclaim we deserve judgment and punishment.

[16 : 04] But the beauty of Good Friday and of this symbol that we remember today is that it will also proclaim the possibility of forgiveness. and so what God will want to know of us is this.

How have you lived life? What did you do with this judgment already proclaimed? Did you live life determined to face a holy God on your own?

Did you live life determined to face the consequences of your actions on your own? Did you say in word or action or deed that you are willing to bear the punishment on your own? Or did you see this?

what God has done for you and accept his love proclaimed on the cross? Did you accept that in the flesh this Jesus had faced the consequences of your sin on your behalf?

Did you in thought, word, deed demonstrate that you wanted Jesus to face God for you and bear the punishment in your place? In other words can we hear what's been said on this day?

[17 : 07] What is being said is will you deal with your case on your own? Well will you let Jesus deal with it for you? Friends this is the meaning of Good Friday this is the meaning of Easter it is clear God so loved the world that he gave his only son so that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life John 3 16 that if you move on to verse 36 whoever believes in the son has eternal life but whoever rejects the son will not see life for God's wrath remains on him this is the beauty of this day we remember that we need not face God's wrath because of what his son has done on our behalf God so loved the world that he gave his only son so that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life we're going to celebrate the Lord's

Supper later on and as we do this is a remembrance that the death of Jesus is a death for us so if that is what you know and what you believe of what Jesus has done then please come and share with us in the Lord's Supper let us pray Father we thank you for your great love for us proclaimed in the cross thank you that you are the righteous God but also the one who makes righteous through Christ who makes those who are in Christ righteous and Father we thank you for this in Jesus name Amen