

+WEEKLY SERMON

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Our Good Friday substitute

Good Friday looks anything but a good day. It's a day full of violence and mockery, a day that shows human religion and political power at their worst.

But it's a day which is good because it's a day that speaks of God's great love. For the cross of Christ was not an accident.

The gospel writers describe how on two occasions Jesus cried out with a loud voice from the cross.

The first cry was a cry of abandonment. Jesus cried out 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' (Matthew 27:46).

This cry followed three hours of supernatural darkness that fell over the land. Darkness is a picture of judgement in the Scriptures. We see it in the events of the exodus when darkness fell for three days as God brought judgement on Egypt.

At the cross, Jesus was also experiencing the judgement of God, not for his own sins, but for ours. As the apostle Peter puts it, he died 'the righteous for the unrighteous' (1 Peter 3:18), for those whose sin rightly deserves God's righteous judgement. He died as our substitute.

A powerful picture of substitution comes from 'The Miracle on the River Kwai' by Ernest Gordon, when he describes what happened to a group of POWs working on the Burma railway.

At the end of one afternoon's work, a shovel was missing. 'The officer in charge became enraged. He demanded that the missing shovel be produced, or else. When nobody in the squadron budged, the officer got his gun and threatened to kill them all on the spot.

It was obvious the officer meant what he had said. Then, finally, one man stepped forward. The officer put away his gun, picked up a shovel and beat the man to death.

When it was over, the survivors picked up the bloody corpse and carried it with them to the second tool check. This time, no shovel was missing. Indeed, there had been a miscount at the first check point ... an innocent man had been willing to die to save the others!

Jesus's second cry is one of victory. 'At that very moment, the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom' (Matthew 27:50.51). Access into God's presence has been secured through the death of our substitute, King Jesus. 'Hallelujah, what a Saviour!'

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