

The Truth About Everything

Introduction:

This morning is Easter Sunday, the conclusion of Holy Week, when Christians around the world look back on the last week of Jesus' life, and today, on his resurrection. Many people have a lot of questions this time of year. What does a man dying a torturous death on a cross two thousand years ago possibly have to do with my life today? Some of you may have come today with such a question. I hope I can help you find an answer.

We see in the Old Testament, in Isaiah 53 and others, that Jesus' death was prophesied some 700 years before he was even born. Jesus said that He came to fulfil the law, and John the Baptist declared of Him, "*Behold the lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world.*" Jesus also declared of Himself, in Matthew 20:28 that He had come "*to give His life as a ransom for many.*"

Jesus clearly and purposefully moved towards what He knew would be a painful and humiliating death. In John 10:17-18 Jesus said, "*The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life – only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.*"

So we see the Easter events were no accident, not a horrible chain of circumstances which Jesus stumbled into. We also see that God the Father was behind the plans for all of this and Jesus was a willing participant. In other words, there was a bigger story going on than just an ordinary man dying the way that thousands of others had died under Roman occupation. The confrontation that seemed to culminate on a hill called Golgotha outside Jerusalem was the continuation of a drama that echoed back to a garden at the beginning of time and reverberated through every age of men.

Human history is a sad one. As author Richard Neuhaus writes, we are all aware that "*something has gone terribly wrong with the world, and with us in the world.*" In reading the newspaper or watching the news on TV, very rarely is the news good. I don't want to read about another mother abandoning her own child or someone else being murdered. I don't want to hear about the plague of human trafficking that is destroying lives or

pornography that is destroying families. I'm tired of the violence and callousness and vulgarity that seems to surround us. I'm also tired of my compromise, my bad attitude, my selfishness. I'm so tired of living so far beneath the purposes for which I was created. How about you?

On Good Friday we come face to face with the reality of sin and evil. God Himself puts the lie to claims that our own faults and sins are "small." If the Son of God had to suffer such a cruel death, then our sins could not have been "small." That was one of the lessons of the crucifixion – sin has horrible consequences. Your sin, my sin, the sin of all of us; every lie, every cruel deed, every self-centered act was poured out on the Son of God. As 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, "*God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us...*" Isaiah wrote "*...the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.*"

Good Friday is, quite simply, the megaphone of God making us come to grips with our sinful nature. We must understand this if we are to know how to live. Neuhaus is right when he says that "*If what Christians say about Good Friday is true, then it is, quite simply, the truth about everything.*"

What does that mean? It means that, as we've seen, it demonstrates the horrific realities of the consequences of sin. We come face to face with the fact that our sin has separated us from our relationship with our Creator and nothing we can do can change that. Deep down we know that there is something lacking, something missing. It's like John Eldredge wrote: "*For most of us, life feels like a movie we've arrived at forty-five minutes late.*" The Cross also shows us that all the self-help books in the world are not going to get you back in a right relationship with God.

The fact of the cross means you can't give enough money to earn heaven. As 1 Peter 1:18-19 says: "*For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.*" Neither can you do enough good deeds to earn it; you can't beat yourself up enough. Isaiah wrote in Isaiah 64:6 that "*all our righteous acts are like filthy rags.*" There is a separation between us and a holy God caused by our sin. What is there to bridge that gap? How do we cross over to find fulfillment, to find forgiveness, to find a relationship with our Creator? Jesus said in John 3:16 – "*For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.*"

In John 14:6 Jesus said, *“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”* In John 19:30 we read the final words of Jesus before His death. It says, *“When He had received the drink, Jesus said, ‘It is finished.’ With that, He bowed His head and gave up His spirit.”*

It is finished. Three of the most powerful words ever uttered by anyone – anywhere. This wasn’t some criminal speaking; not just some man who was relieved to die to end his pain. This God-man hanging on the cross was the one who said to the Pharisees, *“I tell you the truth, ...before Abraham was born, I am!”* (John 8:58) In John 1 we find the apostle wrestling with the words to express the reality of what it meant for the world that Jesus came. In John 1:1 he said, *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”* Verse 4 says, *“In Him was life, and that life was the light of men.”* Verse 14 says, *“The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”*

This was the one hanging on a cross between two thieves - God in the flesh. When He spoke those words they were pregnant with meaning – **It is finished!**

What was finished? We get a hint in Matthew 27:51. It says, *“At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.”* The curtain was a six-inch thick tapestry placed in the temple to separate the priests and all of the people from the holy of holies; it represented the separation between a holy God and sinful humanity. Only the high priest could go beyond that veil, and only after going through a long ritual of purification. It was a real ordeal. The point behind it was to illustrate that our sin has deprived us of the presence of God. Our sin was a veil that hid God from us. We couldn’t see Him; we couldn’t approach Him. But the moment Jesus died, offering Himself as a sacrifice for our sins, once for all, crying out *“It is finished!”* God the Father reached out and tore it in two. *“Welcome home!”*

Every story of separation should end here. The price has been paid. All is forgiven. Come home. It is finished! The power of sin has been broken – step out and breathe the free air. It is finished!

Looking back through history we see God speaking to us through the prophets, trying to bring us back into relationship with Himself. We see promises throughout the Old Testament that one day He would come, Messiah, who would make all things new. We see rules and regulations and how impossible it was and is for people to live up to all that is required. We see the sacrificial system, showing symbolically what had to happen; what effect that sin has, and showing the need for a sacrifice. We see the lamb of God promised. And finally, we see that Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, hanging on a cross, with His last breath saying "*It is finished!*"

Those words had a different meaning for Jesus' followers. They took Him down from the cross and they laid Him in a tomb provided by a man named Joseph from Arimethea. Everybody went away. It was finished. The disciples gathered together, probably in the house of Peter's mother. They talked about their failures. They cried on each other's shoulders. They comforted Mary and each other, and they tried to come to grips with a world without a Saviour.

In their minds, good had faced evil and evil had triumphed. It was hard to believe, but this cold reality was hard to deny. They had seen them crucify Him; they had watched Him die.

The words also had a different meaning for Jesus' enemies in the spiritual realm. I've spoken before of the reality of the spiritual battle between good and evil, and of Satan, the one Jesus called "*The Prince of this world.*" He also thought it was finished. The greatest threat to his domination of the human race was lying cold in a grave. He had won.

But he forgot, or perhaps he never understood, what Jesus said. In John 14:30-31, as Jesus was preparing the disciples for the hard events ahead, He said: "*I will not speak with you much longer, for the prince of this world is coming, he has no hold on me, but the world must learn that I love the Father and that I do exactly what my Father has commanded me. Come now; let us leave.*" Jesus said that the prince of this world had no hold on Him. What did that mean?

Go all the way back to that first garden. After the disobedience of our first parents, the curse of death came into the world. Death was a result of sin. But the Bible tells us that Jesus knew no sin. He was the spotless lamb. He experienced death on our behalf, but He was only visiting. In John 11:25-26,

as Jesus stood outside the tomb of His friend Lazarus, He looked at Lazarus' sister, Martha, and said, *"I am the resurrection and the life, He who believes in Me will live, even though He dies; and whoever lives and believes in Me will never die..."*

On a glorious morning, Jesus Christ stepped out of a tomb and split history in two. He looked at Satan and said, *"Is that the best you've got?"* Paul tells us that, having defeated him, He triumphed over him openly.

Everything changed. From despair to hope. From death to life. From darkness to light. From guilt to forgiveness. From shame to glory. From humiliation to vindication. From defeat to victory. It is finished!

Conclusion:

Only you can decide what this means to you.

This is Easter weekend. Good Friday provided a great opportunity for some to commemorate the sacrificial death of Jesus. For others it was a great chance to vote early and get some chores done. This morning around the world people celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and many will choose to mark that historic event in bed. That's their choice. But it reveals a great disconnect between the reality of the Easter events and our modern-day world. What does Jesus possible have to do with me?

Larry King, the recently retired CNN talk-show host, was asked who he would like to interview in all of history. He said he would like to interview Jesus Christ, and he'd like to know if He was who He said He was, because the answer to that question would define reality for him. That ought to be true for all of us, particularly for those of us who know His resurrection to be true and who have tasted the life that he offers. How can we ever be the same?