

Devotional on Good Friday 2024 - John 19:1-37

Today, we reflect on the last hours of the earthly life of our Lord and Savior. We read in John 19 how Jesus willingly submitted Himself, and gave Himself into the hands of the Jewish and Roman leaders, to be crucified and die. On this day, we try to identify with His suffering, to realise the depth of His agony and loneliness, when – as if abandoned by man and God – He died alone on the cross. Why did Jesus give Himself without a fight? And what does it mean for us now that He gave Himself to die on the cross and that His blood was shed?

God helps us to understand this by referring to Jesus as a Lamb – the Lamb of God. Three years earlier, at the start of His public ministry, John the Baptist exclaimed when he saw Jesus coming to him, having returned from the temptation by Satan in the desert: “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”

John knew that Jesus would suffer and die. He was probably referring to Isaiah 53:7, where it is stated: “He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a **lamb** to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.” Three years after John’s prophecy, his words were fulfilled when Jesus was led, like a lamb, to the slaughter. He was brought before the leaders, who mocked and scourged Him, and condemned Him to die. He did not fight. He barely opened His mouth. He willingly allowed Himself to be killed, although completely innocent.

All this occurred in Jerusalem during the Jewish Feast of Passover, of Unleavened bread. The first of the three great Jewish feasts, Passover is a reminder of the way the Lord freed the nation of Israel from slavery in Egypt. On their final night in Egypt, God commanded each family to take a lamb, to slaughter it, and to paint its blood on their doorposts so that the Israelites would be spared when the Lord killed all of the firstborn in Egypt. In this way they were spared God’s wrath and enabled to leave Egypt and go in freedom towards Canaan, the land promised to them. To remember this event, the Israelites were commanded to celebrate each year the Feast of Unleavened bread. Each family was to take an innocent lamb, to prepare it and after four days to slaughter it, consume it in fire, and eat it without breaking its bones. This seder meal is to remember that the people have been set free.

The lambs that the Jewish families were killing in Jerusalem that day was a reminder of their delivery from slavery into freedom. But they were also prophetic of the real Lamb of God, who in their midst was being slaughtered, and who died to set all people free.

In Revelation 5 we read how in heaven Jesus is worshipped and glorified as the Lamb of God: “You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.”

And so, on this Good Friday, let us give God thanks that the blood of Jesus, the Lamb of God, has set us free. He has paid the price. We can rejoice that we have been redeemed – purchased by God, freed from the slavery of sin, in order to serve Him in freedom. Even more amazingly, He has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve God, and we will reign with Him on earth when Jesus comes again.

Prayer: Thank you, Father, for giving your only Son that we might have eternal life. Hold us and protect us under your wings, keep us from the evil one. Thank you, Lord Jesus, for laying down your life. You are the Lamb of God, and we give you all our praise. Thank you, Holy Spirit, for ministering and sharing the life of the risen Lord with us every day. Work in us this day and every day, until Jesus comes. Amen.

SONG: In Christ alone (Stuart Townend)