

“A Great High Priest Who Has Passed Through the Heavens”

Isaiah 52:13-53:12 • Psalm 22 • Hebrews 10:16-25 or Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9 • John 18:1-19:42

Rev. Bill Pinches

Mason, Michigan

March 29, 2024

Good Friday

Thousands of people were crucified by the Roman Empire. Most were rebels or criminals of one kind or another. It was an ugly, brutal, humiliating way to die. The specific cause of death was typically asphyxiation, but the brutality of crucifixion could also result in heart failure, dehydration, sepsis, or other factors that could lead to death. The Romans typically used crucifixion as a deterrent, to try to discourage other people from doing what *those* people had done. Jesus was by no means the first to suffer crucifixion, and he would certainly not be the last; early Christian literature says that the apostle Peter was also crucified, but he insisted that he be crucified upside-down, as he did not feel worthy enough to be crucified in the same manner as his Lord. And there were many, *many* others.

Jesus's crucifixion is, of course, the most well-known of all. It's also the most important.

Over the course of about three-quarters of a day, he had been betrayed, put on trial by the religious leaders, falsely accused, beaten, bound, put on trial a second time, found to be not guilty of any crime deserving death, condemned anyway, flogged, mocked, paraded through the streets of Jerusalem, through one of the gates in the city wall, brought to a little hill just outside the city, stripped, and impaled onto a wooden cross, which was then hoisted up for all to see, left to suffer and die. He was derided some more. He prayed. He suffered. And, eventually, after several hours of agony, he died.

It was ugly. Gruesome. Barbaric. Utterly horrific. And we Christians call it “good.”

Calling it “good” does not remove any of the barbarity of the event. It does not condone the actions of the Roman soldiers, or Pontius Pilate, or the Jewish religious leaders, or the crowd that demanded Jesus be crucified, or Judas Iscariot, or the other eleven disciples who abandoned Jesus in his moment of crisis. Calling this day “good” means that we ascribe a *theological* and *spiritual* significance to this terrible event. It means that we believe that God caused something *good* come out of this.

No, not just “good.” That's a gross understatement. God caused something *amazing* to come out of this. Something *incredible*. Something *wonderful*. Something simply and truly *awe-some*.

Our salvation. Our *eternal* salvation. The forgiveness of our sins. Our redemption. God has brought us back from all threat of judgment and fear to God's magnificent grace and forgiveness.

We worship an *awesome* God. A God who used *this* to give us the most precious gifts of all.

The unknown author of the epistle to the Hebrews calls Jesus a “great high priest who has passed through the heavens.” He was sacrificed, offered to God on what became for us a holy altar, to

atone for our sins. He is the ultimate sacrifice. But he also becomes for us the ultimate *priest*. *He* is the one who intercedes to God on our behalf. *He* is the one through whom we offer our prayers to God. *He* is the one who presides, even now, over all services that are offered in his name, including this one.

So we worship you, Lord Jesus. We bow down before you, remembering your sacrifice, remembering your offering, the precious gift of your very life, offering our profound praise and gratitude for what you have done for us. Thanks to you, our salvation is secured. Love and forgiveness and grace and mercy are *ours* to enjoy for all eternity. All because you were willing to go all the way to the cross.

© 2024 Rev. Bill Pinches