



Good Friday - Not Just Good but Glorious *Moderator's Comments* *Posted 1 April 2019*

By Rev John P Wilson

Childhood impressions linger, don't they? I'm so grateful for (most of) them. My earliest memory of 1950s church life is full of happy thoughts, good people and full Sundays. Sunday mornings, afternoons and evenings – there was always something engaging and purposeful to do (yes, Sunday afternoons: Christian Endeavour).

As helpful as all that was, there are someone boyhood memories that need tweaking or straightening out later. Each year, our evangelical Baptist church gave huge attention to Palm Sunday, followed five days later by a much more sombre Friday morning service. Even without specific instruction, this pattern taught me to celebrate the joy of Palm Sunday but to tone it down on Good Friday. This was the order of things, from glory to gloom: after the glory of the triumphal march into Jerusalem we must move to the gloom of the Cross. Which prompted, of course, that perennial childhood question: “Dad, why is Good Friday good? Isn't it bad, what they did to Jesus?”

Reflecting on this glory to gloom transition, I now wonder if it needs correction. In fact, the march into Jerusalem isn't all that glorious. Many of those singing the “hosanna” chorus would have a much more sinister chant on their lips by the end of the week. There's not a lot glorious about a people who misapply their praise in hope of personal benefit in some form of national deliverance.

Maybe it should be the reverse: from the gloom of misplaced Palm Sunday hope to the triumphant glory of Good Friday. I have it on impeccable authority that Good Friday is both good and glorious. There are two heavenly witnesses; and these two agree and their words cannot be denied.

For the benefit of his disciples, Jesus predicted his imminent death, describing it as his moment of glory. “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified” (John 12:23)

Jesus said that his moment of death is his moment of glory. Which is really surprising, because it looks like the opposite. It has all the appearance of something horrible – hanging on a cross until asphyxiation is a shocking way to die. But Jesus says it's how God is glorified – that through the Cross there is glory.

See the juxtaposed stories in this chapter – John 12? Immediately prior to this verse, John 12:12, we read of the King's procession into the city of kings ... received by adoring fans waving palm branches, singing praises: “hosanna, hosanna”. It was a ticker-tape parade. Surely, that's where glory is?

But, it's as if Jesus said: “No, over here ... nothing to see over there. That was yesterday's performance: that was just crowd surfing. NOW is the hour. The real glory is at the cross.”

It's counter intuitive: real glory is at the cross. How is death glorious? I recall the Saturday afternoon of President Kennedy's assassination – it traumatised this young boy. Watching the event replayed, seeing snippets of the funeral on TV ... there was nothing glorious about it. Profound, sombre reflection, yes ... but no glory in the great man's passing.

Many of us recall the day of Princess Diana's death, a Sunday afternoon shock. Disbelief, anger, sadness ... but no glory there. Glory in the death of Jesus, really? No wonder the disciples didn't understand. I wouldn't have.

Our Lord's mind always went to this. His main thought was what he'd come to achieve for sinners at the Cross. Yes, he did

many other things in his short life:

- he gave himself to train the twelve;
- he fed the hungry;
- he healed the sick;
- he loved the company of friends;

but all the while where did his mind track to? To his hour of glory – which was: the Cross. The central theme of his mission: the Cross.

Of course, we never separate this from what followed the Cross – it's not the Cross in isolation, it's the empty tomb, his return to heaven ... but it's Jesus' words that track immediately to the Cross. Jesus' heart was always at the Cross.

Jesus was never more glorious than when he was nailed to the Cross. Jesus was glorified in his greatest moment of darkness. At the moment Jesus offered up his life as a sacrifice for sinners, as he bore the terrible weight of the world's sin, as he endured his Father's anger at sin ... and the veil was torn, the lights went out, the earth rumbled ... never was our saviour more glorious. Jesus came into the world to carry a cross, not wear a crown. He came for a crucifixion, not a coronation.

At the most hopeless moment ... when it appears most awful ... we're to see that it's actually the most hopeful and most awesome moment in all history – the moment when justice and mercy meet and glory shines. The moment when Satan is defeated and people are set free.

Then, the second heavenly witness booms from heaven, referring to the Cross: "I have glorified it (i.e. my name), and I will glorify it again" (John 12:28)

There are very few times we read of God's voice from heaven, so it must be monumentally significant. Remember Jesus' baptism? His transfiguration? This time, God declares from heaven that at the moment of his Son's crucifixion there is glory to the name of the triune God. This is the second testimony to the goodness and the glory of Good Friday.

Jesus adds to the testimony: "This is for your benefit, not mine". The voice from heaven is for our benefit, so we may better grasp that central to Jesus' mission is the Cross.

There's application here for us as a church: in Presbyterian churches throughout the nation, we give ourselves to so many things as part of the church's mission: we love worshiping God and we rightly encourage others to attend, we invite friends to Bible study groups, we train leaders, provide pastoral care, visit the sick, engage in mission ... we do so many good things in our church program. In all this: is the Cross central. In all we do, where does our mind track to? Is it to Jesus' hour of glory: the

Cross? Because that's where:

- mercy is found;
- people are blessed;
- sinners are converted;
- sin is forgiven;
- grace is discovered;
- freedom enjoyed.

See where Jesus takes us ... vs. 32 "When I am lifted up, I will draw all people to myself". This is our message to a hurting world:

- looking for mercy?
- want blessing?
- searching for a new start?
- desperate to be forgiven?
- in need grace?
- longing to be set free?

It's all at the Cross, where Jesus was lifted up. His being lifted up is the drawcard. Mercy, blessing, conversion, forgiveness, grace, freedom – it's all there, for all peoples. Because it's the Cross that draws all people to Christ.

Perhaps, dear reader, there are some of you standing at a distance to the Cross, preferring not to come near, desperate for God's blessing, but without the messiness of the Cross. Maybe that's how I felt as a young boy – wishing my church would hurry on from the gloom of Good Friday to get to the joy of Easter morning (let's have done with those sticky buns and get to the chocolate eggs). Yet, the drawing power of God is through the saviour lifted up at the Cross. I pray that God will draw you to the crucified saviour.

Perhaps there are some of you saying what the mockers said while Jesus was on the Cross. Remember what some said? "Come down from the Cross and then we'll believe you". Maybe you ask: "Can't I just believe a gentler version of Jesus, a sanitised Jesus?" Does a blood-stained Jesus dying as a substitutionary atonement offend you? But a sanitised Jesus is not a saving Jesus, because the pulling power of Jesus is his being lifted up on the Cross – not being released from the Cross.

Jesus would not come down from the Cross ... this was his finest hour, this was the moment when the prince of this world was driven out, when salvation was delivered. It's at the Cross where Jesus is most glorious.

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