

Meditation: GOOD FRIDAY?

I have always thought of the crucifixion of Jesus as the greatest expression of the love of God and have done much speaking and writing on the subject. Here, for example, is an excerpt from my essay "Cleanse Me" (slightly modified). It begins with 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. It is hard to express on paper what I am feeling just now about the little word "so." How much does God love us? So much that he gave his life that we might live. Remember that Jesus Christ is God. We must never think that God loved us so much that he chose some lesser being to die for us. No, this was pure self-giving love. I believe many things about God that I can't explain, and I am content with that.

"When was the cleansing blood shed for us? That depends on which realm you are referring to. In the spiritual, eternal realm, the decision was made and carried out before the universe and people were even created. God knew before he made humans exactly how we would turn out and knew that if any of us wished to come into a love relationship with him (which is what he wanted people to choose), a blood sacrifice that only God could provide would have to be in place for the bath we would need. With all that knowledge, God created us anyway. That's love!

"If you are thinking of the earthly realm, where time and space prevail, the cleansing blood was shed by Jesus on Calvary's cross nearly two thousand years ago. The Old Testament is full of stories about the shedding of blood of innocent animals for the remission of the sins of human beings, showing that we can't take away our sins by ourselves. All this, plus many prophecies and hints, set the stage for the most astonishing event in history: the incarnation. The eternal Son of God actually was born as a human baby so he could grow up and shed his perfect blood as an atonement for our sins. Paul prayed that we might grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge. Meditating on the word "so" in John 3:16 is a good place to begin!"

Lately I have been thinking of the crucifixion as also the highest expression of the anger – the wrath – of God. I have used the form of our familiar verse to present this parallel truth to God's love: For God so hated sin that he gave his one and only Son, who shed his blood as an atoning sacrifice for our sin, that whoever believes in him may be cleansed – forgiven! – and have eternal life. God's hatred for sin is revealed in the Bible as he killed animals to make coverings for Adam and Eve the first time they disobeyed him. Some people see only an angry God in the Old Testament and this frightens them. They prefer to concentrate on Jesus, whom they see as pure love. But Jesus said, *"I and the Father are one."* The crucifixion proved that both Father and Son hated sin so much that this cooperative effort was put into place: all of our sins were laid on the Son and the Father then let him suffer the penalty that we deserve – separation from God.

Oh, how much we owe to God for both our earthly and our spiritual life! The least we can do in response is to live lives as free from sin as possible, for his honor and glory.

I've also been wondering about something else: Why do we call the day Jesus died "Good Friday"? Some other countries use different names. In Sweden, for example, the day is called Long Friday, and a long day it was, indeed! I think it's easy to understand that the crucifixion was good for US because it opened the way for our salvation. But what about Jesus? Was the day good for him?

The Scriptures give us many indications of the swirling emotions he experienced as the crucifixion approached. One of my favorites is Hebrews 12:2 which says that Jesus *"for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame."* From the time Jesus performed his first miracle, that of turning water into wine, he knew that at the end of his life wine would be used to represent the blood he would shed to usher in the new covenant. His death was always in his mind, as shown by the many times he referred to it in his ministry. And his prayer in Gethsemane reveals how much he dreaded the experience he HAD to go through.

So when Jesus said *"It is finished"* on the cross, I imagine a TREMENDOUS load falling off his shoulders. Also, the sense of accomplishment, having finished the mission for which he came to earth, must have been HUGE as well. And the temporary breach between Father and Son (that FELT like an ETERNITY) was healed now. The only thing left was for Jesus to enter into the joy that had helped him endure the cross, a joy so great and different from what we know here that it swallowed up all the pain of his ordeal. I think perhaps we HAVE correctly named the day after all!

The time will come when every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. Join me in proclaiming him Lord NOW. In the words of an old hymn I can say, "A wonderful Savior is Jesus my Lord!" Amen.