

Good Friday 2022 Reflection Questions

(If you didn't watch online, the manuscript for Mike's talk is attached!)

Part 1.

Mike's reflection centred on the way Luke's gospel points us to the spiritual battle on Good Friday. Where it's easy to get caught up in what people do or what circumstance we face, Jesus shows us there's a bigger story unfolding.

1) Sometimes being asked to understand the reasons for someone's behaviour can feel like excusing it. What's the difference between understanding vs excusing? Why is understanding helpful but excusing dangerous?

2) One of the results of being forgiven is that you become a forgiving person yourself. Why do you think that is? *(Hint: Matthew 18:21-35, Colossians 3:12-13)*

3) Why is choosing forgiveness important in winning the spiritual battle we are in?

4) Forgiveness is not a once-off event, it is a decision that must be re-made over and over again. What helps you to keep making that decision even in the midst of your pain?

Part 2.

What stood out to you from chapters 22 & 23 of Luke's gospel? Reflect on the following questions.

1) How does that help you know Jesus better and love Him more?

2) How can it help you to follow Jesus, becoming more like Him?

If meeting with others

3) How can we help each other to do something about what we've been talking about today?

Mike's Talk

I hope the story of Christ's death for you and I has impacted you in a fresh way today.

Early on there was a scene where Judas Iscariot was walking through the temple courts and approached some religious leaders. Just an ordinary looking guy going about his business.

But there was something much more sinister going on.

The text says "Then Satan entered into Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve disciples, and he went to the leading priests and captains of the Temple guard to discuss the best way to betray Jesus to them."

The video of that scene quite rightly did not attempt to show what that might have looked like, because the spiritual battle we are in is not one that we can see with our eyes.

Ephesians 6 tells us this: "For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world..."

On Good Friday Jesus was locked in a life-and-death battle and only He was actually aware of where that battle was really being fought and what that battle was really for.

But before we get to that, let's go back to what we can see with human eyes as the story unfolds.

It starts here with Judas' betrayal. One of Jesus' close friends and followers. Someone Jesus had trusted with responsibilities on His team.

When Jesus reveals that one of His disciples would betray Him, the rest start arguing about who it could be. As they each list the evidence of their

faithfulness to Jesus and the genuineness of their service, pretty soon it's just an argument about which of the disciples are better than the others.

Mark and Matthew both tell us that ultimately this led to Peter proclaiming that even if all the others fell away, he would never let Jesus down. But of course, he did.

So Jesus is betrayed or abandoned by those closest to Him.

He's lied about, conspired against and mistreated by the religious leaders. People who should uphold God's laws break so many of them for what they believe is the greater good - getting rid of Jesus to prevent an uprising against Roman rule that would cost many thousands of lives.

Of course, that might be what they told themselves, but their motives were clearly a lot more personal than that.

Then you have the fickleness of the crowds. Some of those who shouted Hosanna at the start of the week are calling "Crucify Him" at the end of the week as it becomes clear that Jesus wasn't going to use His power to get rid of the Romans like they wanted Him to.

They'd rather have a thief and murderer freed than let Jesus go. Not even a vicious beating satisfied their resentment.

You have Herod, visiting Jerusalem for the Passover but really only interested in power. He treats Jesus as an amusement for his own pleasure, mocking Him and sending Him back to Pilate.

Pilate himself saw the truth of Jesus' innocence and tried to avoid having him killed. But finally he gave up on the truth and washed his hands of the matter.

His soldiers delighted in horrendous tortures. All the years of hard military service with the hatred and violence that had built up over their careers was poured out on a man who proclaimed peace.

And we could look at those people and how they all hurt Jesus in some way and feel like they deserve some kind of punishment for that.

But what does Jesus do?

On the cross while being mocked he cries out “Father, forgive them, because they do not know what they are doing.”

Did Judas not know what he was doing when he negotiated the price for his betrayal?

Did the disciples not know what they were doing when they argued with each other or fell asleep while Jesus was feeling the weight of what was about to happen?

Did Peter not know what he was doing when he denied three times that he even knew Jesus?

Did Herod not know what he was doing when he dressed Jesus in kingly robes as a joke and sent him back to Pilate?

Did Pilate not understand the cost of giving up on truth for the sake of politics?

Did the soldiers who twisted together a crown of thorns, beat Jesus with whips and rods, mock him and nail him to a cross not actually know what they were doing?

How can Jesus say that?

Because He sees what human eyes can't see. He sees a spiritual force of evil that is at work in the stories of every human being since the first humans turned away from the protection of God.

That includes the people in your life.

There may be people who come to mind straight away when I ask you to think about people who've caused you pain.

Maybe it's a parent. Maybe it's some other authority figure. Maybe it's a sibling, a friend or ex-friend. Maybe an ex-spouse. Maybe it's someone from work or church.

It's hard to think of them without feeling angry or distressed. I don't want to bring you pain today but the reality is that the pain is there whether I mention it or not. Avoiding it doesn't help. It's affecting you.

It's actually part of the story of how Satan has tried to enter your life too. Jesus said he comes to steal, kill and destroy.

There are some people though who we love and feel close to and as much as we don't like to acknowledge it, also feel let down by. In Jesus' story the hatred & violence of the authorities was one thing, but those closest to Him who genuinely loved Him also contributed to His pain.

We do that. I do that.

I unwittingly play a part in the spiritual battle that I wish I didn't play.

On Sunday Brendan will guide us through the power of Christ's resurrection to bring hope for better than this. He'll show us from God's Word how we can receive new life through the power of Christ rising from the grave and all that achieved for us.

Today, I want to show you some ways we receive new life through the power of His suffering.

Firstly, we see that Jesus really gets us. He understands what's going on for us. He saw behind the actions of all those people who sinned against Him, all the people whose sins He carried on the cross, to what was really going on.

This isn't excusing us for doing what we do. It's acknowledging that none of us truly understands why we do what we do.

As the saying goes, hurt people hurt people.

We act out of our own woundedness in ways that wound others. Yet Jesus somehow doesn't get caught up in that. He doesn't retaliate. He doesn't return fire. He had the power to do anything He wanted to do. He didn't have to put up with the treatment He received.

Yet He chose forgiveness.

We can stop justifying ourselves and excusing our wrong behaviour toward others. We can own up to the wrong things we've done and the good things we've failed to do because we know that God is more interested in healing our hurts than punishing our crimes.

Did you get that? God is more interested in healing your hurts than punishing your crimes.

That's what the prophet Isaiah spoke about when he predicted the work of Jesus centuries earlier, writing that he was punished for our sins and by his wounds, we are healed.

Let God's love heal your wounds. Don't let the enemy of your soul keep poking your pain to not only hurt you but to get you to hurt others too.

The forgiveness that Jesus offers us in the midst of his suffering was made possible because of his suffering. He has paid the price for all our sins against God and people. No matter what caused them, no matter the story behind them, Jesus has taken the punishment for them.

He has reconciled us to God.

Fear is gone. Shame is gone. Guilt is Gone. Love remains.

And loving people even in the midst of suffering is powerful.

Refusing to get caught up in the satanic storyline of endless wounding changes not only our lives but everyone our lives touches.

The Bible has a word for that: redemption.

The centurion who oversaw Jesus' torture then publicly proclaimed Him the Son of God.

Two of the members of the court that condemned Jesus gave Him an honoured burial.

Jesus' disciples went on to courageously proclaim His name despite intense persecution.

And, as we'll think about some more on Sunday, one of the criminals crucified alongside Him who heaped abuse on Jesus had a change of heart and was granted eternal life in the last moments of this life.

I wonder what God might do in the lives of those who hurt you when you see that the real battle isn't against them, it's for them.

They may have been instruments of your pain, but not the authors of it.

We're in a spiritual battle that is much bigger.

Jesus wasn't battling **against** the people who killed him or those who let Him down, He was battling **for** them.

He suffered for you and for me.