

A HOPE THAT SHINES BRIGHTLY – even in hard times



PPT Prayer

Almighty God, we pray you graciously look on us, your family, for whom our Lord Jesus Christ was willing to be betrayed and given into the hands of sinners, and to suffer death upon the cross; who now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

PPT Bible readings

Luke 23:26–49

²⁶ As the soldiers led him away, they seized Simon from Cyrene, who was on his way in from the country, and put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus. ²⁷ A large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wailed for him. ²⁸ Jesus turned and said to them, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. ²⁹ For the time will come when you will say, ‘Blessed are the childless women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!’ ³⁰ Then

“they will say to the mountains, “Fall on us!”
and to the hills, “Cover us!””

³¹ For if people do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?”

³² Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. ³³ When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left. ³⁴ Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.

³⁵ The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, “He saved others; let him save himself if he is God’s Messiah, the Chosen One.”

³⁶ The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar ³⁷ and said, “If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.”

³⁸ There was a written notice above him, which read: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.

³⁹ One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: “Aren’t you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!”

⁴⁰ But the other criminal rebuked him. “Don’t you fear God,” he said, “since you are under the same sentence? ⁴¹ We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.”

⁴² Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”

⁴³ Jesus answered him, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

⁴⁴ It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, ⁴⁵ for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. ⁴⁶ Jesus called out with a loud voice, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” When he had said this, he breathed his last.

⁴⁷ The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, “Surely this was a righteous man.” ⁴⁸ When all the people who had gathered to witness this sight saw what took place, they beat their breasts and went away. ⁴⁹ But all those who knew him, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.

Message

Main points

- Hard times of injustice and crisis reveal character
- What does injustice and crisis reveal about Jesus?
 - Jesus cares for others
 - Jesus provides hope and mercy
 - Jesus leads people to God
- Good Friday is an opportunity to accept God’s grace

PPT Times of crisis or injustice reveal our character. How we handle dark and difficult times tells us about ourselves and each other. It’s often through the difficult and painful times that the most growth occurs. It’s then we are forced to dig deep and ask God the hard questions. It’s then we find out who we really are and who God really is.

Over the past 12 months, the coronavirus has been a time of crisis and injustice. It has killed over two million people around the world. It has been a dark and difficult time of sickness and uncertainty – especially for the elderly and the vulnerable. It has disrupted our health, education, travel, work and opportunities to spend time with friends and family. Thankfully, Australia has been much less impacted than most countries around the world.

Times of crisis and injustice can reveal our anxieties, fears, anger and bitterness. In crisis, we can become self-absorbed and defensive. We saw evidence of this in panic buying of products. But they can also bring

out the very best in us – and reveal our generosity, compassion, hope and wisdom. Difficult times can show our heart for others. We saw evidence of this too in people shopping for others.

(Tell of a story where crisis and injustice have revealed the character of others).

PPT (Maarten van Heemskerck, Crucifixion Triptych and Rembrandt, The Three Crosses)

Good Friday was a dark day for Jesus. It was a time of crisis and injustice. He had prayed with tears that he might not go through it if there was another way. He was hauled before an unjust legal system, rejected by his friends and sentenced to a gruesome death by crucifixion. On this dark day of crisis and injustice for Jesus, what do we learn about him?

PPT Jesus cares for others

As he is led away to be crucified, he turns to the wailing women following him and speaks to their fears. It is shocking that a Jewish man being led to his death, stops to care for and speak with a group of women. All through his life, he has shocked and surprised people by the way he has cared for and engaged with women – and others that were not seen as significant in the ancient world.

These are the women who followed him from Galilee, the women who will stay with him to the end and be the first to the tomb to witness his resurrection. Jesus shows mercy and honours the women – even on his way to the cross.

PPT Jesus provides hope and mercy

As they came to the place called The Skull where he was to be crucified, Luke tells us that Jesus prays for the Roman soldiers, “Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (v 34).

Instead of anger and bitterness toward the Roman guards, Jesus asks the Father to forgive them. His mercy is extraordinary! He is concerned for the eternal welfare of those who have stripped him, mocked him and nailed him to a wooden cross to die.

As he is crucified between two criminals, he promises one that “Today you will be with me in paradise” (v. 43).

As God, Jesus can offer forgiveness and salvation to others – not on the basis of the “good life” anyone has lived but as an act of mercy and grace. The criminal was not promised salvation and acceptance because he had lived a good life! This is the story of Easter – that God is willing to die an unjust death so that others may live. God welcomes and accepts us – not on the basis of our good deeds – but unconditionally as an act of loving grace and mercy.

A story of forgiveness from a Salvos Corps Leader in Sydney

In 2020, Craig came to see me in my office. He sat down and shared that he had previously been married but that his wife was murdered in 2007 by a man who had an altered version of reality due to an Ice drug addiction. Craig was the person that walked in to find his wife dead.

Craig shared that he had been contacted by the special victims support service as there was a hearing for this case.

While we were waiting for the hearing to start, Craig talked to the special victims support service about his forgiveness journey and that he wanted to tell the man that he is forgiven. We all sat there amazed by what Craig was saying. Craig shared that over the last 12 years he's decided that he needed to forgive this person as it was impacting him and stealing his life.

Craig shared that for a long time the only memory he had of his wife was the one where he found her deceased. His hate and thoughts of vengeance made it difficult for him to move past this place. Since getting to a place of forgiveness, the positive memories of his wife have come back in great detail. It's incredible to see the joy as he recounts stories of her.

Craig asked me to help him work on a letter to this person to let them know he forgives them. He doesn't condone what they've done, he doesn't forget, but he is choosing to forgive this guy.

Craig shared some of this story with our community at church as he wants his forgiveness journey story to help others move on from a place of vengeance and hate into a place of forgiveness.

PPT Jesus leads people to God

The criminal crucified alongside Jesus could see that “We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong” (v. 41).

The Roman centurion, “seeing what had happened, praised God and said, ‘Surely this was a righteous man’” (v. 47).

The Roman centurion and the criminal could see that Jesus did not deserve his death. They could see who he truly was – the way he approached his death showed them that he was right with God. In fact, he was God.

It is ironic that a Jewish criminal and a Roman centurion could see Jesus in a way that the religious leaders of the day could not.

At one level, this is not surprising. From Jesus' birth to Mary and Joseph, God has revealed himself most clearly to the most unlikely people – to Samaritan women, blind and disabled people begging on the streets, and tax collectors hated by the Jewish authorities.

PPT Opportunity to accept God's grace

On Good Friday, we are invited to come before Jesus.

Do we come like the criminal seeking mercy and grace?

Do we come like the Roman centurion, with awe and wonder, and acknowledge that he is God?

The Mercy Seat recognizes that God is full of mercy – and that God's grace and his death on the cross – is for us. The injustice and violence of humanity is poured out on Jesus and we see him respond with grace, with forgiveness and with love – a hope that shines brightly.

In the words of Paul, God wants us to know “how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God” (Ephesians 3:18–19). Good Friday shows the immensity of God's love for us.

PPT THINK

How do you respond in times of injustice or crisis?

SHARE

How do people typically respond in times of injustice and crisis?

How does Jesus respond to the injustice and crisis that he faces in this story?

What does this show us about Jesus?

PRAY

Thank God for his love and merciful forgiveness.

Pray that you and others would know “how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ.”

Pray that others might know the loving mercy of God at this time.

Good FRIDAY

– all age worship discussion meeting

Read Luke 23:26–49

Good Friday was a time of crisis and injustice for Jesus. He had prayed with tears that he might not go through it if there was another way. He was hauled before an unjust legal system, rejected by his friends and sentenced to a gruesome death by crucifixion. On this dark day of crisis and injustice for Jesus, what do we learn about him?

Divide the people into five groups and ask them to read the passage together. Ask each group to become one of the following actors/characters in the story and to retell the event from their perspective. Read the passage again in their small group.

Ask: "What did they see/hear/smell? How did they feel? What did they think?"

OR: Prepare some people beforehand and give them the script below. Ask them to speak to the church/corps as if they were the characters below.

Roman soldiers

For example, "We were just doing our job. We were told to crucify this Jesus along with all the others that day. We grabbed a bloke to carry the cross up to the hill – and we noticed Jesus stop and talk to a group of women who were following us. Then we divided his clothes and started the process of nailing him to the cross with the other criminals. When we lifted him up he started to pray that God would forgive us because we didn't know what we were doing! No-one's ever prayed for us like that before! Then he started talking to the criminals who we'd strung up next to him. I've never seen or heard anything like it ..."

Criminal 1

For example, "I was up on a cross alongside this guy they were making a fuss over. He even had a sign 'King of the Jews' put over his head. Then I yelled at him, 'Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!' He was a joke. What sort of Messiah would allow himself to be killed like this? Then, another guy on a cross tells me off and tells me I don't fear God. He calls out that we are being punished because we deserve it, but this Jesus guy hasn't done anything to deserve it."

Criminal 2

For example, "I was on a cross next to this Jesus character when I heard another guy insulting him. I could see that this Jesus of Nazareth was very different from the rest of us. I told the guy to shut up and that we deserved to be punished but this guy didn't. Then I said to him, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom'. He turned to me and said, 'Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.' He didn't ignore me or condemn me. He gave me hope when I was feeling hopeless."

Women

For example, “We had been following Jesus for some time and really loved him and all that he did and taught. We couldn’t believe that this was happening to him. We were crying and really upset seeing the soldiers take him to be crucified like a criminal. Then he turned and spoke to us. Even on the way to his death, he took time to speak to us. He told us not to cry for him but for ourselves, and our children, because people can and will do great evil. We wanted to stay near him and support him so he didn’t feel abandoned.”

Roman Centurion

For example, “I’d never seen anything like this – and I’ve seen a lot of crucifixions! This Jesus spoke and acted in a way that was incredible. He spoke with authority and wisdom and grace – not what you normally see when people are being crucified. Then the whole land went dark and Jesus called out with a loud voice, ‘Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.’ Then he died. When I saw all that had happened and heard his prayer, I praised God and said, ‘Surely this was a righteous man.’ Then all the people watching beat their chests and went home mourning, full of grief and sadness.”

Opportunity to accept God’s grace

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The Mercy Seat recognizes that God is full of mercy – and that God’s grace and his death on the cross – is for us. The injustice and violence of humanity is poured out on Jesus and we see him respond with grace, with forgiveness and with love – a hope that shines brightly.

In the words of Paul, God wants us to know “how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God’ (Ephesians 3:18–19). Good Friday shows the immensity of God’s love for us.

Good FRIDAY

Song suggestions

While the songs have been allocated specifically to Good Friday and Easter Sunday, several fit well with both. To listen to the songs please access the YouTube playlist: youtube.com/playlist?list=PL96CjCUHxMEEvpGZAucHwVT1F2m-PHOGC

Good Friday Theme:

Character of Jesus; hope and mercy; provision of grace through Jesus; God's immense love.

Song	Artist/Author	Where to find it	Notes
<i>When I Survey</i> (3 options)	Isaac Watts	SASB 209; Tune 36 or 30 SASB 209 Tune 875 (alt. arrangement)	Alt. arrangement uses a third traditional tune with new chorus
<i>How Deep The Father's Love</i>	Stuart Townend	SASB 32; Tune 663 songselect.ccli.com/Songs/1558110	
<i>"Here Is Love"</i> (2 options)	William Rees/ Robert Lowry; also alt. arr. by Matt Redman	SASB 169; Tune 369* songselect.ccli.com/Songs/3287884	*Many other tunes of similar metre also work well 2nd version uses original tune + new bridge
<i>Worthy Is The Lamb</i>	Darlene Zschech (Hillsong)	SASB 201; Tune 947 songselect.ccli.com/Songs/3217555	
<i>Man of Sorrows</i>	Brooke Ligertwood and Matt Crocker (Hillsong)	songselect.ccli.com/Songs/6476063	There is also the original hymn Man of Sorrows - SASB 183/Tune 754 - similar themes but different song
<i>Yet Not I But Through Christ In Me</i>	City Alight	songselect.ccli.com/Songs/7121852	
<i>Living Hope</i>	Phil Wickham and Brian Johnson (Bethel)	songselect.ccli.com/Songs/7106807	Also relevant for Easter Sunday
<i>I Will Wait For You (Psalm 130)</i>	Jordan Kauflin, Matthew Merker, Keith Getty and Stuart Townend	songselect.ccli.com/Songs/7118914 store.gettymusic.com/uk/song/will-wait-psalm-130/	Not a specifically targeted Easter song but highly relevant to "hope in hard times" aspects
<i>Jesus, Son Of God</i>	Marty Mikles (transMission)	www.ussmusicandarts.org/tmcharts	Based on Doctrine 4 (from transMission album We Believe)
<i>All For Love (Gethsemane)</i>	Ben Cantelon, Luke and Anna Hellebronth	songselect.ccli.com/Songs/7101538	Original recorded key is quite low (may suit solo/ reflection piece)