

Good Friday

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### FRIDAY--- THE GOOD AND THE BAD

The beginning of the Civil War is usually associated with the attack on Fort Sumter in Charleston harbor in South Carolina. Confederate States of America President Jefferson Davis gave the order for the attack and on April 12, 1861, General Beauregard, began the artillery bombardment of the Union fort.

Colonel Robert Anderson, who had once taught General Beauregard at West Point, was in charge of the government troops on that island. He had very limited supplies of food and ammunition. He did not even have fuses for his explosive shells. So his troops gamely returned fire. But it was with little effect. Colonel Anderson was forced to surrender. On April 14 the Confederate flag replaced the Stars and Stripes at Fort Sumter. The Union troops were allowed to return to the North.

The war concluded four years later at Appomattox Courthouse in Virginia on April 9. One of the chief results of the war was the abolition of slavery. The Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution was ratified later in 1865. Slavery was outlawed in the United States.

It was a great victory for the North and for the cause of the abolition of slavery, but it came at a terrible cost. Over 600,000 Americans were killed. Many were injured. Countless families on both sides of the Mason-Dixon line were impacted by the terrible fighting.

One of the biggest celebrations of the end of the war took place at Fort Sumter. To mark the fourth anniversary of the attack on Fort Sumter, Robert Anderson, now a Major General, was invited to participate. Numerous political leaders and abolitionists were invited to speak. Perhaps the highlight of the ceremony was the raising of the American flag by General Anderson. He had kept the same flag that he had surrendered four years earlier. Now standing on a platform festooned with flowers, he stepped forward and announced that he was fulfilling **“the cherished wish of my heart through four long years of bloody war--- to restore to its proper place this very flag which floated here during peace, before the first act of this cruel rebellion. I thank God I have lived to see this day.”** With tears in his eyes, he raised the tattered flag to the top of the pole.

According to the *New York Times*, **“No sooner had it caught the breeze than there was one tumultuous shout. It was an inspiring moment, grand and sublime, never to be experienced again. Our flag was there, its crimson folds tattered but not dishonored, regenerated and baptized anew in the fires of Liberty.”** (*Presidents of War*, Michael Beschloss, p. 233)

By President Abraham Lincoln’s order, there was a hundred-gun salute to commemorate the hundred gun salute that Union forces were allowed to make at the surrender of the fort four years earlier. Then there was a salute with fire from every fort and rebel battery that had fired on Fort Sumter. The famous preacher Henry Ward Beecher had a long message. He proclaimed, **“No more war, no more accursed secession, no more slavery that spawned them both!”**

There were further celebrations that night in Charleston. At a banquet, the famous Boston pastor and abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison toasted President Lincoln and rejoiced that the President’s **“brave heart beats for human freedom everywhere.”** It was Good Friday, 1865. The full cost of freedom from slavery had not yet been paid.

That evening, 450 miles to the north, President Lincoln decided to bring his wife to see a play at the Ford Theater. They sat in their special box as they watched *Our American Cousin*. At one point the President told Mary that after his second term in office was done, he wanted to visit Jerusalem. Just then, Southern sympathizer and conspirator John Wilkes Booth entered their box and shot Abraham Lincoln. Good Friday. Slavery. A price to be paid. Freedom. Jerusalem.

On the first Good Friday, the Jews in Jerusalem were celebrating another release from slavery. For 400 years their ancestors had lived in Egypt. During the latter part of that time, the Egyptians forced them into slavery, a slavery just as cruel probably as that in the pre-war South. The Jewish slavery was accomplished not only for economic reasons but also to control the burgeoning population of the Hebrews in Egypt.

God raised up Moses to lead His people out of this slavery. In a series of ten plagues death and judgment reigned down upon the Egyptians and their supposed gods. In the tenth and final plague, God proclaimed that the oldest son in every household in Egypt would be slain during the night when the angel of death passed over the land. God told the Hebrews that to avoid this outcome in their families, they must kill an unblemished, year old lamb. The blood of that lamb was to be applied to the doorposts of their homes. When the angel of death did pass over the land of Egypt, the homes of the Hebrews

were spared this loss. Pharaoh was also finally motivated to allow the Hebrews to leave their land. Thus the Hebrews left Egypt.

God told His people to remember this release from slavery by having an annual feast called Passover. Thus it was in the first century that Jerusalem and its temple became the center of that celebration and remembrance. Jewish males were called upon to go to Jerusalem and observe this feast. On the fourteenth day of the first month in the lunar calendar, they were to bring these lambs to the temple to be killed. Their blood was to be poured out. According to Professor Alfred Edersheim, the carcasses were hung up on hooks around the inner temple courtyard while their skin was cut off. Then the animals were brought home by each family where they were feasted upon at the Passover meal that was to begin at sunset. The ideal time at which the lambs were to be slain was at 3 PM.

While this part of the celebration of the release from slavery was going on in the temple, a price was being paid to accomplish real freedom. Jesus was hanging from a cross. His skin had already been cut by the Roman soldiers. The Gospel writers Matthew, Mark and Luke all indicate that His death happened at 3 PM, at the time of the sacrifice of the lambs in the temple. Mark records in his Gospel, beginning in # 15 v. 33, **“And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, ‘Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?’ which means, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’ And some of the bystanders hearing it said, ‘Behold, he is calling Elijah.’ And someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink, saying, ‘Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down.’ And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last.”**

This was indeed a costly sacrifice. For it meant the death of the only sinless human being who ever lived. It meant the death of the God-man Jesus Christ. This was the Son of God, the One who was eternal, who was involved in the creation of the universe. For the only time ever, the Son of God experienced a separation from the First Person of the Triune Godhead, God the Father. For He was experiencing the wrath of God directed toward Him as He was bearing the penalty for the sins of the world as our substitute. In 2 Corinthians #5 the Apostle Paul wrote, **“He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”**

The issue at stake here was a different kind of slavery. It was a slavery that has eternal consequences. It was a slavery to sin. In Romans #6 the Apostle Paul told Christians, **“...you were slaves of sin...”** He went on to say a couple of verses later, **“But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life.”**

In the Old Testament story of the release of the Hebrews from slavery in Egypt, the sacrifice of the lamb was sufficient for every household to avoid the judgment of death from the angel that passed over the land. But to become efficient, the blood from that lamb had to be applied to the doorposts of their homes. The Thirteenth Amendment made it legally possible for every slave to now become free. Yet slaves were responsible to leave that slavery. A number of slaves in the South continued to live on their plantations and still act in many ways as slaves.

In the same way, the sacrifice of Jesus is sufficient for every human being to avoid the penalty of sin of eternal death. But to become efficient, the blood of Jesus has to be applied to the door posts of our lives. The one responsibility that we have to benefit from this sacrifice of Him who is also called the Lamb of God is to believe in Jesus. We must recognize that we are sinners who are headed for eternal death. We must believe that Jesus was God, that He became a human being, that He died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins, and that He rose again from the dead. When we put our trust in this Jesus and what He did for us, we receive the forgiveness of sins and the gift of eternal life.

Jesus, in turn, has asked His followers to remember the sacrifice that He has made for us so that we can be released from the slavery of sin by means of a feast of sorts. We call it the Lord's Supper. The Apostle Paul described this in 1 Corinthians #11. Beginning in v. 23 he wrote, **"For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, 'This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.' For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup."**

So let's have a time of silent reflection. After you have had opportunity to thank Jesus for His sacrifice and to think about what it means to you and to confess anything that you need to confess, then come forward and participate in eating the bread and drinking from the cup. We invite all of you who know Jesus and are in fellowship with Him to participate.