

## **Evil Friday is *also* Good Friday**

Good Friday – 04/18/25 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Luke 23:44-56 Pastor Keith Besel

### **Introduction**

✘ I'm going to take a bit of a risk this evening. I'm going to take a title; a name of something that I know is very familiar and precious to all of you and change it. I'm going to do that by adding something to what we call it. I know, that may sound strange; maybe even wrong. But please bear with me, and I'll try to explain what I mean.

➔ Here it is: Based on this profound reading from Luke 23, consider this, Evil Friday is also Good Friday. I know, we *never* refer to that Friday long ago as "Evil Friday." We *always* call it "Good Friday." And – just to put your mind at ease, I will continue to call it "Good Friday," and so should you.

✘ But, just for tonight, I want to make sure that we don't miss both sides of what Luke tells us. That way, we can take this world as it still is seriously, without sugarcoating things. And it is my prayer that we can more accurately marvel at our God; the Father of Jesus, our Lord, and how He was hard at work so long ago on that Friday, and still at work in our lives and in this world today.

### **I. Evil is at Work**

✘ The first thing that Luke says is this: "It was now about the sixth hour [about noon], and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour [about three PM]" (v. 44).

➔ That certainly raises questions – many of which we simply don't have the answer. But it's pretty safe to say that the darkness is bad; a sign that evil is close at hand. All the way back in Luke, chapter one, Zechariah, John the Baptizer's father, when he was finally able to speak again, praised the true God saying that by Mary's Son, "the sunrise shall visit us from on high, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death" (Lk. 1:78-79). So, some 33 years before this Friday in today's text, God had begun to work in this world in a new way. His light was already living there in Mary's womb as Zechariah spoke these words. God's mercy brings sunrise; light into this darkened world.

✘ But now, at noon on that Friday, there was darkness over the whole land. Less than a day before, as Jesus was being arrested by those who were doing the devil's will, Jesus said to them, "This is your hour, and the power of darkness" (Lk. 22:53). Even though we've heard this before, and we know how this story goes, this fact of God's work in nature should be enough to make us all tremble.

➔ Because it is a clear sign that Satan is very real; just as his evil is very real and working overtime that Friday afternoon as well. Again, we have questions – but one thing is for sure: evil is afoot; working to destroy the very Son of God.

✘ What happened next? Verse 45, "And the curtain of the temple was torn in two." More questions, I know – some without answers again. But here are some answers: Who tore the curtain? God did. He tore the temple curtain from top to bottom (Mt. 27:51 & Mk. 15:38).

➔ Why would He do that, in His own temple? Because God is literally making a split in that earthly edifice that He had said would be the place of His physical presence on earth with His people. Jesus predicted this divide, saying that not one stone would be left upon another (Lk. 21:5). Why? Because the chief priests had lost their way, using their power and influence *against* the one person to whom God intended for His temple to point all souls.

- ➔ At 12-years-old Jesus said in that same Temple that He was to be in His Father's house. Now, in their blind ignorance and hate, they are trying to do away with God's only true Son! It was less than 40 years later that God's judgment came and destroyed the Temple entirely.
- ✘ But be careful, you and I shouldn't point fingers too quickly because really would we have been any different? Evil is clearly at work that Friday; so darkness came over the land and the temple curtain was torn in two.
- ✘ And Jesus, the true presence of God on earth ... dies; even when – no matter how you look at it, He never deserved to die. You and I ... we are the ones that deserve to die. The wages of sin is death, and we have sinned, countless times every day. Luke even tells us in verse 47 that the centurion, witnessing Jesus' death says, "Certainly this man was innocent!"
- ➔ Still, Jesus does die. He dies the death of a criminal, covered in nothing; shamed and dishonored by torture, by nakedness and by taunting. Death by crucifixion: an evil death for sure.

## II. The turning point

- ✘ That centurion though, a Gentile soldier in the pay of Rome; in charge of up to 100 men – His part here in the story of this Friday afternoon is like a hinge; a turning point in all that is taking place here on Golgotha. We don't know the full extent of what the centurion knew or believed. But like it was with the believing criminal a few verses earlier, Luke gives us again this precious and unexpected Gentile believer, for that is what he is.
- ➔ He helps you and me turn a corner of faith and understanding here. He shows us that this Evil Friday is also Good Friday; showing us firsthand the amazing good that God works even in the face of the worst evil ever.
- ✘ Luke tells us in verse 47, translated literally from the Greek, "Now the centurion, seeing what had taken place, he glorifies God saying, 'For certain this man was righteous/innocent!'" Did you hear that? This Roman officer "glorified God!"
- ➔ If you take a quick trip through Luke's Gospel you see that this man is not the only one to "glorify God." On the first Christmas, the shepherds returned to their fields, *glorifying* God after hearing the angels and seeing the new born King in the manger. Did they get it all? Hardly – but they knew that God was doing something wonderful. When Jesus forgives and heals a paralytic with a word, both the man and the gathered crowd *glorified* God. They knew God was at work. At Nain, the crowd saw Jesus raise a widow's son back to life, and they *glorified* God. A woman was crippled and bent over for 18 years, and Jesus healed her. What did she do? That's right, she *glorified* God. Ten lepers were healed, but only one of them – the foreign Samaritan, came running back to Jesus, *glorifying* God. All of these people saw God at work – it was obvious – and they glorified God because His mighty, miraculous and wonderful deeds.
- ✘ And now on this dark afternoon, this unlikely centurion knows that he is witnessing God at work in the presence of evil. He stands in the darkness; facing the cruelty of a death that by every form of justice should never have taken place, and he glorifies God and His work in the midst of it all. How much did he know? We can't be sure. But he knew that the execution of this obviously innocent man had to be part of a big plan; God's plan. So, in faith, he glorifies God. And so can we. So must you and I tonight.

## III. This Can't be the end.

- ✘ In verse 46 Jesus cries out, "Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit!" And having said this "He breathed His last." But that can't really be His "last" breath can it? Not His last forever – not if God is God; not if justice matters. Surely Satan, in all of his evil, believed he had won; believed he finally had the last word.

➔ But if that were true, that would mean that Jesus was wrong to “commit” and trust His Father to receive His spirit. We know that can’t be the case; not if God cares about the world and about sin and about Satan’s destruction. No, instead, the centurion shows us the way with His faith. Because he knew that Jesus was eternally innocent; purely righteous, he boldly glorified God, because he was positive that more was coming; good was sure to be following all of this evil very soon! He may not have known in what form or when, but good was coming. Evil Friday was also Good Friday. It may be Friday, but Easter ... it’s a’coming.

- ✘ The centurion is not the only clue that points us to this great hope and truth. The curtain in the temple was torn in the middle, yes. But why? because God is now rejecting the former place of sacrifice and forgiveness; the place that was now thoroughly corrupted by its leaders and their sin. And for God to reject the temple means that He now recognizes a new place of sacrifice and forgiveness; a new place where He – God, is now present among His people to strengthen, and protect, and restore. That new place; that physical location for God’s blessings now – it is Jesus, in the flesh!

➔ Jesus is the new way to salvation. His blood is the new covenant that covers all sin to perfection; with His perfection, to be precise. His body and His soul – 100% true Man and 100% true God – all of Jesus; He is now The temple of God that is coming. Wait for it, dear Christians! Luke records at least three times that Jesus said in advance that it would be “on the third day” (Lk. 9:22, 13:32, 18:33).

- ✘ Satan – he meant it for evil, and it was. But God – He meant it for good, and you and I now know – it was very good! This was God’s plan to bring men and women and children out of the darkness of Satan’s lies and their own sins, and into the light of His peace; His acceptance; His fellowship.

➔ Satan tried his best; actually did his worst. He waited for the opportune time, and it came. He recruited Judas to do his bidding. The authorities were all his pawns and tools. His evil surrounded Jesus entirely here.

➔ But his darkness could not snuff Jesus out: “Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they are doing,” Jesus cried out from the cross. That darkness could not snatch, even the believing criminal from Jesus’ mercy: “Today you will be with Me in paradise.”

➔ No, even as He hung there in agony, Jesus stood in the gap. He hung where all of us deserve to hang. And He did not flinch. He took it all, and He worked the Father’s plan to perfection. So, when He committed His spirit to the Father’s hands, Jesus knew that the darkness would give way ... to God’s glorious light! Evil Friday - it truly was Good Friday, because Jesus’ work there on that cross, meant that life and light would now absolutely return!

- ✘ And Luke tells us that the preparation for that light; that good, was beginning already on Friday, just before the sun went down. Joseph of Arimathea who gave Jesus a place to rest His body and the women who bought spices to anoint His body, both good and beautiful things on that evil day; giving the best that they knew to give for the One whom they believed was the Son of God.

## Conclusion

- ✘ That day long ago – it really was the turning point; the hinge of history, because it taught us; it showed us in real life, that no darkness of sin or guilt or evil can ever overcome Jesus! In fact, He endured it all in your place and mine, there that day.

➔ So, when confusion and hardship swirl around you. When things are chaotic and you are struggling to find your way back into God’s presence, remember *Good* Friday, and the torn curtain, and Jesus who is God’s very presence there on the cross. Come to Him where He

promises to be now today – in His Supper with the very body and blood that He gave and shed there to pay for and forgive you of all your sin; in His perfect, God-breathed Word of truth, and in the cleansing water and Word of baptism where He wraps you in His innocence and righteousness for eternity. Yes, come to Him there and receive His light of love and grace now in the midst of all this darkness.

- ✘ Because yes, even in the darkness this evening, we rest in hope, and in faith, because we know that it was, and it is, and it always will be ... Good Friday. All those others – they meant it for evil, but God meant it for good – for you; for me; and for the world. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.