

April 3, 2026
Good Friday

“Black Friday, Good Friday”

John 18 & 19

Jesus willingly suffers the cross to gain our salvation. This is good for us, so I understand the thinking behind referring to our remembrance today as “Good Friday,” but it always strikes me as a strange choice. There are other options. Historically this day has also been called “Long Friday,” “Holy Friday,” “Great Friday,” “God’s Friday,” “Friday of the Passion,” and others. The name I prefer and remember from my childhood has now been appropriated by the culture for the shopping day after Thanksgiving: “Black Friday”.

“Black Friday” fits in so many ways. There is the obvious; Matthew, Mark and Luke all record that darkness covered the land for three hours as Jesus hung on the cross. But what really makes the name appropriate is what we see in our mind’s eye as we look at Jesus today—what we see is blackness; our dark, wicked, repulsive sin hanging on the innocent Christ. Our black of evil on the white of His purity. We know this is God’s merciful plan for us, but you just can’t look at Jesus’ in agony, accursed by God for our rebellion, and smile and say, “That’s good!” It just doesn’t fit. What fits is feeling guilty that our grievous sins put Him there.

Yes, we are thankful Jesus did this for us. Yes, we know this is God’s good plan for the redemption of His creation. Yes, we know the joyous victory to which this all leads. But those agonizing hours leading to and hanging on the cross are still nasty beyond description. So yeah, “Good Friday” really never did sit well with me. That Friday is black as death. The only part of this remembrance where I feel anything remotely good is the end of it when Jesus declares, “It is finished” and surrenders His spirit. The dark nastiness of the cross is done. That is good.

And I do believe it is very good that we do what we’re doing today. We remember His cross, we feel the shame of our sins that put Jesus there, and we repent, and we love Him, we thank Him, we praise Him, we trust in what He has done to save His people from their sins.

But we also need to remember that Black Friday is exactly what Jesus says it is: finished. And I need to be careful here and make clear that repentance is indeed the fruit of our faith in what Jesus has done for us. Sin is still dark and evil and is to be shunned and despised. Our Christian life is one of continual repentance, turning away from sin and toward the living and reigning Savior who has taken our sins away by the ugliness of the cross.

But Satan would have us live in Black Friday. I know that’s a rather weird thing to say, but it’s true. Satan would have us live in the guilt of this day, believing the sinful nature still clinging to us is demanding more of a reckoning, more of a payment, is still making the black darkness reign in our lives.

Christians struggle with this. Maybe not all Christians, but I know some do. A believer does that sin again, that sin which is so persistent, maybe even seems so comfortable, maybe even committed with intent even though one knew it was sin. And then, feeling the guilt, one figures that sin still has power; the power to separate one from God, a power greater than one’s faith, maybe even the power to condemn.

Satan wants to use that to keep you at Black Friday where your guilt is on full display and it is ugly and damnable and under God’s wrath. But he switches things up a bit, trying to trick you into seeing that ugly stain still on you there, and not on Jesus. He tries to convince us that because we still struggle with anger, greed, lust, jealousy, doubt or whatever else still plagues our

flesh that something of our salvation remains unfinished, defective, yet to be made right before God.

The part of Black Friday we must keep very close in the midst of such thoughts is the good part; “It is finished.” Sin is paid for; all sin for all time. Every sin. Your sin. Even the sin you do with your eyes wide open to it. Even the sin you do for the 10,000th time. There is no debt left to be paid. Payment, punishment, wrath, condemnation—this is the “it” of “It is finished.” That’s done with. This is very good.

And again, I want to be careful. It is the gift of faith leading to repentance that receives this grace of God. If one chooses to hold onto the sin rather than bring it to Christ’s cross in repentance, that’s a whole other story...one that remains very, very dark.

But when contrition and sorrow over sin leads you to the cross, the cross puts it to death. It’s done. Kaput. It is finished. From there, of course, we struggle against that sin. Yet even though it rears its ugly head again and again, at the cross it’s still done. Kaput. It is finished. In repentance we keep bringing our wickedness back to the cross and it stands put to death in Christ, dead in the blackness of His tomb. It is finished.

In the midst of writing this sermon I somewhat changed my thinking about what name we use for this day. Today, for this mournful corporate remembrance of Christ’s Passion, I still think Black Friday is a more proper monicker. This day we truly do make a practice of viewing our dark sins on Christ and letting the guilt have its way with us for a while. I can’t speak for everyone, but I think this day is a rather important one because nobody can properly mark it and still trivialize their offenses; the gravity of our depravity is made crystal clear in Christ’s wounds.

But I think every other day of the year “Good Friday” is better, because it is finished. Whenever we repentantly recall our Holy Baptism into Christ’s death we know that the “Old Adam in is has drowned and died with all sins and evil desires and that a new person now lives before God in righteousness and purity forever. It is finished and it is good.

Whenever we hear the absolution from the pastor as from Christ Himself declaring that our sin stands paid for by the cross and we are fully forgiven, it is finished and it is good.

Whenever we receive the body and blood of the living Christ who once died for us and know it as the divine antidote to sin’s poison, we are assured sin’s darkness no longer keeps us from Christ’s light. It is finished and it is good.

There is a place for seeing the black of our guilt. It leads us to repentance, which leads us to the cross, which proclaims that sin is paid for and we stand forgiven...of it all; every last one; even those yet to come. Don’t let Satan, the world or your own conscience keep you from reaching the Gospel truth of this day. It is finished.

Always let this Black Friday for Christ be the Good Friday He longs and loves to give you.

Amen.