

INI
Good Friday
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**A Searching Question for Good Friday:
"IF THEY DO THESE THINGS IN THE GREEN WOOD,
WHAT WILL BE DONE IN THE DRY?"**

Luke 23:27-31

Grace and Lenten peace be multiplied unto you, in God our Father, and in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen. The text for our Good Friday meditation is found in the 23rd chapter of the Gospel of Luke, beginning with the 27th verse, as follows, reading from the New King James Version:

And a great multitude of the people followed Him, and women who also mourned and lamented Him. But Jesus, turning to them, said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For indeed the days are coming in which they will say, 'Blessed are the barren, the wombs that never bore, and the breasts which never nursed!' Then they will begin 'to say to the mountains, "Fall on us!" and to the hills, "Cover us!"' For if they do these things in the green wood, what will be done in the dry?" So far the holy Word.

In the Name of Jesus Christ, Who was *"wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities,"* Dear Fellow Redeemed,

By the summer of 1988 there had been three straight years of drought in the great plains, where I lived at the time. So no one was surprised that summer when several huge wild fires swept through the Black Hills and Yellowstone National Park. Forestry officials at the time said that the standing timber in those areas contained less moisture than there is in kiln-dried lumber. The trees were literally drier than match sticks. With the timber in that condition, all it took was a spark and a brisk wind for hundreds of thousands of acres to go up in flames. It was predictable - almost inevitable - that such dry wood would eventually be destroyed. It only made sense.

By way of contrast, on this day some two thousand years ago, a destruction took place that seemed to make no sense at all: the Son of God was destroyed on the cross. Jesus was like green wood - He was sinless, innocent of transgression, perfectly obedient to His heavenly Father, wholly undeserving of punishment. And yet, on Good Friday this "green wood" was consumed by God's wrath over sin. That forces us to ask a dreadful question. It's the same question that Jesus asked of the women of Jerusalem, and it's a very searching question for us to ask ourselves on this Good Friday:

**"IF THEY DO THESE THINGS IN THE GREEN WOOD,
WHAT WILL BE DONE IN THE DRY?"**

Travelling in my car I heard a reporter from National Public Radio discussing the "deep spiritual significance" of Holy Week. She talked a lot about remembering the death of Jesus, but I think she missed the point about what Good Friday is really all about. A lot of people do. They

see Jesus merely as a good man who died a brave and undeserved death at the hands of his enemies. "Such a kind and gentle person," they say. "Such a cruel death -- what a shame!" I'm sure most Americans, to the extent that they think about it at all, view Good Friday this way. They too are missing the point. For Good Friday isn't about sympathy and sentimentality - it's about sin, and the punishment for sin.

On that Friday morning so long ago, Jesus, bruised and bleeding, was being led down the Via Dolorosa to His death. A crowd followed Him, including many women of Jerusalem. When they looked at Jesus, they didn't see their Savior. What they saw was simply a young man unjustly condemned. And they sympathized - they cried for Him. But Jesus knew their unbelief, and He told them to save their sympathy: *"Daughters of Jerusalem,"* He said, *"do not weep for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children."*

Don't cry for Me, cry for yourselves! You're the ones who have rejected the Savior God sent to you! -The Jews of Jerusalem had indeed rejected Jesus. He'd spent years trying to win them for the kingdom of God. He said He wished He could *"gather them together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings."* But with a few rare exceptions, they refused. In the end, the Jews of Jerusalem refused to repent of their sin and accept Jesus as their Savior. And their judgment was coming!

Yes, Jesus was suffering terrible agony - the torn and bleeding back, the crown of thorns - soon the nail wounds and the slow, grinding torture of the cross. God was laying on Him the punishment for the sins of the world. But Jesus had a searching question for them: *"If they do these things in the green wood, what will be done in the dry?"* If God did this to His innocent Son, what would God do to the sinful Jews of Jerusalem who rejected their Messiah? What terrible judgment would they have to bear?

Jesus gave them a dreadful prophesy of that coming judgment: *"For indeed the days are coming in which they will say, 'Blessed are the barren, the wombs that never bore, and the breasts which never nursed!'"* Normally, being unable to bear children was considered the worst thing that could possibly happen to a Jewish woman. But a judgment so terrible was coming that it would make mothers wish they had never given birth. *"Then they will begin 'to say to the mountains, 'Fall on us!' and to the hills, 'Cover us!'"* A period of suffering so severe was coming upon Jerusalem, Jesus said, that people would rather be buried alive than endure it.

The Jews of Jerusalem were hardened, unrepentant, unwilling to turn to their Savior and live -- they were dry wood. And forty years later, in 70 A.D., the world got a good look at what happens to dry wood. In one of history's most brutal and bloody massacres, the Romans attacked Jerusalem and leveled it to the ground. Men, women and children were butchered. The historian Josephus says that blood ran in the streets, in some places as deep as the horses' bridles.

It's horrible, isn't it? Jesus was right when He predicted, *"For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be."* -- *Mat 24:20-21*. Some of the details recorded about this slaughter are so horrific and obscene that I can't mention them. But on Good Friday it's worth remembering this terrible judgment, because it has to do with something our world of today would rather forget: sin, and

it's punishment. So many people in this world think that they don't need a Savior from sin. Or else they want to be their own Savior, navigating according to their own feelings, deciding for themselves how to live, what is right and what is wrong. Few in our society seems to take sin seriously anymore - or at least not what the Bible calls sin. And of course the problem of sin can be avoided, temporarily at least. If a person keeps sinning long enough, his conscience will cease to bother him about it. He can pay psychiatrists to help him get rid of his "guilt feelings." Ignore sin long enough, he thinks, and maybe it will just go away.

But sin won't go away. Make no mistake - every single sin must be paid for. The Bible says that *"the wages of sin is death!"* And if you don't believe that, one look at the cross should convince you! As the hymnist wrote:

*Ye who think of sin but lightly,
Nor suppose the evil great,
Here may view its nature rightly,
Here its guilt may estimate.*

All the horrible consequences of sin are plain to see in the tortured body of Christ on the cross. He suffered for our sins there - yours and mine. As Isaiah said, *"All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned every one into his own paths, and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all."* By rights, our sins should have landed us hell. Instead, they landed Jesus on the cross!

Today, as we gaze upon our suffering Savior, it's time for us Christians to ask ourselves that searching question: *"If they do these things in the green wood, what will be done in the dry?"* Putting it another way, the writer to the Hebrews asks, *"How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?"* -- Heb 2:3. My fellow Christians, if you're not afraid of sin already, then I suggest you start being afraid! If you're cherishing a pet sin of which you're unwilling to repent -- beware! If there's some part of your life that you're unwilling to conform to the will of God -- beware! If the cares and pleasures (and screens!) of this world are beginning to monopolize your attention and crowd out God's Word -- beware! These are sins that can lead you away from Christ. They can *dry out* your Christian faith. If you don't catch them in time, they can eventually turn you into "dry wood." And God has shown us only too clearly what happens to dry wood!

On March 20th we passed the vernal equinox, so for the first time in six months we're enjoying more daylight than darkness. The long nights of winter are now officially over. And yet in a spiritual sense, we have today reached the darkest day of the year. Good Friday is a warning - even to us Christians - not to take sin lightly. *"Therefore,"* Paul says, *"let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall."* -- I Cor 10:12. Our Savior's cross reminds us of the fearsome consequences of sin. It urges each of us to daily contrition and repentance, for, *"If they do these things in the green wood, what shall be done in the dry?"*

But a Christian is never without hope, and there is hope for us even on this darkest day of the year. The bad news of Good Friday is that *our sin has a very high cost*. The Good News is that *Jesus paid that cost*. God's wrath over sin is fierce -- but Jesus bore the full brunt of God's wrath on the cross, so that we should never have to bear it. Paul preaches the Good Friday

Gospel in eleven simple words, "*We were reconciled to God through the death of His Son.*" -- Rom 5:10.

We are reconciled with God through Christ. But you know, that can be really hard to believe. Especially when your sins rise up to accuse you. "I know God is compassionate," you say, "but can He really have compassion on me?! On someone like me, with the kind of sins I've committed?! Is there really compassion and forgiveness even for me?" The answer is yes! I heard an updated version of the Lenten hymn, "Jesus I will Ponder Now." I was struck by the dramatic last line of that hymn - after describing our Lord's suffering in vivid detail the hymn writer says, "If for me He slays his Son, GOD MUST HAVE COMPASSION!" The logic is inescapable: if God loved you enough to put His own Son to death for you, He loves you enough to forgive you. If He was willing to do even that for you, he is certainly going to absolve your sins which, after all, Jesus covered with His sacrifice

Can you remember playing "tag" when you were a child? I can. We always had one place that was "safe" - a car or a tree or a fencepost; if you were touching that object, you were safe, and you couldn't be tagged. For sinners, the cross is safe. As long as we're touching the cross of our Savior, sin has lost its power to condemn us, and we are safe. The terrible fate of the dry wood will never befall us if we abide in Christ. That's why we sing with the hymn writer:

*In the cross I rest me
Foes who would molest me
Cannot reach me here.
Tho' the earth be shaking
Every heart be quaking,
Jesus calms my fear.
Lightnings flash and thunders crash,
Yet tho' sin and hell assail me
JESUS WILL NOT FAIL ME!*

Jesus didn't fail us on Good Friday, and He won't fail us now. Let us repent of all our sins, and rely on the cross of our Savior for complete forgiveness. Let us make God's Word our delight and our meditation, returning to it again and again—as we are this evening—to hear that sweet, ancient story of how our salvation was won. Let's keep coming back to our Savior in repentance and faith. Then we won't be dry wood, but rather, as the Psalmist says, we "***shall be like a tree Planted by the rivers of water, That brings forth its fruit in its season, Whose leaf also shall not wither; And whatever he does shall prosper.***" -- Psa 1:3. AMEN.