

# The Waiting and Desolation of Holy Saturday

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## ***Good Friday: The Death of What Once Felt Certain***

On Good Friday, God incarnate was hanging on a cross to die. An innocent man sacrificed because of a weak ruler, jealous leaders, and an insistent mob. Yet this could not have happened if God had not ordained it. On this day we see how God turned the worst evil into the best thing that has ever happened.

Good Friday was the death of the disciples' dreams and what once felt certain. As they watched Jesus being led away by the Roman soldiers, then nailed to a cross to die, I wonder what they thought. Days earlier, they'd been talking about who would be the greatest in the kingdom when Jesus asked if they could drink from his cup. They were sure that they could — but this? Surely the cup couldn't have meant this.

The disciples might have been together when Jesus was led away, but in many ways they were all alone, each one experiencing their own unique loss. Jesus repeatedly told them this would happen, but they didn't understand it. How could they?

In the midst of our own suffering and pain, nothing is clear. We may be almost paralyzed with fear as we react from pure instinct. We watch the unthinkable unfold, trying to get our bearings but constantly feeling off-balance. When our world is spinning, what we see and hear can ricochet through our mind like a pinball, never settling anywhere long enough to follow it.

I've been through days that felt analogous to the disciples' experience on Good Friday. Days when my story took an unexpected and horrific turn. Days when the following words left me devastated: "I'm sorry, your son is dead." "One day you'll probably be a quadriplegic." "I'm leaving you for someone else."

We are all numb on what has felt like the Good Fridays in our lives. As we stare into the abyss, we are left with more questions than answers. What do we do when we're in freefall and disoriented?

Trust God. Trust that he is at work even when we can't see it. Trust that what looks awful now is ultimately for our good. Trust that as we look at Good Friday, we can know that God is at work even in the chaos.

## ***Holy Saturday: Desolation and Waiting***

Holy Saturday follows Good Friday. On the first Holy Saturday, the disciples all scattered, each to their own homes (John 16:31). It was the Sabbath for them, a day without work. Nothing to busy themselves with. Just silence and stillness. I wonder if they pondered the events of the past week or talked about them together? Were they filled with regret, second guessing what they said, ashamed of what they did and didn't do? Did they wonder what was true about what they once earnestly believed and were willing to give their lives for?

Did they question with the Pharisees, 'He saved others, why couldn't he have saved himself?' (Luke 23:35) Or like Jesus on the cross, were they crying, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34) The cup they were so anxious to drink was now empty. What would happen next?

Holy Saturday follows our own catastrophic losses. The day we realize our dreams have been crushed and we're not sure how to move forward, or if we even want to. Waiting seems interminable. For us, Holy Saturday can be days, weeks, months or even years long. Long days of waiting in limbo, trying to process what has happened. We're afraid of what lies ahead, wondering if we dare voice our disappointment with God. Has he abandoned us? What was real about our faith anyway? Questions spring up everywhere as we struggle to understand what is beyond our understanding.

Holy Saturday is important, as we acknowledge all that we've lost and face our doubts and our disappointments. We may want to rush past this day, to "fix" others who are waiting in it, to offer trite answers to ease the pain. But this day isn't one for platitudes or quick solutions. It's necessary to sit with the questions as we process and heal.

Holy Saturday doesn't have the fury and flurry of Good Friday but it's still tense. And intense. This is when some walk away from faith. It's in the quiet as they start reevaluating what they went through. They wonder why God didn't rescue them. Why did he let them hope and make plans, only to have them crumble? The echoes of the Pharisees words with a unique twist may be ringing in their minds asking, "If he is the Savior and saved others, why didn't he save me?" Disillusioned, many may wonder if God even cares about them. Or if he's forsaken them.

### ***The Whispers of Hope and Assurance of God's Love***

If we could only hear the whispers of God's voice, hear the song he's singing over us, hear the tears he's weeping with us, then maybe we'd see it differently. But many of us cannot hear that. All we hear is deafening silence. Yet in what feels like a dark night of the soul, God bids all of us to lean into him, to trust him in the dark. Nothing looks different on our Holy Saturday, and we have to hang onto Jesus by faith. Or simply trust that he is holding onto us.

For those who are willing to wait, who know that hope in God will never disappoint, we'll stir at the end of Holy Saturday. If we can stay and keep looking at Jesus through the worst, we will discover the love of God is deeper and truer than we can imagine. We'll know God's love from experience in a way that few understand.

That's what happened to the disciple John. He stayed to the end, watching Jesus die at the foot of the cross when the disciples ran away, and John was as firmly convinced of God's love as anyone who has ever lived. John's identity was as one beloved. He wrote about love more than anyone else. When you've lived through tragedy - felt it, watched it and tasted it, and discovered God's love through it all, nothing will convince you God's love isn't real. You'll know from experience that nothing can ever separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:38-39). When you've been through the worst and found God faithful, Christ's love will be as firmly nailed to your identity as his body was nailed to the cross.

God's love will transform you if you let it. Will you endure and trust that Easter is coming?

### ***Easter is Coming***

This Easter isn't the physical resurrection of Jesus, which was a one-time event. But His rising from the grave means loss and death will not have the last word in our lives. So our Easter can be the resurrection of our dreams or the redemption of our suffering or the joy of heaven.

Easter is coming for all of us. For all of us who've watched our nightmares come true, and wondered what comes next. For all of us who have cried bitter tears in the dark, waiting for the dawn to come. For all of us who've felt forsaken and aren't sure whether we're seen or loved. The story isn't over yet. As we wait and cry out to God in our despair, we will soon discover that God is nearer than we ever thought. And that he loves us extravagantly. We'll see that just as night gives way to day, the crucifixion always gives way to the resurrection.

So if you are living in the horror of Good Friday, or the agonizing stillness and intensity of Holy Saturday, can you hang on a little longer? Easter is coming. I promise. The best is yet to be.