

Take Him Away!

Grace, mercy, and peace are yours, from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

“Take him away!”—three words the crowds shouted that showed the truth of the prophecy of Isaiah: **“He was despised and rejected by mankind”** (53:3). “Take him away!”—three words that showed the truth of Jesus’ prediction that he would be handed over to the Gentiles and crucified. “Take him away!”—three words that showed the truth of St. John’s observation: **“He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him”** (Jn 1:10).

The roar of the crowd that Good Friday morning must have been painful for Jesus to hear. In contrast to that, earlier in Holy Week Jesus had been walking with his disciples in the calmness of a spring morning when he came to a hill overlooking the city of Jerusalem. He broke down crying and said, **“If you . . . had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes.”** And Jesus explained that a terrible judgment was looming over Jerusalem **“because you did not recognize the time of God’s [gracious] coming to you”** (Lk 19:42,44).

Our midweek Lenten services have been focusing on events of Jesus’ passion leading up to his crucifixion. Here is the farewell the city gave him—shouts of anger and hatred calling for his death. How different from the shouts of “Hosanna!” a few days earlier. Satan was certainly at work, pouring out his hatred of God through the voices and hands of the people. But God was also at work that day, accomplishing what he set out to do through the voices of the people as well. **Take him away:**

- 1. to leave behind the crowd to its cravings.**
- 2. to move forward the Father’s gracious plan.**

1. To leave behind the crowd to its cravings

How can we even begin to account for this utter hatred of Jesus? What had he done besides heal the sick, cure the blind, make the lame walk, drive out demons, feed thousands, raise a couple of dead people, and, most important, teach the Word of God the correct way so that many, many came to have a clear understanding of the prophecies about the Savior, and what God’s will for their lives truly was? What evil is in any of that? There is none. In the final analysis, what Jesus told his disciples the night before was dead-on: **“They hated me without reason”** (Jn 15:25).

There are so many in this world who believe that people are naturally good or, perhaps, born into this world with a clean slate. Instead of something being wrong on the inside, it’s our environment which shapes us into good or bad people.

But here, in the crowd of Jerusalem, we see what the sinful nature is capable of. **“The sinful mind is hostile to God,”** St. Paul wrote (Ro 8:7 NIV84). And there was never a day more filled with hostility than when sinful people, both Jews and Gentiles, crucified the innocent Son of God.

Jesus picked up his own cross and left the people in the crowd to their cravings. What were they craving? His blood? Sure. But the reason they were craving that was because Jesus of Nazareth was disrupting their nation’s earthly relationship with the powers of the day and endangering their peace, security, and prosperity. “You know nothing at all!” the high priest had earlier said to the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin had said, **“If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our temple and our nation”** (Jn 11:48,49). You see, their thoughts were all about this world, this life. Malachi the prophet had said that **“the lips of a priest ought to preserve knowledge, . . . and people seek instruction from his mouth”** (Mal 2:7). The chief priests ought to have been the leaders in helping the people focus on their eternal relationship with God, but (as our text says) they—the chief priests—were the ones who led the chant, **“We have no king but Caesar.”** Caesar—who within 40 years would have his armies attack Jerusalem, kill thousands, and destroy the temple. Another Caesar—who in one hundred years would put down another Jewish revolt by leveling the city of Jerusalem, rebuilding it as an entirely Roman city with a Roman name, and banishing Jews from setting foot in it. Oh, the irony! This was Passover time. Passover was the festival of liberation and freedom, the birth of the nation as God led his people out of Egypt. But here, in their craving for earthly security, they pledged themselves to slavery.

What power sin has in the heart! How much we need to repent and live in repentance so that our focus is not on this world—its wealth, its apparent security. We have such a natural craving to try to make this earth our heaven and to never want to leave. And when Jesus says, “**Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me**” (Lk 9:23), Satan is so quick to say, “What kind of life is that? Did Jesus say that? Take him away! You don’t need that.” But what a price to pay for buying into that lie!

2. To move forward the Father’s gracious plan

Thank God, though, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, that our salvation does not depend—even a tiny, little bit—on our devotion, our zeal, our commitment to follow Christ. Thank God that it all depends on him—his devotion, his zeal, his commitment to fulfill his Father’s plans for our eternity.

John records it almost without emotion: Jesus picked up his own cross, went out to Golgotha, and there they crucified him. But Jesus had a quiet dignity in all this loud ugliness and an iron-like resolve to see the task done. While he left behind the clamoring crowds to their cravings, he moved forward with his Father’s gracious plan.

That plan was so beautifully foreshadowed by Israel’s very first festival, the Passover. You remember how God commanded the people through Moses to take an innocent, spotless lamb and slaughter it. That lamb’s blood went on the doorframes of their homes, and when the angel of death did his horrific work that night in Egypt, the blood delivered the Israelites from death. This was pure grace. The Israelites weren’t any less sinful than the Egyptians. But God had claimed them and changed their hearts. God had made them his people, and God provided his people with deliverance.

An even greater deliverance was happening at the place of the skull. Here was blood again, but better blood, holy blood. Here was the blood of the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. Here was blood that covers your sins, your guilt. Here was Jesus’ blood that is our righteousness. Through this blood, God has removed your sins as far as the east is from the west, and he remembers them no more.

Trusting in this blood, shed on the cross, a glorious future awaits you. St. John saw us in a vision he recorded in Revelation, as people who one day will have escaped this great tribulation of life in a sin-cursed world. “**These in white robes—who are they?**” the elder asked. John answered, “**You know.**” Yes—“**these are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore, ‘they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple’**” (Rev 7:13-15).

This blood, this forgiveness, this future—this is what Jesus was carrying up Golgotha’s hill with his cross, to fulfill his Father’s gracious plan.

On his first missionary journey (perhaps 15 years after Jesus’ suffering and death), St. Paul stopped at a synagogue in present-day Turkey. It was his custom to go to his fellow Jews first and to try to share with them the good news about the Messiah. In that sermon, he explained what really happened on Good Friday: “**The people of Jerusalem and their rulers did not recognize Jesus, yet in condemning him they fulfilled the words of the prophets that are read every Sabbath**” (Ac 13:27). He would later write to the Romans that Jesus’ rejection at the hands of his own people brought reconciliation to the world (Ro 11:15). That is, peace between God and man.

“Take him away!” “Take him away!” We shudder to hear the words and thank God that we weren’t alive and part of the crowd that day. The crowd got its wish; after that day they would never see Jesus again. Following his resurrection, Jesus only showed himself to those who believed in him. He hid himself from the rest—a horrible judgment for those people in and of itself!

But on that day of his trial—as he always does—God also showed his grace and his power. He gave his only Son into death for our sins. And he used his almighty power to do what he does best, to turn evil into good—eternal good for you who put your faith in him. Amen.