

Sermon for April 3, 2026 – Good Friday

Mark 15:37–38 (EHV)

³⁷Jesus cried out with a loud voice and breathed his last. ³⁸The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.

On that first Good Friday, as Jesus hung on the cross, something happened in the temple a few miles away. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all pause their accounts of the crucifixion to take our eyes off the cross and onto the temple to mention: *The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.*

You could easily pass by that detail without giving it much thought. But the fact that all three evangelists mention it tells us this is not a side note. It is a sermon from God.

Why did the temple curtain tear? What does it mean for your salvation?

This will be the focus of our meditation, under the theme:

Jesus is our sacrificial High Priest,

- 1) whose offering made atonement for all sin.
- 2) who has opened heaven for all who believe in him.

Part One: Whose offering of himself made atonement for all sin.

The worship life God instituted for his Old Testament people was very bloody. Morning and evening, day after day, priests sacrificed animals and used their blood for the ceremonial cleansing and dedication of both objects and people.

Why all this blood? Because the LORD wanted to impress upon his people the seriousness of sin. The wages of sin is death. Sin separates us from God and must be punished. If your relationship with your holy LORD is to be restored, someone without sin must suffer your punishment in your place.

God is holy. Sin is deadly. A substitute must die to save you – God wanted Israel’s bloody sacrifices to drive these truths home every day to draw attention to His promise to provide a Saviour.

Therefore, when the LORD gave the Ten Commandments, He also ordered Moses to place them in a special box called “The Ark of the Covenant,” and to have someone craft a special cover called “the atonement cover” or “mercy seat.” The Ark of the Covenant symbolized God’s throne and was a constant reminder that He was with His people.

However, because God is so holy that no sinner can stand in His presence, He forbade the people from touching or seeing the Ark of the Covenant. Instead, He commanded that it be housed behind

a thick curtain in a special inner room of the tabernacle called “the Most Holy Place.” No one was allowed to look behind the curtain – not even the High Priest. God threatened to strike dead anyone who tried.

There was one exception: once a year on Yom Kippur - the Great Day of Atonement - God ordered the High Priest to go behind the curtain with the blood of a special sacrifice to atone for the people’s sins. Covered by the smoke of incense, the High Priest first sprinkled the blood of a bull on the mercy seat - a sacrifice to atone for his own sins. Forgiven, he would go behind the curtain a second time to sprinkle the blood of a goat on the cover of the Ark, sacrificed for the sins of the people. In this way, the LORD forgave the people.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, do you see the wonderful symbolism God provided? The LORD is holy and just. He cannot tolerate any sin, no matter how insignificant people might consider it to be. He judges the entire world from His heavenly throne on the basis of His righteous law – written not only on two stone tablets but also on every human heart.

If we could keep God’s law perfectly, we could live with God in perfect harmony. But we have not. We, like the rest of humanity, have repeatedly sinned against God’s holy law. Sin separates us from God. The punishment for sin is eternal death in hell. And because God is perfectly just, He will not simply overlook our sin and move on. No - the fulfilment of justice is necessary for forgiveness.

Do you see what that means for us? Humanity needs a mediator - a sinless High Priest who can approach God on our behalf and make atonement for our sins.

Therefore, the LORD, who loves all people and does not want anyone lost in hell, promised to send a Saviour. He would be true God – the eternal Son of the Father –able to both live the sinless life we all failed to live and to make His sacrifice apply to all people for all time. He would also be true man, born of the Virgin Mary, so that He could suffer and die in our place.

Fulfilling every demand of the law with His perfect life, and satisfying its penalty with His own blood, He would atone for the sins of all people of all time, so that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life.

Brothers and sisters in Christ: Good Friday is our Yom Kippur – our great Day of Atonement. Today, we see Jesus, our great sacrificial High Priest, mediating on our behalf before God. Just as the high priests of old prayed for the people’s forgiveness, so also Jesus prayed for yours. And as He prayed, He offered the very sacrifice that would forgive your sins: the sacrifice of Himself.

With hands outstretched and bleeding, He offered His blood. And then – after a lifetime of perfect obedience and hours of agony on the cross – He said something that changed everything forever: “It is finished.”

Think about what these words mean. Every sin you have ever committed. Every failure. Every secret shame. Paid for. In full. Nothing left to add. Nothing left to learn. It is finished.

Then, submitting His spirit into His Father's hands, He bowed His head and breathed His last.

Part Two: Who has opened heaven for all who believe in him

At that precise moment, God gave a great object lesson in the temple to proclaim the meaning of Christ's sacrifice for us.

Picture the priests in the temple that afternoon. They are going about their duties – offering incense, tending the lamps – when suddenly the air shifts. A deep, tearing sound. And the curtain they had never dared to touch – the thick, towering veil that separated them from the presence of God – splits open before their eyes.

The Most Holy Place, forbidden to all but the High Priest once a year, is now exposed for anyone to see. We can't imagine how shocking this was. Throughout their history, God told His people: "Do not come into My presence – you will die on account of your sins." And now here it is: open. What could it possibly mean?

It means that God doesn't want you to be afraid of Him anymore. He wants you to trust that Jesus has forgiven all your sins. He wants you to know that He is at peace with you in Christ – that He has opened the way to heaven for all who believe in Him.

But why is heaven open only to those who believe in Him? Didn't Jesus pay for the sins of all people? Isn't heaven open to everyone?

Yes - Jesus died for all people, even those who reject Him. There is nothing preventing anyone from receiving God's gift of forgiveness, life, and salvation – except unbelief. Unbelief is like standing before an open door and refusing to walk through.

Let me explain what I mean with an analogy. Suppose a king opened his castle door to the public and told his subjects to come and share in his wealth. Those who believed the king and entered through the door he opened would receive everything he promised. But those who didn't believe - out of indifference, fear, or stubbornness – would share none of it. Even though the door is open to all, only those who believe the king's word will walk through it.

The king, of course, is Jesus. And the door He has opened is Himself, as He once declared: "*I am the door. Whoever enters through me will be saved.*"ⁱ God the Father wants all people to come to Him through this door – promising everlasting salvation to all who do.

There is no reason to be afraid. Christ's sacrifice has reconciled you to God. More than that, knowing that we can't manufacture our faith in Him on our own, He even gives us the grace to believe, which He works in us by His Word and Spirit. Everything – from the sacrifice to the faith that receives it – comes from Him.

Therefore, the author of the biblical book Hebrews writes:

¹⁹Brothers, we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place through the blood of Jesus. ²⁰It is a new and living way he opened for us through the curtain, that is, his flesh. ²¹We also have a great priest over the house of God. ²²So let us approach with a sincere heart, in the full confidence of faith, because our hearts have been sprinkled to take away a bad conscience, and our bodies have been washed with pure water.ⁱⁱ

Jesus is our sacrificial high priest - who offered Himself to atone for the sins of all people, and who opened heaven for all who believe.

So let us approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.ⁱⁱⁱ

If you came here today carrying something – a sin that haunts you, a grief that won't let go, a nagging fear that you are too far gone for grace – hear this: Jesus is your High Priest, who tore open the curtain that separated you from God's presence. He opened the way for you.

Come before God through Jesus in repentance and faith to receive all the blessings Christ's sacrifice has won for you. Yes, heaven is open to you right now. Not because you earned it – but because He has.

Rejoice in this truth. Amen.

ⁱ John 10:9 EHV

ⁱⁱ Hebrews 10:19-22 EHV

ⁱⁱⁱ Hebrews 4:16 EHV