

REFLECTION ON THE PASSION OF CHRIST

Suffering And Crucifixion

When Jesus and the disciples finished Supper, Jesus went to the Mount of Olives and His disciples followed Him. He stopped at an Olive Orchard called Gethsemane and took Peter, James and John and went off to pray. A deep sadness came over Him as He pondered the events that were about to take place. He told His disciples, *“My soul is sorrowful even to death.”* (Matt. 26:38)

The Gospel of Luke

After withdrawing about a stone’s throw from them and kneeling, he prayed, saying, “Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me; still, not my will but yours be done.” The Gospel of Luke tells us that [to strengthen him an angel from heaven appeared to him. He was in such agony and he prayed so fervently that his sweat became like drops of blood falling on the ground.] When he rose from prayer and returned to his disciples, he found them sleeping from grief. He said to them, “Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray that you may not undergo the test.” (Luke 22:39-46)

Like every other human being, Jesus had a choice; to obey God’s will, or to avoid what His Father had sent Him to do. The three Apostles, not understanding what was about to happen, fell sleep while He agonized.

When he had prepared Himself, Judas, the betrayer, came and gave Him a kiss, the kiss of death, the kiss of life. A kiss that led to Jesus’ physical death, but a kiss that led to our eternal life with God.

Jesus was arrested, dragged before the Sanhedrin, that is the chief priests, the elders and the scribes, and falsely accused of crimes that were punishable by death under Jewish law. Jesus remained silent and offered no defense. After they could not get at least two witnesses to agree in their testimony against Jesus, as was required by Jewish law, the high priest asked him, *“Are you the Messiah, the son of the Blessed*

One?" To this Jesus answered, "*I am; and 'you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power and coming with the clouds of heaven.*" (Mark 14:62) At that they accused Him of blasphemy, condemned Him to death, and turned him over to the Roman authorities, because the Jews did not have the authority under Roman rule to put Him to death.

Jesus was spat upon, mocked, and beaten with whips that stripped his flesh from his bones. A crown of thorns was pressed firmly onto his head and He was eventually led away to be crucified. While this was happening, all of His disciples fled. He was abandoned and denied. He was alone.

From Caiaphas the high priest's perspective, God revealed Himself to the chosen ones, the Israelites, through the Law and the Prophets. The blood of sheep and goats was used to atone for sins as God, through Moses, had told their forefathers. But only God could forgive sins. So who was this man who had dared to blaspheme and say that He could forgive sins? Who was this man who dared to blaspheme and say that he was the son of the Blessed One? Anyone who blasphemes must pay the penalty. He had to die. In any case, He was a trouble maker and would eventually have caused the Roman authorities to place even greater restrictions on us Jews. He was worse than that seditionist Barabbas, so he made our choice simple. Caiaphas had said, "*It is better for you that one man should die instead of the people, so that the whole nation may not perish.*" (John 11:50)

The High Priest did not know the truth of Jesus' statement that He was the Son of God. The intention of the high priest was to preserve the Law and Traditions as he knew them; to save God's chosen people from going astray. But his heart was hardened and he got it wrong. Instead, he was instrumental in fulfilling God's plan of reconciling fallen mankind to Himself.

Jesus was beaten to the point of death by the Roman soldiers. Why? Because the Jewish leaders brought Him before Pontius Pilate with the charge, "*We found this man misleading our people; he opposes the*

payment of taxes to Caesar and maintains that he is the Messiah, a king.” They continued, “He is inciting the people with his teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee where he began even to here.” (Luke 23:2, 5)

To the Roman authorities, a Jewish “king” would only cause trouble for the Roman Empire. No one could even appear to challenge the authority of the Emperor Caesar. So eliminating this threat seemed the obvious thing to do. Pontius Pilate, the Roman Procurator of that region gave the order for Jesus to be crucified.

Jesus was made to carry His cross. His strength was ebbing with the loss of every drop of blood. He struggled to drag His 300 Lb. cross. It was not only the physical weight of the cross, but also the weight of the sins of everyone who has lived, everyone who is living and everyone who will live that He was dragging, so that those sins could be thrown into the abyss of hell instead of our souls.

My sins He bore! Your sins He bore! Why would he do that? And I don’t even think about Him when I sin. They are my little sins, and who will know? Who will they hurt? But my sins and everyone else’s sins were stacked to the heavens, and He just dragged them, nailed them to the cross with Him, and offered Himself to the Father as propitiation for our sins, fulfilling His destiny.

The cross was planted on a hill at Golgotha for all to see the sinful criminal that was worthy of crucifixion. His crime was so horrific that they even let a murderer go free in His place.

His mother Mary stood there suffering with her Son. She might have asked in her heart, “My Lord and my God, you said through my cousin Elizabeth that blessed is the fruit of my womb. You said that I was favored by You. But for these last three years I have been greatly troubled and I do not understand. How can my son, tortured and nailed to a cross, be a blessing?” Look! His pain is unbearable, the humiliation crushes his humanity. Through her tears and her pain she knew in her heart that this must be God’s will and it was for our benefit.

John standing next to her might have thought, “Lord, I watched you perform miracles, heal the sick, raise the dead. Lord, how can your Father let this happen to you? How can you save us if you die like this? We followed you; we believed in you; we trusted you. We believe that You are the Messiah. How could this happen to the Messiah?” He did not understand.

As they stood there with pain reaching to the depths of their souls, Jesus opened His eyes and said to them, “*Woman, behold your son. Son, behold your mother.*” (John 19:26-27) And from that hour John took her into his home.

The reality of what was happening pierced their hearts like the lance that pierced the side of Jesus. The soldiers tried to give him wine mixed with bitter gall but he refused it. He just hung there, helpless in His human form, but obedient, as he continued to gather our sins, removing them from His Father’s presence. Yes, our sins may harm others and harm us, but their greatest offence is against God. And Jesus just hung there, embracing both the pain in His humanity and the pain in His divinity. Yes, as man, he bore the physical pain of our sins. As God, He felt the spiritual pain of our sins. We made Him suffer twice for each offence.

As He hung there with His arms outstretched between Heaven and Earth, gathering to Himself everyone that God has given Him, the door to heaven slowly opened and at 3 o’clock on that incredible day. The curtain of the sanctuary was torn in two from top to bottom and the true Holy of Holies, Jesus, was revealed to us. Jesus had said, “*I am the way and the truth and the life.*” (John 14:16) The doorway to paradise was again opened for us and our Heavenly Father is waiting to welcome us. God calls each of us by name and invites each of us to make the journey through the narrow, open door.

Then Jesus cried out, “*My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?*” (Matt 27:46) He was alone in the darkest moments of human despair. He again cried out, and then He died.

The Gospel of Matthew

“The earth quaked, rocks were split, tombs were opened, and the bodies of many saints who had fallen asleep were raised. And coming forth from their tombs after his resurrection, they entered the holy city and appeared to many. The centurion and the men with him who were keeping watch over Jesus feared greatly when they saw the earthquake and all that was happening, and they said, “Truly, this was the Son of God!” (Matt 27:51-54)

When they took His body down from the cross, it was wrapped in a clean linen cloth and laid in a new tomb. A huge stone was rolled across the entrance. The Chief priests had a seal attached to the stone and a guard placed outside the tomb.

PRAYER

My Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, help me to confess my sins so that they can be forgiven and removed from your sight. Forgive me for all of the times I have offended you, have hurt you, have nailed you to the cross. Grant me I pray, the understanding to know your will, the faith to accept your will, and the grace to do your will. Lead me through my trials and allow me to help others along the way. I ask these things through You, my Lord, who lives and reigns in unity with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever, Amen.