

Doing and Saying – a Christian Pilgrimage

Week 80: The Storm Hits

Day 553: Mockery and pain. The price of obedience.

As they were going out, they found a man from Cyrene named Simon, whom they forced to carry his cross. They came to a place called Golgotha (which means “Place of the Skull”) and offered Jesus wine mixed with gall to drink. But after tasting it, he would not drink it. When they had crucified him, they divided his clothes by throwing dice. Then they sat down and kept guard over him there. Above his head they put the charge against him, which read: “This is Jesus, the king of the Jews.”

Then two outlaws were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by defamed him, shaking their heads and saying, “You who can destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself! If you are God’s Son, come down from the cross!” In the same way even the chief priests—together with the experts in the law and elders—were mocking him: “He saved others, but he cannot save himself! He is the king of Israel! If he comes down now from the cross, we will believe in him! He trusts in God—let God, if he wants to, deliver him now because he said, ‘I am God’s Son!’” The robbers who were crucified with him also spoke abusively to him.
(Matthew 27:32-44).

The soldiers continued the “Kings Game”, gambling for Jesus’ clothing (see day 544). Even the sour wine (vinegar) and gall was an ironic mockery of the Roman soldiers: “See how merciful we are! This may dull your sense of the pain we are inflicting on you.” The vinegar was probably posca, a cheap vinegar wine diluted heavily with water. It was the drink of slaves and soldiers. The passers-by mocked Him, the religious authorities mocked Him, even those who were being crucified with Him, mocked Him.

Amazingly, all of this was foretold in scripture.

Psalms 69:21: **They put bitter poison** (could be translated as gall) **into My food, and to quench My thirst they give Me vinegar to drink.**

Psalms 22:

1 My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning? ...
7 All who see me taunt me;
they mock me and shake their heads.
8 They say,
“Commit yourself to the Lord!
Let the Lord rescue him!
Let the Lord deliver him, for he delights in him.” ...
14 My strength drains away like water;
all my bones are dislocated.
My heart is like wax;
it melts away inside me.
15 The roof of my mouth is as dry as a piece of pottery;
my tongue sticks to my gums.

You set me in the dust of death.
16 Yes, wild dogs surround me—
a gang of evil men crowd around me;
like a lion they pin my hands and feet.
17 I can count all my bones;
my enemies are gloating over me in triumph.
18 They are dividing up my clothes among themselves;
they are rolling dice for my garments. ...

Psalms 22 graphically depicts Jesus' experience on the cross:

- All taunt me and mock me
- They say "Let the Lord rescue Him!"
- My strength is gone, my bones dislocated, my heart melts
- My mouth has no moisture
- Evil surrounds Me
- My hands and feet are pinned
- I can count all my bones while my enemies gloat
- My clothes are divided up by rolling of the dice

Surely it would be hard to find a better description of what Jesus experienced in His crucifixion.

Even in His death, especially in His death, Jesus was doing what had been foretold by Him.

Obedience to the Way of Christ can sometimes be really hard. Jesus was crucified, and ten of His remaining 11 inner-circle disciples were likewise murdered, as many Christians have been since for following Him. While God desires shalom for us and all His Images, sometimes even reminding others of that can cause them to strike out in fear and anger. When the light shines in the darkness, the darkness can strike back. Jesus was determined to do the Father's will, not because the Father desired Him to have pain and mockery, but because the Father (and Jesus) knew this was the way to life for all.

List some experiences you have had, or some you have read or heard happened to others, where the result of doing good for others, even of sharing Christ, was mockery, pain, or even death.

Share with those you trust.

Day 554: The first ending

Now from noon until three, darkness came over all the land. At about three o'clock Jesus shouted with a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, "This man is calling for Elijah." Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge, filled it with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink. But the rest said, "Leave him alone! Let's see if Elijah will come to save him." Then Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and gave up his spirit. (Matthew 27:45-50).

This is so sad. All because of jealousy.

It is very sad indeed. Jesus cried out, "My God, My God; why have You forsaken Me?" There are at least two ways to interpret this:

- a.) "Father, I am desolate. I am abandoned. Even You have abandoned Me. More than the physical pain, more than the mockery, I cannot handle being separated from You. You have been with Me every second of My life. Where are You?"
- b.) Psalm 22.

What do you mean, "Psalm 22"?

It was a common custom of Jesus' time for people to refer to entire passages in the Old Testament by their significant or leading words. It's like stating, "In the Beginning" and everyone knowing you meant all of Genesis. Matthew used this in His gospel, Paul did it a lot in his letters, in fact it is sprinkled through the New Testament. Here are some examples from Matthew:

- 1:23 – Refers to Isaiah 7:10-16
- 2:6 – Micah 5
- 2:15 – Hosea 11

Each of these short verses refers to longer writings in the Old Testament which write about the coming salvation which God will provide His people. Matthew is saying, "all those predictions – they have come true!" without having to spell them out in detail.

In the same way, Jesus yelling out the first words of Psalm 22 is telling his listeners – go and meditate on this Psalm – it is happening now!

This is the end then? Jesus has died.

His first disciples thought it was the end. However, let us look at the psalm. As mentioned yesterday, Psalm 22 recounts the ordeal which Christ is going through. However, it continues, starting in verse 21:

- 'You have answered me.
- I will declare your name to my countrymen.
- In the middle of the assembly I will praise you.
- You loyal followers of the Lord, praise him.
- All you descendants of Jacob, honor him.

All you descendants of Israel, stand in awe of him.
For he did not despise or detest the suffering of the oppressed.
He did not ignore him;
when he cried out to him, he responded.
You are the reason I offer praise in the great assembly;
I will fulfill my promises before the Lord's loyal followers.
Let the oppressed eat and be filled.
Let those who seek his help praise the Lord.
May you live forever!
Let all the people of the earth acknowledge the Lord and turn to him.
Let all the nations worship you.
For the Lord is king
and rules over the nations.
All the thriving people of the earth will join the celebration and worship;
all those who are descending into the grave will bow before him,
including those who cannot preserve their lives.
A whole generation will serve him;
they will tell the next generation about the Lord.
They will come and tell about his saving deeds;
they will tell a future generation what he has accomplished.'

In the context of Jesus, His calling attention to Psalm 22 is in effect saying, "You are doing all these terrible things to Me. Yet, My Father will respond and My promises will be fulfilled. The oppressed will be freed, all people will turn to Me and worship Me, I will rule, all who are blessed will celebrate and serve Me, and generations yet unborn will learn of Me and My saving deeds."

In other words?

In other words, Jesus has died; but this isn't over yet.

Sometimes, despair can weigh so heavy that there seems no way out. This could be because of a medical diagnosis, what others have done, psychosomatic or physical reasons. Depression is real and despair can be deadly.

Crucifixion was literally a dead end, and what Jesus was going through was horrific. Yet, even on the cross, He reminds us, He announces, that God's plan is at work and will triumph.

Despair is not the last word. Depression will be uplifted. Death will not win. As was written in Genesis 50:20, and as Paul wrote in Romans 8:28, "**We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.**" All things; even a merciless crucifixion.

The oppressed shall be freed, Christ rules over all creation, join in His joyful worship and glorification. Generations yet unborn will learn of God and God's saving deeds. Be joyful and

filled with grateful love: out of death has come life, out of darkness, light; out of mockery and derision, celebration and joy. Give all your life, all your hard times and struggles, and let Him work it all for good. He loves you more than life itself, and so He sacrificed Himself so you may know that embracing and energizing love.

Write down where you have read in the bible or history, or examples from your own life, where God has turned hard times into life-giving experiences, either immediately or much later. The ultimate example, of course, is Christ on the cross.

Share with those you trust.

Day 555: The lightning bolt which split history

Just then the temple curtain was torn in two, from top to bottom.

The earth shook and the rocks were split apart.

And tombs were opened, and the bodies of many saints who had died were raised.
(They came out of the tombs after his resurrection and went into the holy city and appeared to many people.)

Now when the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and what took place, they were extremely terrified and said, "Truly this one was God's Son!"

Many women who had followed Jesus from Galilee and given him support were also there, watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee. (Matthew 27:51-56).

The temple curtain was a barrier which separated the 'Holy of Holies', a room which only the High Priest was allowed to enter once a year, believed to contain the very presence of God, and the rest of the temple. It signified the separation between God and His people.

With the death of Jesus, the separation between God and His people was ended. The temple curtain was no longer required – and so, God rendered it asunder (to quote a biblical phrase ☺).

There was an earthquake. These were powerful signs that a new era was being introduced.

Tombs were opened and many who had died were seen in the city. The age of resurrection, the end time of creation, is beginning. A new reality was now in effect – history was split. Jesus' death was a lightning bolt not from the clouds to the ground, but from the heavens to the earth, impacting all of reality, physical and spiritual.

People were terrified by the unexpected events, and recognized, finally, who Jesus was.

And though the men had all deserted Jesus, all run away, many of the women who followed Him had stuck around to witness. He who had reached out to the marginalized was loved by them to the end.

There have been many momentous events in history, and will be many more – but the most momentous, the most critical, is what we are witnessing this week. Jesus, the Son of God, has just been crucified – and nothing will ever be the same again.

Jesus transforms lives. He invites relationship. List some lives you are aware of who Jesus has changed, and how He changed them. Perhaps, your life?

Share your list with your fellow explorers.

Day 556: Prophecy

Now when it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who was also a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate ordered that it be given to him. Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and placed it in his own new tomb that he had cut in the rock. Then he rolled a great stone across the entrance of the tomb and went away. (Now Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were sitting there, opposite the tomb.) (Matthew 27:57-61).

Read Isaiah chapter 53. Anywhere from 500 to 750 years before Jesus was born, Isaiah had given a profound prophecy – and in Mathew’s reference to Joseph of Arimathea, Isaiah 53:9 is lived out: **‘They intended to bury him with criminals, but he ended up in a rich man’s tomb because he had committed no violent deeds, nor had he spoken deceitfully.’**

Jesus’ life was the fulfilment of prophecy – and so was His death. God keeps His promises.

Knowing that God keeps His promises, read Jeremiah 33:3 and then Jeremiah 29:11. Jeremiah lived during one of the most despondent times in Israel’s history, yet even God told him He wanted a relationship and for His people to prosper. Now read Revelation 21:3-5. God is promising you an eternal life with Him. All you have to do is accept it. All it costs you is your earth-driven life. All it gives you is true life, for eternity.

What kind of life is God promising you? What do you need to do to receive it?

Share your thoughts with your fellow explorers.

Day 557: Sealed off

The next day (which is after the day of preparation) the chief priests and the Pharisees assembled before Pilate and said, "Sir, we remember that while that deceiver was still alive he said, 'After three days I will rise again.' So give orders to secure the tomb until the third day. Otherwise his disciples may come and steal his body and say to the people, 'He has been raised from the dead,' and the last deception will be worse than the first." Pilate said to them, "Take a guard of soldiers. Go and make it as secure as you can." So they went with the soldiers of the guard and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone. (Matthew 27:62-66)

The religious leaders are still worried – Jesus was smart and organized, surely His fanatical followers will strive to prove His claims (as indeed they did try). To ensure that His movement would die along with Him, they sealed His tomb and guarded it with soldiers.

There are times when it seems like everything that could go wrong, has gone wrong. There is no hope. Death has won, and it is ensuring that victory with a remorseless finality. Write your thoughts about such times.

Share with your fellow explorers.

Day 558: Devotion, even in despondency.

Now after the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. (Matthew 28:1)

Even when everything is at its worst, God asks for faithfulness. Jesus' inner circle was in hiding, fearful of being persecuted as Jesus had been. Mary and Mary, also devoted disciples, did not hide, but approached the tomb to honour His body and pray. It seemed like everything they believed, everything they had worked towards, was over – but at least they could honour Him even in this.

You may have encountered terrible times – war, attack, abuse, great evil. Hopefully, you will not. Though Mary and Mary could not undo what had just happened, they could still love. That is our calling, no matter the circumstances we are facing. Love. Sometimes, it is the most difficult thing in the world to do.

Share sometimes when you have found it hard to love, yet God has empowered you to try.

Share as you feel appropriate.

Day 559: Rest

Rest, receive nourishment, feed both body and soul. Reflect on the past week and care for your needs (body and spirit). Pray. Dedicate this day to God. Worship! Fill yourself with Light. In the evening get together with a group you trust and share what you would like to from the previous week – good points, hard points, what you've learned, what you've struggled with, etc. Decide again if you wish to continue journeying together or want to stop.

Know that God loves you. Celebrate, Rejoice, Give thanks, talk and walk with God. Be in shalom. Love. Pursue what is healthiest. Order your life as one pursuing facilitating as many people as possible to find the Kingdom of God. Be brave, trust God, Love.