

God Moves... to the Cross

PALM SUNDAY

April 14, 2019

Scripture: Luke 23: 1-5, 13-25, and 32-49

¹ Then the assembly rose as a body and brought Jesus before Pilate. ² They began to accuse him, saying, "We found this man perverting our nation, forbidding us to pay taxes to the emperor, and saying that he himself is the Messiah, a king." ³ Then Pilate asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" He answered, "You say so." ⁴ Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, "I find no basis for an accusation against this man." ⁵ But they were insistent and said, "He stirs up the people by teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee where he began even to this place."...

¹³ Pilate then called together the chief priests, the leaders, and the people, ¹⁴ and said to them, "You brought me this man as one who was perverting the people; and here I have examined him in your presence and have not found this man guilty of any of your charges against him. ¹⁵ Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us. Indeed, he has done nothing to deserve death. ¹⁶ I will therefore have him flogged and release him."

¹⁸ Then they all shouted out together, "Away with this fellow! Release Barabbas for us!" ¹⁹ This was a man who had been put in prison for an insurrection that had taken place in the city, and for murder. ²⁰ Pilate, wanting to release Jesus, addressed them again; ²¹ but they kept shouting, "Crucify, crucify him!" ²² A third time he said to them, "Why, what evil has he done? I have found in him no ground for the sentence of death; I will therefore have him flogged and then release him." ²³ But they kept urgently demanding with loud shouts that he should be crucified; and their voices prevailed. ²⁴ So Pilate gave his verdict that their demand should be granted. ²⁵ He released the man they asked for, the one

who had been put in prison for insurrection and murder, and he handed Jesus over as they wished...

³² Two others also, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. ³³ When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. ³⁴ Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." And they cast lots to divide his clothing. ³⁵ And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!" ³⁶ The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, ³⁷ and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" ³⁸ There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews."

³⁹ One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding Him and saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" ⁴⁰ But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? ⁴¹ And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong." ⁴² Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." ⁴³ He replied, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

⁴⁴ It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, ⁴⁵ while the sun's light failed; and the curtain of the temple was torn in two. ⁴⁶ Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." Having said this, he breathed his last. ⁴⁷ When the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God and said, "Certainly this man was innocent." ⁴⁸ And when all the crowds who had gathered there for this spectacle saw what had taken place, they returned home, beating their

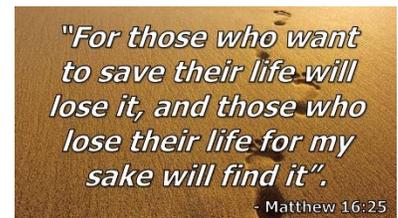
breasts. 49 But all his acquaintances, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.



Last week I spoke of paradoxes. At the close of the message I shared a verse from Matthew 16. Verse 25 reads, *"For those who want to save their life will lose it,*

and those who lose their life for my sake will find it". As

we seek to empty ourselves, we are seeking to lose our earthly life. In our human hearts, we are trying to empty ourselves by releasing our grip on our time and



our material possessions and by ridding ourselves of our proclivity to judge and compare and gossip and by seeking to rid ourselves of envy and jealousy and pride and, and, and... When we can empty ourselves of these earthly things, then God can fill us with His treasures: hope, peace, love, mercy, grace, patience, compassion, empathy, forgiveness, presence. When we empty our heart of earthly things, God fills our heart with heavenly things. When we replace "self" with Jesus as the one who sits on the throne of our heart, then we are beginning to find true life with eternal hope. Let us pray...



Last week we saw how Mary anointed Jesus both for His burial and as the king of a coming kingdom. We began worship today with a reading from Luke 19 and we

remembered the triumphal entry into Jerusalem as the children paraded and sang "Hosanna, Hosanna". In the song that Jim sang, "The King Is Coming", we were reminded that the king was coming. The crowd was on Jesus' side and

they rejoiced at the coming of a king. But the king they envisioned and the king that Mary anointed were very different kings. The song ends with a reminder that the king is still coming, as a matter of fact, for you and for me. Next week, on Easter, we will be reminded of the eternal victory won by Jesus for you and for me. I hope you can be here again next week as we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ, our Lord.

As we pick up the story in our passage today, Jesus has already come to Jerusalem. Today we are jumping ahead to the end of the week. In between Palm Sunday and the passage that we read for today, much will happen in Jerusalem. I encourage you to take some time this week to read Luke 19-22 to fill in that gap. The heart of today's passage centers on Jesus moving towards His eternal kingdom via the cross. It is a cross of suffering and pain and torture. The idea of a king dying is not uncommon. In history, kings die all the time. But in the history books, the kings often died at hands of the enemy or of a rival. They were heroes. In the storybooks, they live happily ever after. But in history and in the storybooks, kings are not martyrs. They do not willingly cede power and control and they do not humbly allow themselves to be hung on a cross. Here Jesus is so different.

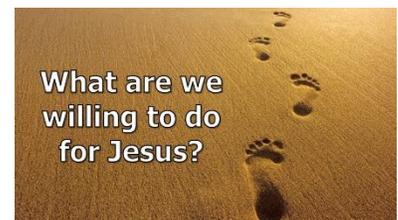
In the lectionary readings for this week and in our Lenten small group study, we find a passage from Isaiah 50, verses 4 through 9a.

This passage is one of four from Isaiah that speak of a "suffering servant". For Isaiah's contemporaries and for generations to follow, they would read these passages



and see an example of faith. In the suffering servant, they see one who is willing to endure suffering without retaliation because they know that God is with them. The servant is not only willing to endure the suffering but is also willing to endure more suffering. When we read such passages today, we think of Jesus. When Jesus invited his followers to offer the other cheek or to give the coat along with the tunic that they were demanding, He was modeling what this radical servant's love looked like when lived out. It was a radical way to show God's love to those who did not know God or His extravagant and unconditional love. This is again the idea of losing our earthly life so that we can gain our heavenly life.

We are called to be a suffering servant. When we think about it, "servant" sounds okay, doesn't it? But "suffering servant"? Doesn't sound so good, does it? Last week I asked this question: "What are we willing to do for Jesus"? It was asked within the context of the extravagant gift that Mary gave for her Jesus. Did anyone find an opportunity to offer sacrificially for another this past week?.....



Today we consider the idea of a suffering servant today and as we see Jesus' example of what it looked like to live as a suffering servant as it led Him to the cross and the grave. This question takes on a deeper meaning when considered in the light of Jesus' extravagant gift for you and for me. It was a gift that ushered in a new kingdom. The new kingdom that Jesus began was a kingdom of love. It is a kingdom that invites you and I to be participants in. You and I

are invited to be followers of Jesus Christ and to be disciples in the building of the kingdom. Jesus spent much time describing His kingdom. Jesus Himself was the example – loving the unloved and the unlovable, welcoming and ministering to one and all, seeking out the lost so that they too could know God and His love. He also shared several parables that spoke of our role in the building of the kingdom. For example, in the parables of the mustard seed and the yeast spreading through the dough, Jesus encouraged us to be out there in the world, walking alongside the lost and broken, spreading His love to all we meet. This idea of a suffering servant is not hard to grasp or to understand – it is just hard to truly live it out.

In our passage today, we have the two thieves on the cross. Joining Jesus at Golgotha are two men convicted of crimes, being punished for what they have done. One thief mocks Jesus. This thief says, *"Save yourself and us!"* He wants Jesus to intervene, to save him. But he is unwilling to actually meet or acknowledge Jesus. He is not even slightly repentant of his crimes, never mind acknowledging his role in where he finds himself. The other thief admits his guilt. He knows the sentence is just. This thief acknowledges Jesus' innocence. And then he says to Jesus, *"Remember me when you come into your kingdom"*. Jesus lets this thief know that he will be with Jesus that day in paradise. At this point many of us ask, can this be the purpose of the cross? Can this be what Jesus intended to do with His reign as He moved to the cross?



Jeff Stratton is a pastor in Evansville, Indiana. A few years ago, he was called to visit a 93-year-old man who had terminal cancer. His name was Adolph Allen and he had been a hard-living, hard-drinking, union ironworker for most of his life. Two minutes into their first conversation, Adolph looked at Jeff and asked, "Is it fair for someone to live their whole life one way and then at the end of their life to ask God to take them to heaven?"

After thinking for a minute, Jeff said, "No, Adolph it's not fair. But luckily for you and me, God is not fair." Jeff shared the plan of salvation with him and this 93-year-old man bowed his head and asked Jesus to come into his heart.

Four weeks later Jeff preached Adolph's funeral and he talked about how some football games come down to a final play. The team that's behind might have been outplayed the whole game, but on this last play the quarterback fades back and heaves a Hail-Mary pass into the end zone as time expires. The ball might be batted around but if an offensive receiver catches it, the game is over, and they win. Jeff said, "That's what happened with Adolph. The devil was in the lead for most of his life, but the final score was Jesus 1 and the devil 0!"

There is one deathbed conversion in the Bible. Sometimes we struggle with the idea of grace as shared in our passage today and in this illustration. At times we struggle with the idea of a criminal being forgiven at the last moment. And, unfortunately, yes there is a time when it's too late to trust Jesus. If you die without putting your faith in Jesus, then it is too late. In the last-hour conversion that we see on the cross at Golgatha, we learn that no one should despair. We should also remember that there is only one such conversion in the

Bible, so nobody should presume either. If you have put your faith in Christ alone, the score is already and forever Jesus 1, Devil 0. But if you have not, I invite you to come forward today during the offering and ask Jesus to be the Lord of your life. Kneel here at the rail and ask Jesus to be your Lord and Savior. There are little prayer cards on the altar for you to use if you would like. If that is uncomfortable or feels awkward for you, then come in tomorrow during the day and ask Jesus to be your King. The cards will remain on the altar. The invitation remains open. Or if it feels more comfortable to slip up here after church, to take a card, to pray to Jesus in private, that works too. And if you need or want someone to pray with you, I am always available. If you have never surrendered, if you have never given your heart to Jesus, do not keep putting it off. Ask Jesus into your heart.

My friends, we have an unexpected king. We find His final throne is a cross, His final words a gift of forgiveness, His final act insurance that the kingdom would not end. We have a king who moved to the cross so that we can move to Him. We have a king that invites us to pick up our cross, to daily offer love and mercy and grace and forgiveness to the world, to join Him in the building of His kingdom of love here on earth, and to one day live forever with Him in the kingdom yet to come. Thanks be to God. Amen.

GPS – Grow, Pray, Serve

- 1) Grow. Where has your faith grown recently to open you up to be a “suffering servant”? How would doing so help your faith grow even more?
- 2) Pray. Who do you know that needs to confess Jesus as Lord and Savior? Pray that God might lead them to profess faith in Christ this week.
- 3) Serve. How could your sacrificial service lead another to know Jesus more this week? Who is that person? How can you be Jesus to them?