

The Sufferings Of Christ

The Lord permitting, over these next two weeks, I would like for us to take a short detour from our usual study in the Book of Luke, and instead, give our hearts to knowing more about all that took place during these special few days in the life of the Lord Jesus, His suffering, His death and His blessed resurrection.

And I would encourage us as a church to dedicate our thoughts over these next few days to the real reason for our celebration of this season. Yes, family gatherings and food and even Easter eggs, but much more than that, the sacrifice that Jesus made in His sufferings to give each of us, you and me, eternal life.

As we know, throughout most of the history of the Christian Church, this week that lies in front of us and leading up to Easter Sunday has been known as "Passion Week", days of remembrance of the sufferings that the Lord Jesus endured as He suffered and died on the cross providing salvation for the souls of sinful man.

Beginning with this day, known as "Palm Sunday", the scriptures tell us about all the many events that led up to that moment there on the cross when our blessed Savior paid the ultimate price so that you and I might be saved and have eternal life in heaven.

This day is known as Palm Sunday because this was the day that Jesus made His triumphal entry into the City of Jerusalem, riding on a donkey, with adoring people placing palm branches on the ground before Him.

And in those scriptures, we are able to see the adulation and praise that was shown to the Lord Jesus by the people, but then we're also able to witness how in only a few days that adulation turned to scorn and contempt, with the people calling out for His crucifixion, such a clear example of the fickleness of the human heart.

And it was within the moments of those last few days of Jesus' life that the weakness of the souls and spirits of the disciples was revealed to them, men who once declared that they would do anything for Jesus, suffer any cost for Him, fell away from Him in fear and trembling.

All of which led up to those final moments as Jesus suffered the awful beatings by the Roman soldiers that would then lead to His death on that cross.

The Prophet Isaiah and the Psalmist, King David both spoke so clearly about that day many hundreds of years earlier. Listen to these words, first by the Prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 53.

³He was despised and rejected by men,
a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering.
Like one from whom men hide their faces
he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

⁴Surely he took up our infirmities
and carried our sorrows,
yet we considered him stricken by God,
smitten by him, and afflicted.

⁵But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was upon him,
and by his stripes we are healed.

⁶We all, like sheep, have gone astray,
each of us has turned to his own way;
and the LORD has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.

⁷He was oppressed and afflicted,
yet he did not open his mouth;
he was led like a lamb to the slaughter. (Isaiah 53:3-7)

And then the words of King David in Psalm 22, describing Jesus' suffering as He hung there on that cross,

¹⁴I am poured out like water,
and all my bones are out of joint.
My heart has turned to wax;
it has melted away within me.

¹⁵My strength is dried up like a potsherd,
and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth;
you lay me in the dust of death.

¹⁶Dogs have surrounded me;
a band of evil men has encircled me,
they have pierced my hands and my feet.

¹⁷I can count all my bones;
people stare and gloat over me.

¹⁸They divide my garments among them

and cast lots for my clothing. (Psalm 22:14-18)

Too often, as I read through words of scripture like these, the real impact of their truth escapes my understanding. But then at another reading, my eyes will suddenly be opened and my ears receptive, and then those same Words will have a special, even profound effect.

When that moment comes, I just want to weep and weep, weep so much that I don't even know why I am weeping. I just know that it all means something very special, something in that other realm, over there where God is.

In those moments, while I have ears to hear and eyes to see, a depth of God and His great suffering for our redemption is revealed in a way that I have never understood before.

That moment was one that was forced upon me violently some years back, when I went to see the movie, "The Passion of The Christ". Folks, that movie had such a profound and lasting impact on my soul and spirit, that if I let my mind ponder its scenes for very long, I will begin to weep all over again.

And yes, the man responsible for its production, Mel Gibson, has since suffered many personal difficulties, sinful behaviors that have discredited him personally. But folks, the movie itself still stands as one of the best presentations of the sufferings of Christ that will ever be produced by human hands.

I personally believe that the movie was a special gift from God to people like me.

I can recall, as I watched that movie, that I sat helpless and stunned as I watched Jesus being wounded for my transgressions, bruised for my iniquities, chastised for my peace and ripped to shreds, so that I might be healed.

Folks, I have seen many portrayals of the sufferings and the death of Christ, but this one was different. His agony as He hung there and died on that cross, enduring sufferings beyond my comprehension, quietly enduring the punishment that went far beyond physical pain, sufferings that reached beyond this earthly

realm into the heavenlies, sufferings that transcended all of time and eternity, paying debts for all our sins, a penalty that you and I would have had to spend and eternity in hell to pay.

Somehow, in those awful hours there on the cross, Jesus entered into that timeless eternity that only God knows about, and He paid the full and complete penalty for all our sins.

And no, I don't understand any of it, but by faith I know that it is all true. And praise be to God for His blessed gift!

And His sufferings all began as the Prophet Isaiah told us it would, there at that beating stake where those Roman soldiers gave the Lord Jesus a beating that was so savage, and was so relentless and unending, that any other person would surely have died right there at that beating stake. It took place exactly as Isaiah said it would.

I confess that for many years, I pondered God's reasoning for the beating that the Roman soldiers gave, that if ultimately it was Christ's death on the cross that saves us from our sins, why add that awful beating. Some people have suggested that it was to simply reveal man's inhumanity to man. But folks, this was God's hand, those awful men simply carried out God's plan.

Thankfully, as I have studied and wept over these scriptures for so many years, I think that I am at least beginning to understand why the beating was so important. It was exactly as we read here in Isaiah 53. It is by His stripes that our once corrupt soul and spirit is being healed as we live out the days of our lives.

Watching that movie, "The Passion of the Christ", the movie critics later said that it was too violent, that it had gone beyond reasonable boundaries for shock and effect. And maybe that was in the producers minds as they directed those scenes. But folks, according to the words of Isaiah, the beating that Jesus endured was probably far more violent than the movie could possibly describe.

Whatever the reasons, I personally believe that it was one of those God-appointed moments in time, set aside for me, and set aside for the person sitting

next to me and set aside for anyone else in that theater that night that might have opened their hearts and minds to hear, and truly see what Jesus endured, and in seeing it, might surrender their hearts and be saved.

I recall that Mel Gibson said at that time, that God had somehow commissioned him to say to the world, "Stop! Stop and see what my Son has done for you! Stop and see the suffering that I had to go through, watching my dearly beloved Son being ripped apart by savage animals that call themselves men, savage animals that I love so much that I am willing to go to any extent to redeem them".

Folks, Mel Gibson, the man, did not think those thoughts himself. I have no doubt that God put those words into his mouth. And I do pray that Mel Gibson has heeded or will heed his own words and turn and be saved.

All through the movie, I recall that I was captivated by the face of Jesus' dear mother Mary. Her grief and her suffering were so evident as the misery of Jesus' suffering built and intensified. And especially as Jesus was being beaten so savagely by the Roman soldiers there in the courtyard, and then as He walked the path of the "Via Della Rosa", the grief in the face and heart of Jesus' dear mother was so evident.

It was as if she knew that it all had to take place, just as it did, not one stripe less could be laid upon the back of Jesus. It all had to be as it was.

I recall that as I watched her face, I could see the very face of God the Father, weeping, grieving, crying out for His dear Son, asking, "When will there be enough? How many more stripes will it take to remove the stain of sin from the souls of my children?"

It seemed to me that in those intense moments, God the Father was locked within the prison of His own holiness. Those men were slowly, stripe by stripe removing the flesh from the back of His dear Son, but the reality was, every ounce of the punishment being inflicted upon the back of Christ was coming from the very hand of God the Father Himself. This was the "wrath of God" that we, that you and I deserve, but being inflicted upon the back of God's beloved Son.

Yes, that beating itself was cruelty and vileness on the part of the people, the Jewish Priests, Pontius Pilate, the Roman soldiers, but the reality was, it was God the Father, locked into a covenant commitment that He had made to mankind that He would remove from them the wretched sin nature that kept them separated from Him.

An agreement that He had made with Jesus and with the Holy Spirit in eons past, before the foundations of the earth, was being fulfilled and carried out that day on the bleeding back of the Lord Jesus. It was the only way to remove every sin from the hearts of men.

As I watched that awful unrelenting beating ripping the flesh off the back of Jesus, I recall that I kept saying in my mind, "How long will it have to continue? How many more lashes will He have to endure?" But all the while, I really knew the answer. I knew that it would take one more, and one more, and one more, because that is the way of sin, and that is what my sin demands in order to remove it.

Because for some reason, every day, every moment of the day, my heart is desperately wicked and deceitful beyond all understanding. And I keep right on sinning. I know that I should not, but I do. And so, it will take one more, and one more, and one more ripping, slashing, bloody stripe upon the back of Jesus.

Folks, the truth is, it took all that Jesus did that day to separate me from my sin nature and to set me free from my bondage to sin and death.

Now the question is, what will my response be to so great a suffering? Shall I keep on sinning even after I know the price Jesus had to pay for my freedom? Shall I take the free gift of His awful suffering and treat it as filthy rags? Shall I tread underfoot the blood that Christ shed there for me? God forbid that I should do that!

Folks, as much as you and I want to claim that we are unable to keep from sinning each day, God has declared to you and me that that is just not so. You and I have been set free from the bonds of sin and death by these sufferings of Christ.

That assurance is given to us in Romans chapter 8,

¹Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, ²because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. (Romans 8:1-2)

Folks, these are some of the most precious words given to us in all of scripture. You and I must not live the kind of life that would demand one more stripe to be laid upon the back of Jesus.

When the Lord Jesus came to live within our heart, we were redeemed, fully redeemed, eternally redeemed. Our penalty was paid in full. We don't have to keep going right back out and rebuilding more debt that would have demanded one more stripe upon the back of Jesus.

Romans 6, beginning in verse 11 . . .

¹¹. . . count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. ¹²Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. ¹³Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. ¹⁴For sin shall not be your master. (Romans 6:11-14)

Again, what is my response to be, what is your response to be? It is to join with Christ in the fellowship of His suffering, not continuing to build up more and more sin but instead filling up behind that which is still lacking in the sufferings of Christ, to stop being a part of the problem and to start becoming a part of the solution.

And you and I need to say with our whole heart,

¹⁰I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. (Philippians 3:10-11)

Folks, watching Jesus, there on that screen, taking one stripe after another, groaning in agony, suffering my suffering, dying my death, has broken my heart many times over. And each time I remember those scenes, my heart is broken all over again. And I don't want to be the cause of even one more lash of that scourging whip to have been laid upon His back.

I want to challenge each one of you to read and reread these words of Isaiah 53 and of Psalm 22 and to let those words confront your heart and your spirit. And in response, turn from some of those ingrained habits and behaviors that you know would cause one more stripe to be laid upon the back of the Lord Jesus. Listen as we close.

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⁴Surely he took up our infirmities
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⁵But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was upon him,
and by his stripes we are healed. (Isaiah 53:3-5)

May we pray!