

Day 18 – The Suffering Christ

When we think of Jesus' death on the cross, we also remember all those who were together with Him in the last days. Imagine being in the disciples' shoes during what was certainly the darkest period of their lives. Through the Scriptures we see Jesus' followers as they fall asleep, betray Him, deny, flee, despair and generally fail to "get it." Imagine what it would have been like for them to watch their friend, mentor, King, their Savior, be arrested, whipped, humiliated, stripped naked, crowned with thorns and hammered to a wooden cross. The week before Christ's death is often referred to by many as Holy Week and it's reasonable to ask, "If this is Holy Week, what would an unholy week look like?"

The horror of holy week is a stumbling block to the Jews, even for Jesus' own followers. They stumbled on the fact that this "King" was killed by the Romans when He was supposed to be conquering them! Instead of taking the throne, He was nailed to a tree, and forever cursed by it, they thought. But Jesus' way was not their way. He knew that by dying, the Jews could not only be saved from the perceived tyranny of any military power, but from a far worse tyranny, that of sin and evil. Jesus chose the path of suffering and death so that they—and we—could be free forever from the punishment due to us because of the evil in our hearts. He took our place on the cross. If we are able to "get" this truth, then suffering and death are no threat to us, whether at the hands of a Roman soldier, or in the hand of a just God. We don't need to fear death because of what Jesus did.

Because of Jesus' suffering, we also have an advocate when we suffer. No matter what we are going through, no matter how tough or terrorizing, one thing is sure: Jesus understands. He has endured far worse, for our sake. When we are tempted to look up out of the dark holes we find ourselves in, to search the heavens and call out to God—we may wonder, "Where is God and why won't he rescue me?" Consider for a moment that Jesus

doesn't gaze down at you from some great throne in Heaven. No. He is beneath you, waiting for you to let go and fall back into His arms. Jesus has experienced the limit of suffering and He is able to meet you where you are.

There is no depth of despair to which we can ever descend that is lower than Jesus went when He died under the weight of a world full of evil. But no matter how low we have been, don't doubt that if we are found in Jesus when He comes again, then we will rise with Him, and will have no reason to fear death again.

Additional Reading

Isaiah 52:13-53:12 (NLT): (This passage foretells the Passion of Jesus by more than six hundred years.)

“See, my servant will prosper; he will be highly exalted. Many were amazed when they saw him – beaten and bloodied, so disfigured one would scarcely know he was a person. And he will again startle many nations. Kings will stand speechless in his presence. For they will see what they had not previously been told about; they will understand what they had not heard about.

Who has believed our message? To whom will the LORD reveal his saving power? My servant grew up in the LORD's presence like a tender green shoot, sprouting from a root in dry and sterile ground. There was nothing beautiful or majestic about his appearance, nothing to attract us to him. He was despised and rejected – a man of sorrows, acquainted with bitterest grief. We turned our backs on him and looked the other way when he went by. He was despised, and we did not care. Yet it was our weaknesses he carried; it was our sorrows that weighed him down. And we thought his troubles were a punishment from God for his own sins! But he was wounded and crushed for our sins. He was beaten that we might have

peace. He was whipped, and we were healed! All of us have strayed away like sheep. We have left God's paths to follow our own. Yet the LORD laid on him the guilt and sins of us all. He was oppressed and treated harshly, yet he never said a word. He was led as a lamb to the slaughter. And as a sheep is silent before the shearers, he did not open his mouth. From prison and trial they led him away to his death. But who among the people realized that he was dying for their sins – that he was suffering their punishment? He had done no wrong, and he never deceived anyone. But he was buried like a criminal; he was put in a rich man's grave.

But it was the LORD's good plan to crush him and fill him with grief. Yet when his life is made an offering for sin, he will have a multitude of children, many heirs. He will enjoy a long life, and the LORD's plan will prosper in his hands. When he sees all that is accomplished by his anguish, he will be satisfied. And because of what he has experienced, my righteous servant will make it possible for many to be counted righteous, for he will bear all their sins. I will give him the honors of one who is mighty and great, because he exposed himself to death. He was counted among those who were sinners. He bore the sins of many and interceded for sinners.”

1 Peter 1:3-9: “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious

joy, for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.”

- Do you fully realize the blessings God has given you because of the offering of Christ?
- Have you claimed the gifts He has given you--gifts of peace, forgiveness, and righteousness?
- Jesus Christ has made you righteous and accepted in God’s eyes.

Spend some time thanking Him again for His sacrifice and that your sins are completely forgiven, once and for all. (2 Corinthians 5:21 “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”)

Prayer

Father, teach me Your way this week. Teach me how to leave my selfish, sinful ways at the foot of the cross, and teach me how Jesus my Savior is willing to bear those sins in His own body and be punished for them. Lord, how can I thank You for this great salvation? I worship You and Your amazing power: Jesus is greater than death, and could not be conquered. When He died, I know that my sins were destroyed: And when You raised Him three days later, You taught us that we too could be raised. I confess my many sins Lord Jesus: I lay them down at the foot of the cross. I turn away from them and ask You to give me a new way of living in the world. Walk with me this week, Father. Teach me Your way.

Journal

Write what you learned from your study today