

SATURDAY 16 April 2022 "Golgotha"

Matt. 27:26-66; John 19:16-42

Good morning my "Walking with Jesus" friends,

Today, let's do that. . . let's walk with Jesus to His crucifixion on Golgotha hill.

Yesterday I left you standing in the crowd viewing a historic and almost unbelievable scene, especially if you are a person who believes these truths about Jesus: *Jesus He is God incarnate, the creator of the world, who had come to earth, taking on a human body, for the purpose of telling our world the truth about God, the truth about humanity, and the truth about our desperate need for a Savior, for none of us can save ourselves from our hopeless sin bondage and sin condemnation.*

Let's now rejoin that scene with the crowd in city center Jerusalem... the early Friday morning sun was now flooding Jerusalem and, in this place, this moment, *the wickedness of humanity was reaching a new plateau.* The criminal Barabbas was unshackled and released while Jesus, the Son of God, who had only spoken God's truth, only helped people in great need, who had showed God's love to the destitute, the blind, the poor, the crippled, the grieving...this Jesus, was dragged away from Pilate into the Praetorium, the place where Roman soldiers beat Him, spit on Him, mocked Him and abused Him. (Matt. 27:26-31) Matthew writes this statement: ***"The soldiers spit on Jesus and took the staff and struck Him on the head again and again... Then they led Him away to crucify Him."***

I've often wondered what was happening in heaven through that Thursday night and Friday morning? Were the angels crying out for God to intervene, to do something? Were the angels confused, wondering why Jesus, God the Son, who had created the world by His power, including all humanity, didn't do something to defend Himself in such horrific injustice from ungrateful human beings who were reliant upon Him for every breath? Do you suppose today similar questions are being asked of Jesus in heaven by angels who watch what is happening all around the world in our day, as billions of human beings want nothing to do with Jesus in 2022?

So badly beaten Jesus could barely walk, with a crown of thorns pressed down on His head, the blood running down into His eyes, the whip cracked on His back and Jesus began His walk toward Golgotha. The soldiers placed a heavy cross beam on His back, and He stumbled under its weight, so they grabbed a man standing in the crowd and put the beam on his back. Matthew tells us his name was Simon from Cyrene. I've often wondered what that was like for this man as he carried Jesus' cross, and Jesus stumbled in a near daze toward Golgotha. The crowds screamed and mocked Him, but if you look closely, you'll see some in tears, shocked by such brutality, such disregard for all the good Jesus had done.

Do you suppose Lazarus was in the crowd, or maybe formerly blind Bartimaeus, or Zacchaeus or Jairus and his daughter whom Jesus had raised from the dead? Or maybe the woman who'd had a bleeding disorder for 12 years before she was healed by Jesus, or maybe some of the lepers Jesus had healed? Or maybe the little boy whose lunch Jesus had multiplied to feed 5000 people? We do know Mary Magdalene, Mary Jesus' mother and John the disciple were in the crowd, following the procession to Golgotha. Oh my, what a heartbreaking scene.

Once on the hilltop, the executioners did what they were trained to do and did often. Gruffly they threw Jesus down on the cross laid on the ground and drove those long spikes into His hands and feet. Can you hear the screams? But wait... did you just hear Jesus say something? No, it wasn't a curse, as the soldiers usually heard. In fact, the soldier stopped and put down his mallet. He couldn't believe it. Jesus had looked right at him and cried out **"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."** (Luke 23:34)

It was a busy morning on Golgotha hill, for two criminals were also being crucified at the same time. Once feet and hands were secured to their cross, the soldier nailed a rough placard sign to each cross which identified the name of the crucified and their crime. These horrible crucifixions were very powerful deterrents to crime in Jerusalem for the main north south road, just outside the Damascus gate of Jerusalem, was heavily traveled and the crosses were right there, in full view. The dying agony was almost indescribable. The humiliation was extreme for sometimes the crucified hung on these crosses stark naked. The sign on Jesus' cross was in three languages Hebrew, Latin and Greek. It read: **"Jesus of Nazareth; the King of the Jews."** When the religious leaders saw the sign, they were furious and demanded that Pilate at least change it, stating that Jesus "claimed" to be King of the Jews. But Pilate refused.

From about 9am that hot Friday morning, till about noon, the suffering on these three crosses was beyond description. The one criminal taunted Jesus but the other honestly acknowledged his guilt and the justice he was suffering and asked Jesus for His mercy. In deep compassion Jesus looked at this criminal and with gasps said: **"Today, you will be with Me in paradise."** (Luke 23:43) *What a powerful statement of assurance of life after death and paradise for those forgiven by God because Jesus paid the full sin atonement price!*

Then about noon, with great effort, Jesus cried out from His intense suffering, **"Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani" which means, 'My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?'** (Matt. 27:46) As Jesus cried this, an eerie darkness came over Jerusalem which lasted for three hours. Darker than a solar eclipse, almost as dark as midnight, it caused frightened people to flee the hillside of death. The soldiers stood their guard, as did John the disciple of Jesus, with Mary Magdalene on one side of him and Mary Jesus' mother on the other side, grieving this horrific scene. They'd been at the cross since it was raised, and they were not leaving for any reason. *This darkness was symbolic. It symbolized the darkness of the world when God, God's Son, God's Truth are rejected by humanity and replaced by evil, deceit, fear and hopelessness.*

*It was also symbolic of what Jesus was experiencing as God the Father poured out His justice wrath on Jesus in payment for the sins of the world which Jesus had taken upon Himself in this sacrificial suffering and death. **Such indescribable agony.***

Nearly unable to breathe, Jesus spoke again from His horrific cross, this time to His earthly mother and His best friend John, who stood faithfully at His cross in His deepest hour of agony: **"Dear woman, here is your son. Here is your mother."** (John 19:26,27) While Mary had other sons, none of them believed in Jesus and we presume Jesus felt John would much more lovingly care for Mary in her time of deep grief. John gives us tender insight into this compassionate moment: **"From that time on, this disciple took her into his home."** I can only imagine what it was like for them through this weekend of prolonged grief. No one could comfort them, no one had answers for the unexplainable. Jesus refused to use His miraculous power to defend Himself or lash out in anger against those who so badly abused Him. Instead, Jesus bore the full burden of paying the full sin atonement price, and finally about 3pm Jesus cried out with a desperate gasp **"It is Finished"** (John 19:30)

After a few moments later, one final gasp: **"Father, into Your hands I commit My Spirit."** (Luke 23:46) With that, Jesus hung His head, and breathed no more.

The Pharisee Nicodemus, who had come to visit Jesus at night so many months before, came to Golgotha hill a short while later, bringing with him another Pharisee Joseph of Arimathea. Both were highly respected members of the ruling counsel the Sanhedrin. Both had believed Jesus to be who He claimed to be and had objected to the decisions to arrest and kill Jesus. They had gone to Pilate, asking permission to take Jesus' dead body off the cross, and so now they came to carry out this gruesome task. It was late afternoon, they must hurry but taking great care, for after removing the spikes from His hands and feet, they would need to wrap Jesus' torn body with burial spices and carry it quickly to Joseph's nearby garden tomb, which had never been used. As they did so Mary Magdalene and others watched intently, even following them to the tomb. They would report to the others where they had laid Him and prepare other spices for returning after Sabbath for a proper burial wrapping of this precious but decimated body.

John, Mary the mother of Jesus, Mary Magdalene and all of them were good Jews. This was Passover weekend, the highlight of their Jewish life. Oh, so many wonderful memories of Passover's past in this great city of Jerusalem... but this Passover had been horrific, beyond anything imaginable. Would they go to Synagogue for Sabbath? Would they hide in their grief? *And what future could any of them imagine without Jesus? Never had life been darker, more hopeless.*

Matthew tells us the chief priests and Pharisees were not yet satisfied, and they went to see Pilate requesting security for the tomb. They said: **"We remember that while he was alive this deceiver said, 'after three days I will rise again'. So, give the order for the tomb to be made secure..."** (Matt. 27:62-64)

Pilate was beside himself with frustration. What lunacy, what near paralyzing fear these religious leaders were suffering. ***"Take a guard,' Pilate answered, 'Go, make the tomb as secure as you know how.' So, they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard."*** (Matt. 27:65)

It was dark Saturday, the darkest day since the day Adam and Eve had said no to God and invited Satan and evil into God's perfect garden of Eden. So, I ask you, my friends. What if Jesus had remained dead? What if there was no Easter, no resurrection? For the rest of this Saturday, I urge you to ponder that and consider this closing question: *are you living as though Jesus is dead or are you living a victorious life built on the assurance of Easter resurrection morning, which we will celebrate tomorrow?*

Today's Scripture is Matthew 27:26-66; John 19:16-42.