

Mark 15:35-47 Good Friday

Don't sew the Veil up again, please.

This may be the strangest Good Friday morning that you ever experience in your life time. Seems so strange not being together with darkened room and images to help us reflect on the meaning of today. I trust that you have or you will at some point look at the video clips posted as I do think they can help us do just that.

For me, most sermons I would like to be simple enough for a year 7 to understand and yet deep enough to bless the most mature Christians. Today however I am happy just to focus on those of you who have walked with the Lord for many years and I pray that I can give you some fresh insight into what happened that Good Friday.

As we come to our passage this morning, imagine the scene that has just gone before, a strange darkness had just blanketed the land. A couple of months ago, our skies were darkened by the forest fires in Aussie and it felt weird. I imagine on that day, even darker skies and there would have been a really eerie sense about that day.

As I think of that dark, eerie afternoon, I can't help but think of the darkness that must have clouded the minds of the religious leaders as they so desperately wanted Jesus done away with. It strikes me that these jealous, power hungry men, didn't see Jesus for who He really was because they didn't want to see Jesus for who He really was. Sometimes people have said to me, Russell prove to me that Jesus is alive, and I think that I can, but if they are filled with pride, if they don't want to give up on their sin, nothing I can say can remove the darkness. They don't find Jesus, essentially because they don't want to.

On that day, from the cross Jesus had just cried

"Eloi, Eloi, Lema sabachtanin?"

"My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?"

It's the only time in Jesus' life when His voice was ever filled with terror!

The storms didn't bother Him, in fact He slept right through them.

The lepers didn't scare Him, in fact He reached out and touched them.

But this one thing absolutely terrorized Him. For the first time in all eternity He was now out of touch with the Father. Because all of our sin was put on Him, the Father turned His back on the Son and terror filled Jesus' heart.

A few gathered around the cross that day may have recognised that Jesus was quoting the beginning phrase of Psalm 22 when He said these final words. Psalm 22 is a Messianic Psalm that describes the crucifixion in detail. Centuries before the crucifixion was invented as a cruel form of capital punishment it is described in Psalm 22.

So Jesus crying out "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" was actually an insight for those present about what was really going on... but they didn't get it.

Some of the people standing there heard Jesus and said, "He is calling for Elijah." One of them ran and grabbed a sponge. After he had soaked it in wine, he put it on a stick and held it up to Jesus.

This vinegar would act as a pain suppressant. When Jesus cried out some thought that He was calling for Elijah the prophet and someone went and got a sponge full of vinegar and held it up to the Lord.

Was this an act of compassion?

No, not at all because the next phrase says,

He said, "Let's wait and see if Elijah will come and take him down!"

They kept Him alive a little longer, not out of compassion but out of a morbid curiosity. Would Elijah come and get Him?

Here is Jesus, on the cross. Pinned to the very wood that He created. Surrounded by people mocking Him and soldiers throwing dice for His clothes, and people who just wanted to see some kind of freak show.

Jesus shouted and then died

What were the words that He shouted?

The other gospel writers tell us.

IT IS FINISHED!

The three greatest words ever spoken. It, is, finished!

I personally believe that as Jesus shouted these three words, if His hands had not been pinned to the wood, that He would have punched the air as an expression of triumph.

“It is finished” (fist pump)!

It wasn’t a cry of agony but a cry of victory.

“It is finished”, “I made it”, “I have done it!”

All through His life the enemy had been coming against Him, trying to derail Him from His purpose. Trying to destroy Him. Trying to stop Him building a bridge from us to God.

Jesus stayed the course, He paid the price, He finished the work.

I don’t know if you noticed as you have read through the gospels that none of the gospel writers elaborate on the cruel and brutal way in which Jesus suffered and was crucified. The gospel writers just say something like, “and Jesus was crucified with two thieves, one on His right and one on His left.”

Jesus took the blows, felt the spit, heard the mocking, took the punches, felt his flesh being ripped from His body and yet we just read that He was crucified with two thieves. Why don’t they say more?

My theory is that God wants us to make a rational response to what Jesus has achieved for us and not an emotional response. Here are the facts. This is what He has done. Now you and I get to intelligently choose our response. I think that the gospel writers record the events the way they do, not so much to arouse our emotions, but to affirm our faith.

Jesus shouted and then died.

At once the curtain in the temple tore in two from top to bottom.

That massive veil, 25.4 centimetres thick, that had originally taken 400 priests to hang in the temple to divide off the presence of God, the Shakina glory of God from the common person. That curtain was ripped from top to bottom.

In so doing our Father in heaven was declaring, “it’s open house”.

“You can come boldly into the presence of God, any time you want, because the price has been paid once and for all”.

Family, my word to you this Good Friday is “don’t sew it back up”.

The curtain was ripped in half from top to bottom, declaring, you and I can come into His mighty presence anytime, freely, easily, because He paid the price totally.

You and I can come boldly into the presence of God, not because we pray for 2 hrs a day, not because of our worship life or which day we go to church or which Bible translation we use. Not because we have worked really hard and been really good this week.

The only reason that the curtain was ripped and you and I can come into His presence anytime, is because ‘it is finished’, Jesus completed the work. He has paid the price in full.

Family, don't sew up the veil. Don't let people try to sew up the veil for you.

From the very beginning of Christianity people have been trying to do that.

It can't be that easy to get to know God, you have to do stuff and earn His presence they say.

Even in those first years of the Christian church there were a group of Hebrew converts that Paul later called evil people in Galatians. These converts to Christianity caused a lot of trouble by visiting Gentiles, that is non-Hebrew fellowships, and telling people, if you want to be a true Christian all your men need to be circumcised first. They tried to add to grace, and Paul the apostle let them have it. I don't know if I have ever talked to people the way that Paul spoke to this faction.

Don't sew it up.

Don't let people tell you that you cannot enjoy the favour of God and have Him hear your prayers unless you do a whole lot of other things first.

When the curtain, the massive curtain was ripped by God it was so there would be no separation between mankind and His presence. The price was paid,

His presence became accessible to all of us. The way is open. Nothing at all has to be done!

Jesus' body was torn so that we might go into the Holy of Holies freely, easily, because He paid the price totally.

It's free grace but it is not cheap grace, it cost Jesus everything!

A Roman army officer was standing in front of Jesus. When the officer saw how Jesus died, he said, "This man really was the Son of God!"

The centurions in those days were men's men. Elite fighting men. Hardened men, but when this centurion saw how Jesus died, He believed.

For those of you who have walked with Jesus for many years, you will understand this well. Often when times are good and we are living in a season of comfort, we share our testimony, we share the gospel, and people don't always listen. But when pre-Christians see how we face sickness, loss and pain with faith, the witness of how we have suffered often becomes a greater testimony to them and leads them to faith.

I recall hearing a story of a Belgium Priest called Father Joseph Damion who was sent to the island of lepers, Maliki in 1873. This guy served them there for 12 years and it seemed that his ministry was fruitless. No one came to his services, no one wanted to talk to him about faith. Apparently after 12 years of failure as he waited on the dock ready to be ferried back to the mainland he discovered blotches on his hands. He realized he had leprosy as well. Within the week the word got out that Father Damion had leprosy and the church was filled to capacity with 400 people. Often, when people watch how we go through suffering and loss, God uses that to build a bridge to others and as a witness to them that He is very real.

The centurion was converted because he saw Jesus' response to injustice.

You don't get to choose what others will do to you in life, but you do get to choose your response and if you choose to respond as God leads, others will believe!

Some women were looking on from a distance. They had come with Jesus to Jerusalem. But even before this they had been his followers and had helped him while he was in Galilee. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of the younger James and of Joseph were two of these women. Salome was also one of them.

These woman looking on had been in Jesus' inner circle for some time. They were the ones who served Jesus and the disciples practically with food when they were hungry. They are the last ones mentioned beside Jesus at the cross and they are the first ones to go to find Jesus at the tomb. Woman of real, practical, passionate faith.

It was now the evening before the Sabbath, and the Jewish people were getting ready for that sacred day. A man named Joseph from Arimathea was brave enough to ask Pilate for the body of Jesus. Joseph was a highly respected member of the Jewish council, and he was also waiting for God's kingdom to come.

Pilate was surprised to hear that Jesus was already dead, and he called in the army officer to find out if Jesus had been dead very long. After the officer told him, Pilate let Joseph have Jesus' body. Joseph bought a linen cloth and took the body down from the cross. He had it wrapped in the cloth, and he put it in a tomb that had been cut into solid rock. Then he rolled a big stone against the entrance to the tomb.

Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph were watching and saw where the body was placed.

While I believe that it costs us nothing to become Christians and to inherit eternal life, following Jesus will at times cost you a lot. It will involve dying to self and doing what God wants you to do; it will at times involve you picking up your cross as well and staying faithful to God and others during times of pain and pressure.

We are told in Matthew's account that Joseph from Arimathea who is mentioned here, was a very rich man. And John's gospel tells us that this Joseph was a secret disciple of Jesus. He was on the Sanhedrin, the Jewish supreme court which paid well and had much prestige attached to it. Up until this day Joseph had not made it clear that he believed in Jesus and wanted to follow Him. And why would he? To say he believed in the Galilean Rabbi would cost him his job, his income, his status in society. Heck no. He was a secret disciple. But on this day His love for the Lord caused him to ask for Jesus' body. Just to touch a dead person would make him unclean and unable to go into the temple. He spent money embalming Jesus properly, respectfully. He put Jesus in his own tomb, carved out of a rock. Super expensive. From this moment, from this action forward the whole of Israel would know of his love for Jesus and he would most likely lose everything, maybe even his life, for showing his allegiance to Jesus.

I believe, family, that we are saved by grace, we come into God's presence totally because of what Jesus has done for us. The veil has been torn. It is finished. But to follow Him, to live a life of significance will cost us a lot at times. You can only be a secret disciple for so long, not telling people about Jesus in the circles you live. But know this, there will usually come a time when you will need to deny Him or declare Him. And my prayer is that for you and me, we will always choose to declare Him. It might cost you some friends. It might cost you economically. It might cost you popularity at times. But it is always worth living a life of significance, and that can only happen if you commit to Jesus and follow Him 100%.

Good Friday is traditionally a time of reflection on what Jesus has done for us. Today family, let me remind you, it is finished, the veil has been torn in half. Don't ever allow legalistic people to compel you to add to grace, to add to what Jesus has done. And neither let people tell you that a relationship with God is cheap. It cost Jesus everything and at times, as you follow Him, it will cost you too ... oh you will never regret the cost but all the same, dying to self and living for Jesus will involve pain and sacrifice at times. Don't be a secret Christian; be one who shows people that God is real not only by how you live in the days of plenty, but in how you love the Lord and others when the days are hard.

May the Lord bless you with a fresh revelation of grace, of God's unmerited favour towards you. May you come to see afresh, the work is done, it is finished, you can come boldly into His presence.