

LET GOD DELIVER HIM NOW!

MATTHEW 27:38-44

APRIL 5, 2020

(PASSION/PALM SUNDAY)

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I have struggled this week for the message, but God finally laid upon my heart what he would want you to hear. In spite of the COVID-19 virus and all it's complications, God still want us all to remember it is Palm Sunday. But never let us forget about the Passion part of today also. Most of us have a passion for something. What is your passion? What do you burn after? Most of us know that the best way for me to relax is to go fishing. Yes, I have a passion for fishing. My mother-in-law had a passion for quilts. She loved to quilt and look and look and look and look at them. She and Ruth Anne drove all the way to Paducah, Ky. just to look at quilts. I know most of you have a passion for something. Most of us collect things/stuff. I like to collect fishing lures---all kinds (some are antique and some are not.). Ruth Anne is a collector of music boxes---she probably has close to 200 of them and she can tell you every tune that they play.

However, in our sometimes difficult English language, the "Passion" word refers to Jesus' death! Today, the Sunday before Easter Sunday and the beginning of Holy Week is referred to as Palm/Passion Sunday. Some preachers will be focusing on the Triumphant Entry of Christ into Jerusalem. But, others, as I am, will deal with the Passion of our Lord, which bty is the very heart and core of God's plan for our present abundant life, and our future Eternal Life.

A strange calm spread over Jesus as he faced the last hours of his life. He was ready to face the fate that was his; after all, he was born to die. He said "My time is near..." He told his disciples and thus, he began to unfold the chain of events that would lead to his passion.

He never said a word in self defense during the several trials he endured that fateful last Thursday night of his life. He did mention that, if he wanted to, he could have called “...more than twelve legions of Angels...but then how would the scriptures be fulfilled, which say it must happen this way?”

Vs. 26:53

He submitted when the high priest taunted him, and others in the court room, “spat in his face and ridiculed him, while some slapped him, saying “Prophecy to us you Messiah?” vs. 6. They beat him with sticks and whipped him with the infamous “cat of nine tails.” While Jesus was near death already, they twisted thorns into a crown and buried it into his scalp. They knelt before him and mocked him, saying “hail, the King of Jews!” vs. 27:28.

And after crucifying him between two bandits, the public taunted Him on the cross. The chief priests, scribes, and elders followed him to the cross and mocked him saying, “He saved others; he cannot save himself, He trusts in God; let God deliver him now.” Vs. 43. You can almost hear a “Ha! Ha!” after that taunting barb. What a loser, they must have thought; pretending to be the Son of God, and here he hangs helplessly dying a slow and painful agony.

The Bible (N.T.) never mitigates the horrors of the cross. God never intervenes. In fact, God seems to disappear as did most of the disciples. Why did God not step in? I’m sure that many of you are asking that same question today in view of our Pandemic. But just think how many lives this Pandemic saved last Saturday during the Jonesboro Tornado. Normally, two weeks before Easter is a big shopping day. The mall that was destroyed could have been filled with hundreds of people.

One reason God didn’t intervene was that Jesus never asked him. The Son accepted his fate. In the Garden of Gethsemane he did plead: “Father, if there s some other way to do this apart from crucifixion, let’s find it.” However, he went directly on to say: “Yet, not what I want, but thy will be done.” Jesus submitted to the Father’s eternal plan for salvation of humanity, based on his death. Folks that is good news for you and me!! Amen!

Yet, even for God to stand by and watch his Son be tortured, must have even been hard for God. I don’t think any of us could have done it.

In fact, there is a true story that kind of helps me understand how God could have carried out this plan.

There is a story about a railroad switcher. Back in the days when a man had to manually switch the tracks for oncoming trains to be able to go in the correct direction. Some of you former railroad folks know a whole lot more about this job than I do. But today, it is done for the entire U.S. from one huge computer room in Kansas. As the story goes, one day the Switcher went out to turn an oncoming passenger train north. This was critical since the southbound bridge was out. But as he was ready to manually pull the big control, he saw his small son playing on the northbound track. Instantly he had to decide, whether the sacrifice of his son, or to allow the massive train loaded with many passenger cars be totally destroyed by running off into the river. He did what he had to do, and stood there watching.

God did not stop to save his son, but he saved us! But still from the cross, we hear the most haunting, yet humanly revealing words of Jesus, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” vs. 46 I feel that this reflects our human predicament as we face death.

Most folks say that as they deal with their own immanent mortality they waffle between calm, and terror. Jesus modulated from the peaceful acceptance of, “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.” To the terror of asking, “Why have you forsaken me?”

But finally, after Jesus---as it says in vs. 50—“breathed his last”, God did step in; not to stop His son’s death, but to begin to prepare the people for the ultimate intervention of resurrection. Bystanders and taunters in front of the cross and the soldiers standing behind the cross, all felt the earth shake as huge stones surrounding Calvary were split. This was no ordinary earthquake as we feel sometimes around here. Tombs were opened and dead prophets came out into the city and all Jerusalem was gripped in the realization of what they had done...

The head of the Roman soldiers said, “Truly, this man was God’s Son!” Vs. 54. This same centurion may have guarded Jesus before. Probably he had heard Jesus preach, and may have seen some of the miracles. He had possibly wondered in his heart whether these claims he was making were true. And I feel in his words something of a profession of faith.

At the Cross, we too are confronted by claims of Christ upon our lives. Christ died for all, but we each must decide to believe it, and to commit our life to it. Will we believe in him, or will we walk away in disbelief?

Let God deliver all of us now! Amen!

Will you pray with me; “Dear Lord, we lift up your people—your creation-- and ask for your healing power upon this worldly Pandemic. We pray for Peace, Passion, and Love among each other. We may believe our situation is hopeless. We may not see a solution. We may not have a clue how to get out of the mess in which we find ourselves. But, Lord, in you, there is always hope. There is always the possibility of new life, not just some day in the great by-and-by, but here, in this life. Lord, we pray for a new life today, and a new life to come. We never forget to pray as You taught us: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day, our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil; for thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever, Amen!