

Setting Our Face To Go To Jerusalem Week 7

We've been on a journey for the past seven weeks having set our face with Jesus to go to Jerusalem using the gospel of Mark as our guide. We've arrived. All things culminate here, this weekend, as Jesus goes to the cross, bearing the weight and shame of our sins and the sins of all humanity, giving his life as the sacrifice for our sins. And glory to God, fulfilling all Scripture, he was not left in the grave, but as the firstfruits of all who will follow, God raised him from the dead and he lives and rules and reigns forevermore. Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Christ is risen and not one dead remains in the grave. He is risen and nothing is quite as it seems anymore.

Turn to **Mark 14:43-50** and let's look at the events surrounding Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. As I studied this week, I was struck by the contrasts, by the paradoxical elements of the story. A paradox is described as a statement that seems contrary to belief or appears to be self-contradictory. Perhaps irony or ironic is a better term to describe what I'm thinking of this morning (irony being the opposite of what might be expected). Let me show you what I'm talking about.

Mark 14:43 tells the story of Judas' betrayal of Jesus in the Garden. Notice that he came with a crowd armed with swords and clubs and Judas instructed them to arrest the one he kissed and "lead him away under guard." (Read v43-50) **"Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, 'Rabbi!' and kissed him. The men seized Jesus and arrested him. Then one of those standing near drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear. 'Am I leading a rebellion,' said Jesus, 'that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? Every day I was with you, teaching in the temple courts, and you did not arrest me. But the Scripture must be fulfilled.'" Mark 14:45-49**

The most obvious bit of irony is the kiss of betrayal from Judas. This incident is the source of our phrase, "the kiss of death" referring to an intimacy with someone or something that ultimately leads to your harm. But there is something else I want you to notice. Jesus asked the question, "Am I leading a rebellion...?" There were dozens of messianic movements both before and after Jesus, men that indeed were leading a rebellion, a guerrilla movement trying to overthrow the Roman government. The question was appropriate, but the implied answer is "No. Of course I'm not leading a rebellion." The truth and the irony is, he wasn't leading a rebellion

against Rome, he was leading a spiritual revolution to bring the kingdom of God and heaven's values and heaven's order to this messed up, sinful world. This wasn't a rebellion to be fought with swords and clubs against Roman soldiers, this was a revolution to cast down the ruler of this world and bring God's redemption to the lost. What a glorious revolution as Jesus triumphs over the powers of hell and gives us the victory.

Jesus is led away and stands now before the high priest and the Sanhedrin, the ruling authority of the Jews. False testimony was given concerning Jesus but the liars couldn't get their stories straight. Finally verse 61 tells us the high priest himself stood and asked Jesus, "**Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?**" And Jesus answered, "**I am, and you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.**" In response "The high priest tore his clothes. 'Why do we need any more witnesses? You have heard the blasphemy.'"

Where is the irony or paradox in this? Look at this a little closer. Jesus said he was indeed the Christ, the Messiah, but keep in mind that while the Jews expected a Messiah, they did not expect him to be God in the flesh. So when Jesus refers to himself as the Son of Man and says he will be sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One, they get pretty worked up. Why?

Everyone in that room knew the images and the Scriptures to which Jesus was referring. It was the prophet Daniel who wrote, "**I looked and there before me was one like a Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.**" Daniel 7:13-14. The son of man coming on the clouds of heaven. That wasn't just prose, that was a declaration.

When Jesus said they would see him "Sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One" they knew it was a reference to Psalm 110 that speaks of the Lord ruling and judging the nations. They were outraged at what he was inferring, but don't miss the irony of Jesus standing here, bound in chains as the accused before this Jewish court, and yet he tells them that he is in fact the judge of the whole earth. Nothing could appear more absurd. This sad prisoner - the judge of all creation. But here is the irony of his love and grace, the judge of the whole world allows himself to stand accused, judged and sentenced to die – for our salvation.

After he is beaten by members of the Sanhedrin and by the temple guards he is led away to Pilate's judgment hall where he is again interrogated and questioned. Pilate finds no reason or cause to execute Jesus. Looking for a way out of this predicament and hoping to wash his hands of the death of an innocent man, he appeals to the crowd. Look with me at Mark 15:6-15. (Read passage).

What irony, that Jesus, the only innocent, perfect, sinless man is put to death and a murderer named Barabbas is pardoned and set free. And when we look closely we can see ourselves in Barabbas. We are all guilty. We are all Barabbas. We are all insurrectionists, rebelling against God and his word. The prophet Isaiah said we were like sheep that had all gone our own way. We were rebellious and sinners, guilty and deserving of our sentence of death, but Isaiah said of Jesus, "the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all." Irony of ironies, Jesus stands in chains, sentenced to death, while we the guilty are set free by his grace. Jesus the innocent One dies to give us, the guilty, eternal life.

Mark is brief with his account of the brutality of the Roman soldiers and the actual crucifixion but let's hear those words again this morning. Remember that he did all of this for you! (Read **Mark 15:16-37**).

Mark tells us in verse 33 that darkness covered the whole land from the sixth hour (12:00 noon) until the ninth hour (3:00 pm). The Scripture always associates darkness in the daytime as a sign of God's judgment. We often read of judgment coming when "the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light." Mark 13:24 is an example.

What irony that total darkness surrounds the one who is the Light of the world! John described the face of the risen Christ in Revelation as shining like the sun in all its brilliance. The New Jerusalem will require no sun or moon for the Lamb of God will give it light. But see him on the cross, the Light of the world shrouded in total darkness as he bears the judgment for the sins of the world.

At the ninth hour, at 3:00, Jesus cries out in a loud voice, "**My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?**" At that moment, he bears the full crushing weight of our sin and the judgment of God upon that sin. We are made aware of the intensified pain of that moment when we consider that Jesus repeats the phrase "My God". It is the language of relationship, of intimacy. "This is my wife," I tell someone. "This is my daughter." It shows affection and

relationship. “My Paula. My wife.”

It is also the language of the covenant, for God had said to those who were in covenant relationship with him, “You shall be my people and I shall be your God.” “My God” means intimacy, relationship, affection, covenant. And consider this: if someone I’ve never seen before comes up after service and says, “I’m leaving and I’m never coming back.” I’ll feel bad about that, but if Paula says to me after service, “I’m leaving and I’m never coming back” I’ll be devastated. The deeper the love, the longer the relationship, the deeper the heartbreak and the greater the pain.

So imagine as Jesus cries out, “My God, why have you forsaken me?” Imagine the depth of that pain, as Jesus is forsaken by the love that had been unbroken from before the world began. Tim Keller reflects that this was not a rhetorical question. Why has God forsaken Jesus? We know the answer. The answer is – for you, for me, for all of us. And here is the irony, Jesus is utterly, totally, as no other man has been or ever could be, forsaken by the Father, so that we could be adopted by the Father. He was forsaken so we could be included. That terrible judgment fell on him rather than on us. That utter aloneness was born by him so we would never have to be alone.

Walter Wangerin Jr. wrote, “Here is a paradox, both impossible and true. Jesus is rejected by God, is cut completely off from God, is hung on a tree and thereby cursed, divorced at all points from his Father. And yet; it is in this same Jesus, at this same moment, precisely because of his sacrifice and death, that God is most present to the world! It is in Jesus on the cursed tree that God’s supreme intentions toward the world are made manifest: that he hasn’t come to curse, but rather to love and to bless. God is not here with Jesus. Yet God is indeed here, in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself!”

Look with me at verse 37. It is the ninth hour, 3:00 in the afternoon. **“With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last. The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, heard his cry and saw how he died, he said, ‘Surely this man was the Son of God!’”**

Multiple ironies here. With the high priest, the chief priests, the elders, the teachers of the law, with all of them having examined him and interrogated him and watched all of these proceedings, with these men being learned scholars of the law, yet they missed it all. They

couldn't see who he really was, but the one man on that hillside that understood, the one man that got it, wasn't a Jew, wasn't a bible scholar. He was a calloused pagan soldier, the Roman centurion in charge of the crucifixion. What amazing grace that captured the heart of this hardened soldier. And what was it that convinced him?

Notice the verse again, "When the centurion...heard his cry and saw how he died, he said, 'Surely this man was the Son of God!'" What did he hear and see? The King James version reads, "Jesus cried with a loud voice." The words "loud voice" are translated as *megaloi fo-nay*. It means a strong, loud, big, mighty, voice or noise or sound. But the words sound familiar don't they? Megaphone. It's not at all what you expect to hear from one so weakened, dying upon a cross. But it was something that centurion could relate to, something he had heard before, in a different place and a different time.

I've read this passage more than once over the years, but it is one of my favorites from Walter Wangerin Jr. He writes of this passage, "A loud shout! What? What? No, this is not at all what the centurion expects. It's a cry that he has heard before, to be sure – but never in defeat and never, never in death, always when the soldier has won the battle or the king the war! This is a cry of triumph! The centurion whirls around to see Jesus: he sees eyes like fiery darts in the darkness; he sees a mouth thin and thin, as thin as the blade of a sword, grinning! Victorious? King of the Jews – victorious over what? What do these flaming eyes announce? 'Satan thou art defeated in my defeat! Sin, dispossessed of a people! Death, look about thee; thou art not mighty and dreadful. Lo, I close my eyes and die – and death shall be no more.' Then suddenly he dies..."

"The centurion whirls around and sees Jesus, so suddenly dead upon that battle cry of triumph – sees the central criminal with such stunning clarity, sees as he has never seen before ...and a pagan whispers with the solemn weight of conviction, confession, faith, 'Truly, this man was the Son of God!'"

That veil of the temple was ripped in two, from top to the bottom, to show that God himself had done this. You understand the veil was the heavy curtain that separated the holy of holies from the rest of the temple. It separated the people from the presence of God and only on the holiest day of the year could one holy man, the high priest, from the holiest nation, the Jews, enter that holy place and then only if he brought a blood sacrifice to atone for his sins and the

sins of the people. But when Jesus died, the ultimate sacrifice was made and accepted by the Father and the veil of separation was torn. We could now come by means of his redeeming blood into the presence of God and what irony, the first to enter by means of Jesus' sacrifice was not a Jew, not a high priest, not a member of the tribe of Levi – it was this rough old pagan, this Roman soldier who saw and heard and believed, there at the foot of the cross!

Jesus died upon that cross. There was no mistaking it. Hurrying because the Sabbath would begin at sundown that evening, Jesus' body was taken down, wrapped in a linen cloth and placed in the borrowed tomb of Joseph of Arimathea. Mark 16 begins, "When the Sabbath was over..." Let's read this passage (Read Mark 16:2-7).

The ladies had gone to honor the dead by anointing his body, but something extraordinary happened. An angel was there to tell them they were looking in the wrong place. It's Easter Sunday morning and nothing is as it once was. Death has been swallowed up in victory. **"You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen!"** Luke's gospel adds, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen." Luke 24:5-6

He is not here. He has risen. Oh the power of the resurrection. The apostle Paul said, if this is not true, if Christ has not been raised from the dead, then our faith is futile; we are still dead in our sins, those loved ones who have died in Christ are lost to us forever and we are to be pitied by everyone that knows us. If indeed Christ has not been raised from the dead.

But hear the word of the Lord, **"But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive!" 1 Corinthians 15:20-22.**

One man sinned and brought death to the world and to all of us, but another man died and brought righteousness and eternal life to all who would believe and receive. What a glorious truth. What bright hope for each of us.

Long before the truth of Christ and the cross and the resurrection, the Spirit of God testified through a righteous saint named Job. He declared that of which our souls have been made certain through Christ, "I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God. I myself will see him with my own eyes – I, and not another." Job 19:23-27 Paradox. Contrast. Irony.

But oh what grace and truth. I know my Redeemer lives. Christ is risen and even if we die, yet shall we live. Christ is risen and our loved ones who died in the faith are alive in his presence. Christ is risen and we are filled with hope.

At my Dad's funeral, my brother quoted from St. John Chrysostom's Easter message from the 4th century. **“Let no one weep for his iniquities, for pardon has shown forth from the grave. Let no one fear death, for the Savior's death has set us free. He that was held prisoner of death has annihilated it. By descending into hell, Christ made hell captive...and so now we sing the triumphant hymn: O Death, where is your sting? O hell, where is your victory? Christ is risen and you are overthrown. Christ is risen and the demons are fallen. Christ is risen and the angels rejoice. Christ is risen and life reigns. Christ is risen and not one dead remains in the grave.”St. John Chrysostom**

Hallelujah - Jesus is Alive!!!