

JESUS TRIAL AND CRUCIFIXION

Jesus entered the city to shouts of praise but just days later would hear shouts for His death. Jerusalem was stirred up over this King.

During the coming week the drama heightens as He celebrates a meal with the Disciples in the Upper Room, goes to Gethsemane where He wrestles in prayer and is ultimately arrested through the betrayal of Judas. He is subjected to a “kangaroo court” of the Sanhedrin breaking their own rules that a trial should not be held in the darkness of night but during the day – He is taken to Pilate for sentencing and He makes no defence of the charges against Him.

During recent weeks we have been shocked by the violence during demonstrations, we have been dismayed at the posturing of certain politicians during a time when we need stable government; we have been disappointed to see leaders publicly villifying one another and we are left wondering just what the truth of certain matters is!

The folk in Jesus’ time were left wondering too – crowds had gathered and from the time Jesus left Pilate’s court until He arrived at Golgotha, there was a crowd of people. Some people in that crowd were people who loved Him and were for Him. Some were people who were passing by and got caught up in it. Then there were those who were railing against Him while the top religious leaders were trying to create a mob to make sure Jesus wouldn’t be rescued. There were so many people that Pilate assigned an entire battalion of 600 guards to the crucifixion. After being severely beaten, and paraded through the streets, Jesus made His way outside of the city walls to the place of the skull. There, after they nailed Him to those roughly cut boards, they raised Him up for all to see. With the mocking sign above the Cross “The King of the Jews” .The crowd began to taunt Him even more. Matthew 27:40 records them as saying, “‘Look at you now!’ they yelled at him. ‘You said you were going to destroy the Temple and rebuild it in three days. Well then, if you are the Son of God, save yourself and come down from the cross!’” (NLT)

Well, He didn’t – this Jesus who had commanded the winds and the waves to be still, who had turned water into wine, who had healed many now seemed unable to save Himself. If we are honest we sometimes wonder ourselves why He didn’t just use all the power at His disposal to settle the argument once and for all. To appreciate Jesus fully we must understand and embrace His humanity as well. It is this hungry, thirsty,

exhausted, bleeding and dying Jesus that unpacked the wonder of His humanity. The vulnerable, suffering Jesus makes us uncomfortable “turn the other cheek”, forgiveness, being meek doesn’t sit comfortably with us any more than it did with that crowd at the foot of the Cross!

I often wonder where I would have been in the crowd that day. It’s easy to think I would have been with the disciples, quietly watching in shock. Jesus’ accusers knew His sermons. They were quoting the things He had said. These were people who saw the miracles and shouted, “Hosanna” just a week before, yet here they were mocking Him. Would you and I have been caught up in the rush of the moment to attack a person who was being humiliated publicly? We do it every day on social media. Why would this have been different?

I’m sure every bit of Jesus’ human nature was screaming at Him to come off the cross to prove to them that He was the Son of God and to silence them. Thankfully He obeyed the Spirit’s voice that had Him die on the cross that day. Because He stayed on the cross, He was able to open the doors of Heaven to all those in the crowd that day who were insulting Him. His blood that was spilled that day was enough to pay the debt of any sin that was ever committed or ever would be. Jesus wasn’t just suffering for the sake of suffering. The prize of Calvary was forgiveness of sin for all humanity!

I often wonder what my position would have been that day had I been one of the bystanders at the Crucifixion scene. Would I have been behaving as a mocker, a condemning judge, a religious fanatic or a grieving mother – would I, like the Roman Centurion have responded “Truly, this was the Son of God”. We cannot, of course, go back in time, but today we have a fresh opportunity to reflect again on these scenes. Standing beneath the Cross is a reminder of the love Jesus has for me and for you. We don’t have to be perfect; with pious prayers or devotions or even live a life of exemplary faith. We just have to say yes and receive this love as a gift. In receiving this incredible free gift of Salvation, our lives can be transformed by the power of God’s love.

May we all rest in the kind arms of Christ this Palm Sunday, knowing that only through the One who rode humbly into the city can we sing, “When He shall come with trumpet sound, oh may I then in Him be found; dressed in His righteousness alone, faultless to stand before the throne.”

