



Were You There? Good Friday Service, April 6, 2012

Matthew 26-27

Pastor David Sunday

"Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him, and all the tribes of the earth will wail on account of Him. Even so. Amen."

Let's pray.

All glory, power, honor and dominion belong to You, Lord Jesus Christ, You who love us. We thank You that You love us in the present tense. The love that You displayed at Calvary, You've poured into our hearts through Your Holy Spirit and You love us today and You will love us forever. We thank You that You love us, Your people, purchased with Your blood, not some future version of us. You love us today in all our weakness, with all our failings, with all our weakness of faith.

Though we love You so imperfectly, You love us perfectly, Lord Jesus our Savior. You have freed us from our sins. You have freed us from sins' penalty. We will not have to pay for our sins because You've paid it all and You freed us from sin's power so we no longer need to submit to its dominion. We no longer need to say "yes" to sins demands. Your grace teaches us to renounce ungodliness and to live holy and righteous lives. You freed us from our sins by Your blood. Help us believe that, Jesus, and to apply that in our lives today.

You've made us a kingdom. You've given us royal authority and all the privileges of your Father's kingdom. And we are priests. We can come into your presence, day or night; it's never too late or never an annoyance. You welcome us into Your Father's presence so we can receive mercy and help in our time of need. To You be all the glory, Lord Jesus, for Your dying love and the millions of—indeed the innumerable—benefits we receive because of it. We love You, Lord. Amen.

Were you there when they crucified my Lord?
Were you there when they crucified my Lord?
Oh! Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.
Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

(Were You There; An African-American Spiritual)

It can be a powerful exercise as we survey the wondrous cross to consider some of the personalities who were involved and to ask yourself, "With whom do I most closely identify?" Out of the many who were there when they crucified our Lord, can you recognize a reflection of yourself?

Consider Judas, the Disciple who Betrayed Jesus

Judas is there with Jesus at the Last Supper. He hears his Master's sorrowful words: *"The Son of Man goes as it is written of Him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born." Judas, who would betray Him, answered, 'Is it I, Rabbi?' He said to him, 'You have said so. What you are going to do, do it quickly.'* (Matthew 26:26-29)

While Jesus is praying in the Garden of Gethsemane, Judas is plotting to deliver Him over to those who will torment Him. Once the dastardly deed is done, though he is riddled with remorse and regret, he is unable to repent. *"And throwing down the pieces of silver into the temple, he departed, and he went and hanged himself."* (Matthew 27:3-10)

Were you there, my friend? Can you see a reflection of yourself in Judas? Has your heart ever been so captivated by lust or greed that you have betrayed your Master? If so, realize that you cannot free yourself from Satan's tyranny. You cannot pay for your sins. Remorse and regret lead only to despair; repentance leads to life. Acknowledge your treachery. Confess and forsake your sins. Flee to Jesus, not from Him.

Were you there? Were you there?

Consider the Mob of Soldiers

We read in Matthew 26:47 how *"a great crowd"* came with their swords and clubs. They revile Him, abuse Him and scourge Him. They spit on Him and mock His majesty. They are completely blinded to His glory but they are just following orders. They don't realize they're following the will of Satan.

Ephesians 2:1-2 says we were all there—all of us. *"And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience."*

Just like the soldiers, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience controlled us until God made us alive in Christ. I can see myself among those soldiers, just following orders but following the wrong master. Even there, the mercy of Jesus reaches.

There is one among the mob named Malchus whose ear is cut off by Peter. What does Jesus do? He heals Malchus, even as Malchus is seeking to destroy Jesus.

Were you there? Can you see yourself in that mob? Can you see yourself in Malchus? Have you seen times when Jesus has shown incredible mercy to you even when you were working against Him? Have you ever been powerfully touched by the Lord, blessed by Him even when you were not living for Him?

Consider Caiaphas, the High Priest and the Religious Leaders

In them we find an example of the human personality when it is infatuated with power and control. Matthew 26:3-5 states: *"Then the chief priests and the elders of the people gathered in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas, and plotted together in order to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him. But they said, 'Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar among the people.'"* That's what they cared about—the people's approval, the people's praise.

By the end of the chapter, they have Jesus arraigned for a mock trial. Matthew tells us in verse 59: *"Now the chief priests and the whole Council were seeking false testimony against Jesus that they might put him to death, but they found none, though many false witnesses came forward. At last two came forward and said, 'This man said, I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to rebuild it in three days.'" And the high priest stood up and said, 'Have you no answer to make? What is it that these men testify against you?'"*

The fate of the whole world hangs on Jesus' response. Our salvation hinges on Who He really is and praise God for the words that came forth from Jesus' mouth in Matthew 26:64: Jesus says to him, *"You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven."*

There it is. Jesus is identifying Himself as the Ancient of Days from Daniel, the Son of Man, the One Who was and is and is to come, the promised Messiah, the hope of the

world, the One to which all of the Old Testament has been pointing. And what do these religious leaders do? How do they respond to Jesus? Do they examine the evidence? Do they search the Scriptures? Do they even bother to ask, "What if Jesus is Who He says He is?" No, they do none of these things and why not? Their minds are already made up. Their hearts are hardened. They are not willing to believe the truth.

Believing in Jesus is not an option for them because believing in Jesus would mean they would have to repent. They would have to change their agenda and how they think. They would have to relinquish their power and submit to Him. So together they passed judgment on the Son of God, the Maker of the heavens and the earth, the Lord and Giver of life. They say, "He has blasphemed! He deserves death!" And they spit in His face and strike Him. Some slap Him.

Were you there? Were you there? Have you ever resisted Jesus because He didn't fit your agenda? You found that you couldn't live with Him unless you were willing to change and instead of submitting to Him, you fought against Him. These religious leaders thought if Jesus wouldn't go away, they would do away with Him. The same thing happens today.

Consider Peter

Many of us can identify with Peter, an apostle. We see so much of our own personality in him. When we find him in Matthew 26:58, it says he is following Jesus at a distance to see the end. Peter loves Jesus. Peter cares about Jesus but his heart is divided. He is disloyal. Jesus cannot count on Peter and Jesus knows that. He even tells Peter, "*You are going to deny me.*" But Peter does not know this about himself. Peter views himself as much more loyal and faithful to Jesus than he really is.

Have you ever had a fair-weather friend, someone who thought he was really close to you but you knew you could not rely on him to be with you in season and out? Peter is such a friend. How painful it is for Peter to discover the duplicity of his own heart, to look at himself in the mirror and see not a faithful friend who sticks closer than a brother, but a traitor—a denier of Jesus, a deserter, a coward. How painful to stand before a young servant girl and to find himself unable to stand up for Jesus. How painful it is for us when we find in ourselves the same kind of timidity, weakness and fear of man. When we realize we are not the friend who sticks closer than a brother in the day of adversity to our Savior. I can see in Peter a reflection of myself. Can you? Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

Consider Pilate

Jesus suffers under Pontius Pilate. Jesus is brought to the Roman leader for another mock trial. Pilate examines the accusations. He hears all that the witnesses have to bring against Jesus and he himself is greatly amazed at Jesus. He knows that Jesus is innocent; that He has done nothing deserving of death and that it was out of envy that they had delivered Him up. You can imagine the pressure Pilate is under. I can see beads of sweat forming on his forehead as the crowds were clamoring for Christ's crucifixion. They are crying, "Crucify Him!" All the while his wife is pleading with him, *"Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for I have suffered much because of Him today in a dream"* (Matthew 27:19).

I can hear Pilate nervously arguing with his wife, "Claudia, it's easy for you to say, 'Let him go,' but you don't know the pressure I'm under. I've got a mob on my hands here. My political future is on the line." His conscience shouts, "Stand up for Jesus!" But the crowds shout, "Crucify Him or we will get rid of you and get you out of office." He counts the cost and finds it too high.

Were you there? Can you identify with Pilate? You may know Who Jesus is. You may be greatly amazed by Him—so was Pilate. As you stand before His cross, count the cost of following Jesus Who said, *"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me"* (Matthew 16:24).

Consider Barabbas

As you count the cost, the crowds, the pressures of life, the pressures of human approval pull you away. Your desire to please men is too strong. You're on the fence and the wind of public opinion blows you over to the side of the opposition. Then can you see yourself in that crowd as Pilate deliberates before the people?

"Which of the two do you want me to release for you?" And they said, "Barabbas." Pilate said to them, "Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" They all said, "Let Him be crucified!"

Underscore that word "all." They all shout, not just the chief priests, not just the Pharisees. This is the man on the street; they all answer, "Crucify Him!"

Teenagers shout, “Crucify Him!” Passersby and timid spectators are swept into the fury, “Crucify Him!” Women, mothers, grandmothers, grandfathers, cry “Crucify Him!” Do they even know what they are doing? Do they realize that their tongues have been set on fire by hell? Do they see that they are condemning their Maker—their Redeemer—to death? They have lost all sense of reason and responsibility, so much so that they even invoke God’s judgment on themselves and upon their children.

In Matthew 27:25 we read: “*And all the people answered, ‘His blood be on us and on our children.’*” What are they saying? They are saying, “We don’t care if we all end up in hell; just let Him be crucified!” That’s what they’re saying.

Were you there? Can you hear your mocking voice call out among the scoffers? Can you resonate with the words of an old hymn that asks Jesus?

“Who was the guilty? Who brought this upon Thee?
Alas, my treason, Jesus, hath undone Thee.
'Twas I, Lord Jesus, I it was denied Thee!
I crucified Thee.”

(Ah, Holy Jesus, How Hast Thou Offended by Johann Heermann, 1630)

But as the crowds cry out for Barabbas, I can see an even more powerful identification of someone with myself. Barabbas, my friends, provides us an amazing illustration of our salvation. Imagine you are Barabbas. You’re sitting inside your dark and dirty prison cell, listening to the crowds milling around outside. It’s noisier today than usual. You are waiting, watching. You have been on death row for some time now and you know that soon the guards will come. They will take you up that hill to the cross—that place called Golgotha—and there you will be crucified and you deserve it. You’ve rebelled against the government. You’ve murdered people and now you must pay for your crimes with your own life.

Outside you hear the crowds and they are shouting your name. You cannot quite make out what they are saying but over and again you hear them yell, “Barabbas!” Then you hear the words, “Let him be crucified!” Surely it’s time. This is the day justice will be served. You hear footsteps outside your cell. Soldiers are coming and your stomach tenses. You feel nauseous. The guard is outside your door and he opens up the gates of your prison cell. He stares at you for a moment. You’ll never forget the words that come from his mouth, “Barabbas, you can go home now. You’re a free man. They’ve decided to crucify Jesus of Nazareth instead of you.”

“My Lord, what is this that I the guilty one may go free? The guilty one, the sinful one?” Barabbas is set free and in his place dies the sinless Son of God. In Barabbas we see a vivid illustration of what God does for everyone who repents, who acknowledges: “I am a sinner, I am an unclean man” and who turns from his sin and says, “Oh Lord Jesus, I believe in You. I trust in You. I receive You. I embrace You.” What God does for that sinner who repents and believes in Jesus is described in 2 Corinthians 5:21: *“For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.”*

I see glimpses of myself in Judas, in the mob, in the religious leaders, in Peter and Pilate and the crowds. But praise God, through the amazing love of Jesus, I am Barabbas. I am the guilty one who has been set free because Someone died in my place.

*Long my imprisoned spirit lay,
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray--
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
My chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.*

(And Can It Be That I Should Gain? By Charles Wesley, 1738)

There's One Person in the crucifixion narrative with Whom a believer more closely identifies than anyone else, even more than Barabbas. We identify with Jesus Himself. In all the other people, we see reflections of the sin that is in us. But we lift our eyes to the cross and there we see our Savior with our sin upon His shoulders. What is He doing with that sin? He is carrying every one of them away, down into the grave itself like the scapegoat that was sent into the wilderness. He takes my sins and carries them into the abyss of the earth and He buries them there never to be brought up against me again. Then He rises from that grave victorious, no longer bearing my sins but instead going ahead to prepare a place for me and for all who believe in Him in His Father's house (John 14:1-6).

I look to Jesus and I say,

Why should I gain from His reward?
I cannot give an answer
But this I know with all my heart
His wounds have paid my ransom

(How Deep the Father's Love for Us by Stuart Townsend)

The wonder of it all! The wonder is that no one in the whole story of Jesus' death identifies more closely with us than Jesus Himself. We identify with all the sinners; Jesus identifies with us. A believer is someone who looks at Jesus' death on the cross, dying there, rising from the dead, and who says, "Jesus, I identify myself with you. When you died, I died. When you were raised, I was raised so that I might walk in newness of life."

Ask a believer, "Were you there when they crucified my Lord?" Every single one of them will tell you without fail, "Yes! yes, I was there. *"I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me"* (Galatians 2:20).

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