

THE PASSION OF THE LORD
Passion Sunday (Apr 17, 2011)
Mark Chapters 14&15

Passion: Intense zeal, emotion, anger, love. But the original meaning is: suffering and death, martyrdom. The Passion of our Lord is His passion to save you.

The day begins in triumph. Hosannas and palm branches. ***“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey”*** (Zechariah 9:9). Kind of fun, isn't it? Who doesn't love a parade? The King is coming! Hosanna to the Son of David!

The air was filled with energy. The crowds that greeted Jesus when He entered Jerusalem were ready to do battle. In addition to palm branches there were probably swords and weapons. They wanted a holy war, and Jesus was their man, He would be their king and captain piloting them into victory. ***“Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord!”*** straight from the pages of Psalm 118. Go get 'em Jesus!

Did they have any idea how this week was going to end? Would you, if you had been there? Would you have imagined that within a few short days the King would be betrayed by one of His own, tried and convicted before the courts of Religion and Government, be mocked, be beaten, and be crucified between two criminals?

Is this any way to wage “holy war”? Yes it is, when the war is against your sin, against eternal death - the great enemy of our humanity, against the Law that convicts, kills, and condemns us. This is what Jesus is all about. He is more than a miracle workers; more that a religious teacher, more than a moral example to follow. He is the King who fights on behalf of His subjects. The Savior who rescues us from death by dying. The Redeemer who buys humanity back with His own blood. The Lamb, the Substitute, the whole burnt offering, the atoning sacrifice, the world's reconciliation and peace.

The passion history is the story of our Lord's passion to save you. It begins with an anointing. A woman pours her costly perfume on His head. The Anointed One is anointed, preparing Him for His burial. Magi presented Him myrrh at His birth. Now this woman, in a reckless act of devotion, makes an offering never to be forgotten. Her worship is contrasted with Judas' treachery. A disciple, one of Jesus inner circle, agrees to betray his master for money. Faith and unbelief; worship and betrayal. These lie ever so close together.

Thursday evening. Jesus gathers with His disciples (not His family as was the custom) to celebrate the Passover. He gives them something never given at a Passover before - His own Body as Passover bread; His own covenant blood as a cup of blessing. His death and His life is our food and our drink with the promise that He will again drink again with them, and with us, in His kingdom.

Jesus goes to Gethsemane to pray. Humanity fell in a garden, and now humanity's new head, the Second Adam, returns to the garden to pray. ***“Not my will but thy will be done.”*** He prays as His disciples sleep. Even the sweet hour of prayer eludes them. The spirit is willing; the flesh is weak. Only God in our flesh can save us from ourselves.

A young man flees naked. Most think this is John Mark, the author of the Gospel and that this is his personal signature, possibly an admission of weakness and guilt. A confession of his own denial, like Peter's three-fold denial. When Adam realized he was naked in his sin, he was ashamed and tried to cover himself. Mark does no such thing. He does not cover up his sin but confesses it. The next time we hear of him, he is clothed and faithful. Mark is a reminder that there is no safe distance when following Jesus. You're going to get caught.

Jesus betrayed with a kiss from one of His own. He is ever the rejected King. ***"He came to His own, but His own did not receive Him"*** (John 1:11). The Prince of Peace is arrested as though He were a terrorist and led away in chains. He is tried and convicted of blasphemy by the Sanhedrin, the religious court. Religion considers Jesus a "blasphemer," and will either redefine Him or push Him out of the way. He is an obstacle to everyone who would try to earn God's favor by their religious works. He is falsely convicted and sentenced to death by the Roman government. Not for justice's sake but for expedience. Anything to quell a riot. But God, in His mercy and eternal plan, takes man's injustice, and works our justification.

Jesus is clothed in robes of royal purple, crowned with thorns, spit at, mocked, and beaten. These are the blows of humanity inflicted on one another in the name of God. He is the Victim, absorbing every act of genocide and religious or political terrorism. Yet this Lamb goes willingly, purposefully, intentionally forth to His suffering.

An out-of-town pilgrim, Simon from Cyrene, is sucked into the vortex and forced to carry the cross of Jesus. He was known to the later church, the father of Alexander and Rufus. Perhaps this day, joined with Jesus by a cross, he himself became a believer.

Jesus is crucified. The details are quick, more of a rough sketch and than a detailed photograph. Mark spares us the gory details. He notes the time and the place. Nine in the morning at Golgotha, the hill called "the skull." This is a matter of history, and the world's history hinges on this event. He is crucified between two thieves, the Innocent One among the guilty, bearing our sin, becoming our sin. The people passing by mock Him even as they unwittingly proclaim the truth about Him.

He cries out in abandonment, ***"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"*** He cries out for all of us in our time of abandonment and need, when God appears distant, removed and absent. Where is God in all this? Why does God allow such suffering in the world? Here, in the darkness, on the cross, God answers in silence.

Jesus drinks the sour wine, the bitter cup of our grief and woe. He shouts a last cry, a cry of victory in death, and He dies in the darkness. ***This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it.*** We call it "Good Friday" for a reason. In the liturgy of Good Friday, you will hear this sentence: ***"We adore You, O Lord, and we praise and glorify Your holy resurrection. For behold, by the wood of Your cross, joy has come into all the world."***

This is the passion of our Lord to save the world, to save you. This is the passion of our Lord who ***"though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross"*** (Philippians 2:6-7)

Hosanna to the Son of David! Hosanna to the King! Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord. He came to live the life you couldn't. He came to die a death you dare not. He came to save you.

Hosanna means Lord save us! And He has, for by the blood of Jesus all your sins have been forgiven, a price paid in full by His passion. You are forgiven in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, for Jesus sake and in Jesus name. Amen and Amen

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your heart and mind in Christ Jesus AMEN.