

“The Passion of Jesus”
Mark 14-15

Intro:

Here at Cornerstone, we put a great deal of emphasis on grace

-we believe that our acceptance with God is not earned by our religious or moral performance, but rather our acceptance with God is a gift of God’s grace given freely to those who trust in Christ’s death on the Cross to give them a right relationship with God

-furthermore, we believe that our daily relationship with God as believers is based on the merits of Jesus Christ instead of on our own spiritual commitment or performance

-the grace by which we are accepted by God is undeserved; it is unearnable; it is unrepayable - it is simply received by humble reliance upon Jesus Christ and his finished work on the Cross

God’s grace comes to us as a free gift

-but that free gift was given at great cost to Jesus Christ

It is important that the Cross not become merely a theological doctrine to us

-when we are burdened with a heavy load of sins and failures, we need more than an abstract concept

-when we are ashamed and in need of forgiveness and acceptance, we need more than an abstract concept

-when we are feeling unlovable and lonely and forgotten and are in need of God’s love, we need more than an abstract concept

-when we are feeling hurt and angry and bitter and are in need of healing grace, we need more than an abstract concept

-when we are suffering and need compassion and strength, we need more than an abstract concept

Where can we turn with our sin, our guilt, our shame, our pain, our anger, our loneliness?

-Where can we turn to receive mercy and grace and love and acceptance and forgiveness?

-to the Cross

-not just to the doctrine of the Cross / to the reality of the Cross – to the Christ of the Cross

A disproportionate amount of the Gospels tells the story of that 24-hour period of Jesus' suffering and death

-we will pick up the story in the Garden of Gethsemane following the Last Supper

I. GETHSEMANE

After Jesus and his disciples had observed the Passover Seder, they traveled to the Mount of Olives, northeast of the City

At nearby Gethsemane, Jesus, knowing that the time of his death was near, suffered great mental anguish, and, as described by the physician Luke, his sweat became like blood

-although this is a very rare phenomenon, bloody sweat may occur in a highly emotional state, as a result of hemorrhage into the sweat glands

At Gethsemane, Jesus' body was showing signs of emotional distress

-does that surprise you?

-do you consider that a sign of weakness on Jesus' part?

-or do you consider that part of Jesus' full humanity?

At Gethsemane, Jesus was stressed-out

-he did not commit any sin, but the combination of spiritual temptation and emotional distress took him right to the edge

What were the causes of Jesus' mental anguish and emotional distress?

(1) Spiritual Conflict - You can be sure that Jesus felt the tempter's power at Gethsemane every bit as much as in the desert at the beginning of his ministry

The temptation?

-to turn from the Cross

-to shun suffering, shame, and loss

-to quit God's mission before finished

-to seek a short cut - to seek to bypass pain and suffering

--to figure out some way to avoid drinking the cup of suffering and wrath

At Gethsemane Jesus was struggling for the strength, courage and perseverance to finish the will of God

Have you ever struggled with the difficulty of persevering in obeying God's will?

-Have you ever been tempted to quit something before you were finished because it was just getting too difficult or too discouraging or too burdensome?

--Have you ever been so weary that you desperately wanted to find a way to rationalize a decision to quit a ministry assignment or violate a marriage vow – while still saving face somehow?

In Gethsemane, Jesus experienced the full force of temptation

-something we rarely experience because we usually yield to temptation before its full force is over

Jesus did not stride effortlessly to the Cross

-Jesus was fully human in his emotions and in his battle against temptation, and his fully human body was showing the signs of stress

(2) Anticipation of Physical Suffering

-Jesus knew that the time of his death was near, and he knew that his dying would involve terrible pain and suffering

-Jesus was fully human

-he did not look forward to crucifixion any more than you would look forward to major surgery without anesthesia

Do you know what it is to dread the onset of pain?

-Do you know what it is to await surgery or chemotherapy?

-Do you know what it is to walk through the valley of the shadow of death?

-Do you know what it is to suffer physically?

Turn to the Cross with your pain

Jesus has been there - and he can be there for you today

--He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering

(3) Anticipation of Shame

-Not only would Jesus be beaten and crucified, but he would also be betrayed by a disciple, denied and abandoned by his best friends, abused by his enemies, rejected by the religious leaders and masses alike, and exposed naked in public

More than anything else, the Cross was a symbol of shame

-this form of execution was reserved for the scum of society: slaves, hardened criminals, and rebels against the state

-it was deliberately public, heightening its disgrace
-the purpose of crucifixion was not merely to torture and to kill, but also to shame and to humiliate

Hebrews 12:2 - *“Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the Cross, SCORNING ITS SHAME, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”*

The Cross is the starting point for the healing of shame

Shame is a common experience

-it may grow out of experiences of public humiliation or failure
-it may come from experiences of rejection
-it may come from early life experiences of criticism or ridicule at school or at home
-it may come from being abused or sinned against

Shame hurts very deeply and can destroy a person’s sense of self-worth

-shame can damage people so deeply that it causes them to feel fundamentally flawed, unlovable, unworthy, and irreparable

-It takes a powerful love to heal deep-seated shame

The Cross provides the most powerful love of all for healing from shame

-because the Cross shows you that no matter how badly damaged you think you are, God sees you as valuable

-no matter how unlovable you may feel, the Cross shows that God loves you

*-no matter how hopeless and pessimistic you may feel, the Cross and Resurrection of Jesus offer the hope of deep healing and newness of life - **after great pain, comes new life***

By enduring the shame of the Cross, Jesus secured our worth

-no shame or humiliation can destroy that worth or separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord

(4) Anticipation of Loss

-Who is the one person in the world you most fear losing?

-How would you sleep tonight knowing that tomorrow you would be separated?

Jesus was grieving in Gethsemane - grieving the loss of his unblemished closeness with his Father

-Jesus knew that his sin-bearing death would mean separation, wrath and judgment from his Father from whom he had known only oneness, kindness and love

What a Friend we have in Jesus – all our sins and griefs to bear... Can we find friend so faithful – Who will all our sorrows share?

Isaiah 53:3-4 ³He was despised and rejected—a man of sorrows, acquainted with bitterest grief. We turned our backs on him and looked the other way when he went by. He was despised, and we did not care. ⁴Yet it was our weaknesses he carried; it was our sorrows that weighed him down.

(5) The Weight of Our Burdens

At Gethsemane, Jesus was beginning to feel the full weight of our burdens that were being laid upon him – *our sins // our guilt // our sorrows // our sufferings // our pains*
--He is not only our sin-bearer, but also our pain-bearer and infirmity-bearer and grief-bearer

Many of you know what it feels like to have a friend unload their burdens upon you
 --Perhaps a marriage problem // perhaps a sin problem // perhaps a health crisis // perhaps a financial crisis // perhaps a deep depression // perhaps a Prodigal son or daughter // perhaps the loss of a loved one

--And you are very willing to listen to them and support them and pray for them and fulfill the Scripture to carry each other's burdens

--But when you help carry someone else's burdens – and the burden is significant – you feel the weight of it afterwards, don't you?

--Imagine the weight of all of our burdens being laid upon Jesus

At Gethsemane, under great stress, Jesus made the decision to endure the Cross and its pain, rejection, shame, loss and heavy burdens

READ Mark 14:32-42

II. TRIALS

Soon after midnight, Jesus was arrested at Gethsemane by the temple officials and was taken first to Annas and then to Caiaphas, the Jewish high priest for that year

Between 1:00 am and daybreak, Jesus was tried before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin and was found guilty of blasphemy, a crime punishable by death

While Jesus was doing his ministry, he tried to keep his identity as the Messiah a secret from those who would misunderstand and expect him to be a Davidic conqueror and ruler

*--but now, with his life on the line, and his hour come, he deliberately provokes the Jewish rulers to murderous wrath by applying the vision of the heavenly Son of Man in Daniel 7 to himself: **I am the Messiah, the Son of God, and you will see Me – the Son of Man – sitting at the right hand of Almighty God and coming on the clouds of heaven just as Daniel prophesied***

--This was a clear claim to Deity, and Jesus was thus condemned as worthy of death for this blasphemy

The guards then blindfolded Jesus, spat on him, and struck him in the face with their fists

Since permission for an execution had to come from the governing Romans, Jesus was taken at daybreak by the Temple officials to the Praetorium of the Fortress of Antonia, the residence and governmental seat of Pontius Pilate, the governor of Judea

-However, Jesus was presented to Pilate not as a blasphemer, but rather as a self-appointed king who would undermine the Roman authority

-Pilate made no charges against Jesus and sent him to Herod Antipas, the tetrarch of Judea

-Herod likewise made no official charges and then returned Jesus to Pilate

-Again, Pilate could find no basis for a legal charge against Jesus, but the people persistently demanded crucifixion.

-Pilate finally granted their demand and handed over Jesus to be flogged and crucified.

Do you know what it is to be falsely accused, unfairly judged, or mistreated?

-Jesus has been there - and he can be there for you today

READ Mark 14:53-65

III. SCOURGING

During the 12 hours between 9:00 pm Thursday and 9:00 am Friday, Jesus suffered great emotional stress plus a savage beating by Roman soldiers

-he was also deprived of sleep that night, and then he had to walk close to 3 miles while being transported to the sites of his various trials

-these physical and emotional factors rendered Jesus vulnerable to the cruel effects of scourging

By the time of Christ, the Romans had refined the art of flogging or scourging to a science

-flogging was the preliminary event prior to Roman execution

-the scourging was carried out by using a short whip with several single or braided leather thongs of various lengths

-incorporated in the thongs of leather were small iron balls, sharp pieces of sheep bones, and sharpened metal buttons designed to exact maximum physical damage - producing deep gashes in the flesh, along with deep bruising

For scourging, the man was stripped naked, and his hands were tied to an upright post

-the back, buttocks, and legs were flogged by two soldiers

-the scourging was intended to weaken the victim to a state just short of collapse

As the Roman soldiers repeatedly struck the victim's back with full force, the iron balls would cause deep contusions, and the leather thongs and sheep bones would cut into the skin

-Then, as the flogging continued, the lacerations would tear into the underlying skeletal muscles and produce quivering ribbons of bleeding flesh

-the pain and blood loss set the stage for circulatory shock

At the Praetorium, Jesus was severely whipped as just described

Then the Roman soldiers, amused that this weakened man had claimed to be a king, began to mock him by placing a robe on his shoulders, a crown of thorns on his head, and a wooden scepter in his right hand

-next, they spat on Jesus and struck him on the head with his wooden staff

Considering the lack of food, water, and sleep, the physical and psychological abuse, and the severe scourging, with its intense pain and appreciable blood loss, Jesus' physical condition was at least serious and possibly critical even before the actual crucifixion

“He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering.”

Some of you are familiar with suffering

-some of you know what it is to suffer as a result of being sinned against

-some of you have suffered rape or sexual assault or physical abuse

-and maybe today you carry emotional wounds as a result

-or your experience of suffering has alienated you from God and you have felt forsaken by God in the midst of suffering

-or you feel that no one understands your pain, your shame, your loneliness

There are no easy answers to the problem of suffering

-some *whys* will never be answered this side of heaven

-but one thing is certain: Jesus has been there - a man of sorrows / familiar with suffering - and he can be there for you today

-the Cross is not merely a religious symbol or abstract doctrine

-the Cross is the place where suffering people can identify with and connect with a God who knows suffering first-hand

-the Cross is where suffering people find comfort, strength and hope through their relationship with the Suffering Savior

Most of us know that the Cross is where we find forgiveness for our sins – and it is –

*Praise God! – **but the Cross is also where we find healing for our sinned-against-ness***

-- For by his wounds, we are healed

READ Mark 15:15-20

Hymn # 178 “O Sacred Head, Now Wounded”

IV. CRUCIFIXION

Although the Romans did not invent crucifixion, they perfected it as a form of torture and capital punishment that was designed to produce a slow death with maximum pain and suffering

-it was one of the most disgraceful and cruel methods of execution and usually was reserved only for slaves, foreigners, revolutionaries and the vilest of criminals

The cross was characterized by an upright post and a horizontal crossbar

-it was customary for the condemned man to carry his own crossbar from the flogging post to the site of crucifixion outside the city walls

-the crossbar weighed 75-125 pounds and was placed across the nape of the victim's neck and balanced along both shoulders

-usually, the outstretched arms were then tied to the crossbar

The procession to the site of crucifixion was led by a complete Roman military guard, headed by a centurion

-one of the soldiers carried a sign on which the condemned man's name and crime were displayed

-later, the sign would be attached to the top of the cross

Outside the city walls were permanently located the heavy upright posts on which the crossbars would be secured

-at the site of the execution, by law, the victim was given a bitter drink of wine mixed with myrrh (gall) as a mild analgesic

-the criminal was then thrown to the ground on his back, with his arms outstretched along the crossbar

-the hands were then nailed to the crossbar with tapered iron spikes approximately 5-7 inches long

-the nails were usually driven through the wrists rather than through the palms

After both arms were fixed to the crossbar, the victim and the crossbar together were lifted onto the upright post

-next, the feet were fixed to the cross, again by nailing

-when the nailing was completed, the sign was attached to the cross, above the victim's head

The length of survival generally ranged from 3-4 hours to 3-4 days, depending on the severity of the scourging beforehand

-Roman soldiers could hasten death by breaking the legs below the knees (unable to breathe)

-by custom, one of the Roman guards would pierce the body with a sword or lance through the right side of the chest to make sure the victim was dead

Each aspect of this slow form of execution was intended to produce intense agony, and the contributing causes of death were numerous

-the scourging served to weaken the condemned man and in some cases to produce shock

-when the victim was thrown to the ground on his back, his scourging wounds would become torn open again and contaminated with dirt

-driving the nails through the wrists would produce excruciating bolts of fiery pain in both arms

-furthermore, with each breath, the back wounds would be scraped against the rough wood of the cross

-as a result, blood loss would continue throughout the ordeal

For those of you who are familiar with pain, there is sometimes no easy or satisfactory answer to the question: “Why” or “Where is God when it hurts?”

-but we do know that God was in Christ experiencing the pain of crucifixion

-Jesus has been there - and he can be there for you today

The major effect of crucifixion, beyond the excruciating pain, was a marked interference with normal respiration, particularly exhaling

-the weight of the body, pulling down on the outstretched arms and shoulders, hindered exhaling

-adequate exhaling required lifting the body by pushing up on the feet and by flexing the elbows and shoulders

-however, this maneuver produced searing pain

-each breath thus became an agonizing and tiring effort

After the scourging and the mocking, sometime before 9:00 am, the Roman soldiers put Jesus’ clothes back on him and then led him and two thieves to be crucified

-Jesus was so weakened by the severe flogging that he could not carry his crossbar from the Praetorium to the site of the crucifixion 1/3 mile away

-Simon of Cyrene was summoned to carry Christ’s cross, and the procession then made its way to Golgotha (Calvary), an established crucifixion site

Here, Jesus’ clothes, except for a linen loincloth, again were removed, thereby reopening the scourging wounds

-he then was offered a drink of wine mixed with myrrh (gall), but, after tasting it, refused to drink

-then, Jesus and the two thieves were crucified at about 9:00 am

The soldiers and the civilian crowd taunted Jesus throughout the ordeal, and the soldiers cast lots for his clothing

-Jesus spoke 7 times from the cross

-since speech occurs during exhalation, these short, terse utterances must have been extremely painful

Each saying reveals something about Jesus' mental and spiritual condition upon the Cross:

- *"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."*

- (to his mother and to John): *"Dear woman, here is your son,"* and to the disciple: *"Here is your mother."*

-(to the repentant thief on the cross): *"I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."*

-(After the sky had darkened): *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me"?*

- *"I am thirsty."*

- *"It is finished."*

-(Last words): *"Father, into your hands I commit my spirit."*

READ Mark 15:21-39

V. DEATH

At about 3:00 that Friday afternoon, Jesus cried out in a loud voice, bowed his head, and died

--Since the Jews did not want the bodies to remain on the crosses after sunset (the beginning of the Sabbath), they asked Pontius Pilate to order crucifraction to hasten the deaths of the 3 men

-the soldiers broke the legs of the 2 thieves, but when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs

-rather, one of the soldiers pierced his side, probably with an infantry spear (5-6 feet in length), and produced a sudden flow of blood and water – proof of death

-later that day, Jesus' body was taken down from the cross and placed in a tomb

The actual cause of Jesus' death was probably the result of a combination of factors - blood loss, exhaustion, suffocation, cardiac rupture or acute heart failure

The weight of the historical and medical evidence makes one fact clear - **Jesus died on the cross**

-any explanation of the empty tomb on Easter Sunday must take into account that on Good Friday Jesus was truly dead

Much of the medical information in this sermon came from an article several years ago in the Journal of the American Medical Association

But more important than knowing the medical facts of Jesus' death is to know the real reason for his death

-Jesus died for my sins and for your sins

-Jesus died to forgive our sins and to restore us to a right relationship with God

When we look at the Cross, we are rebuked to realize how serious our sin problem is that it required such a drastic remedy

-and when we look at the Cross, we are comforted and assured that no matter how serious our sin problem is, it has been completely taken care of by Christ's blood shed on the Cross

Jesus paid it all!

-you can add nothing of your own penance or good works or spiritual commitment to the finished work of Christ on the Cross

-if a right relationship with God could be gained through our moral or religious efforts, then Christ suffered and died for nothing

-the Gospel clearly teaches that your acceptance with God is based solely on Christ's death on the Cross for your sins

-because of the Cross, there is no condemnation for those who trust in Christ as Savior

--because of the Cross, we have free access into the Presence of God and entrance into the kingdom of heaven – through the blood of Jesus

That is the significance of the curtain of the Temple being torn in two from top to bottom:

Hebrews 10:19-20 And so, dear brothers and sisters, we can boldly enter heaven's Most Holy Place because of the blood of Jesus. ²⁰This is the new, life-giving way that Christ has opened up for us through the sacred curtain, by means of his death for us.

“My sin - O the joy of this glorious thought - my sin, not in part, but the whole, is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more: Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!”

Prayer of Salvation

“You Are My King”