

Jesus Suffered on the Path to Calvary

Mark 15:16-21 and Luke 23:24-26

Lent Evening II, March 4, 2015

Beloved of the Lord.....In our text this evening we have a word not in common use today, namely the word platted. Platted comes from the noun “plait” (spelled p-l-a-i-t). Verse seventeen of our text says the soldiers clothed Jesus “with purple, and platted a crown of thorns, and put it about his head.” This means they interwove or interlayered thorny branches into the shape of a crown, then put it on His head. This was entertainment to the soldiers, to mock Him with such a crown, even watch Him bleed. This was good sport, good fun. “They bowed the knee before him, and mocked him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews! And they spit upon him, and took the reed, and smote him on the head.”

A few years ago I read how the famous Lutheran theologian, C.F.W. Walther, kept a crown of thorns upon the desk where he did all his Scriptural writing. He kept this crown of thorns as a reminder of all that Christ had suffered for him. Tonight we are going to meditate upon the suffering of Christ on His path to Calvary, as He carried His cross. This road or path is commonly called Via Dolorosa, the Way of Sorrows. It begins at the Praetorium of Pilate, and ends at Golgotha, outside the city. So the Bible says, “Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.” Is. 53:4-5 (KJV)

Since Jesus was nailed to the cross at 9AM in the morning, this journey to the cross was shortly before. Keep in mind Jesus had been up all night. He first endured the horrible sufferings at Gethsemane, where He bled as it were great drops of blood. When betrayed by Judas with a kiss all His disciples forsook Him. He was then tried separately by both the high priest Caiaphas and Annas, and then Pilate and Herod and Pilate again. Not only had it been a sleepless night, but Christ had been beaten often, first by the Jews, then the Romans, who also scourged Jesus. This whipping left deep bloody stripes upon His back, even furrows, like a farmer who plows his field. Christ says the same in Psalm 129:3, “The plowers plowed upon my back: they made long their furrows.” Jesus was tied to a post, His back laid bare, and then struck with the Roman scourge of three lashes or whips. Truly it should have been us who were tied to the post and whipped? But

“He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.”

Thus by the time Christ is condemned to be hanged, Jesus is absolutely physically exhausted and spent, yet this is only the beginning of His sorrows. Now He who is without sin, is forced to carry His own cross to Calvary, and that cross would be an instrument of His own torture. Seeing the bloody and beaten condition of Christ, the Romans were absolutely barbaric to force Jesus to do this. But they had no mercy upon

Christ, no compassion at all. Thus Jesus said in Psalm 69, "Reproach hath broken my heart; and I am full of heaviness: and I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none." So may God help us to have pity upon the suffering.

As for the reason Jesus did not die within Jerusalem, but outside the city walls, this was necessary because of the manner of sacrifice in the Old Testament. After the animal sacrifice was slain, the blood of the sacrifice was taken inside the tabernacle and put upon the altar to atone for sin, but the carcass of the animal itself was burned outside the camp. So Hebrews 13:11-12 explain, "For the bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned without the camp. Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate." You could say because Jesus carried our sins in His own body, He deserves to perish outside the city walls. But all this is so that we who are born outside of God's Kingdom, are forgiven by blood and translated into His Kingdom of Glory above, that New Jerusalem, the eternal City of God which is heaven. So our Lord Jesus says in Revelation 21, "Behold, I make all things new.....I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely. He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son."

Returning now to Jesus and that path to the cross, there was at the front of the group a Roman centurion leading the way. "Following him was a soldier bearing a white wooden board, on which was written the crime with which our Lord was charged. Next to him came a guard of four soldiers carrying a mallet and spikes. In the midst of them was Jesus, carrying...His own cross." And after Jesus the other two criminals carrying their crosses. Behind all this there was the churchmen, namely Caiaphas the high priest, as well as the Sadducees, scribes, and Pharisees. No doubt they were still venting their hatred, heaping their vile insults and scorn upon the innocent Lamb of God, "Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously." Still behind all these people there was likely Mary, the mother of Jesus, John, Mary Magdelene, and others, the faithful.

Somewhere along this path or road to the cross, we know Jesus physically broke down. He was so spent and exhausted from the beatings and scourging, He couldn't carry that cross any longer. The soldiers "found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name: him they compelled to bear his cross." The Evangelist Mark gives us the name, "Simon a Cyrenian, who passed by, coming out of the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to bear his cross." This city, Cyrene, was in Northern Africa. Cyrene later became known as Tripoli, Libya. Simon of Cyrene was a Jew who was in the city for the Passover. It appears he was leaving the city when he was caught in the wrong place at the wrong time. This however was the Lord's timing or providence. This is how God the Father granted God the Son relief. By the Evangelist Mark's reference to Simon being the father of Alexander and Rufus, we can be certain Alexander and Rufus were commonly known believers in the early Christian Church. We also hear the Apostle Paul speak of Rufus in

Romans 16:13, hence Rufus was a member of the Christian congregation in Rome, and Paul calls Rufus “chosen in the Lord.” From all this it seems fairly safe to conclude Simon of Cyrene eventually became a Christian, for his two sons were notable in the Christian Church. Certainly it was also no accident that God had placed Simon of Cyrene at that particular place and time, even to carry the cross of Jesus.

What can we learn from all this? First, by the physical collapse of Jesus under the cross, we remember how He truly was a man of flesh and blood like us, except without sin. Secondly, His willingness to suffer so much, even to the point He physically breaks down, such sanctions the heavy burdens God sometimes gives to His dear children. We too break down on occasion under our cross, just as Jesus did. “Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator.” A third point is that as hard the journey was to Calvary, Jesus didn’t stop there or give up. Jesus endured. So we must endure all things for Jesus’ sake, as the Bible says, “Let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.” This Way of Sorrows is but for a moment, but it works in us an exceeding weight of glory.

Another lesson here is that when God gives that particular cross of physical hardships or sickness, and we do indeed collapse, He will surely give us a Simon of Cyrene also. By this I mean He is not going to leave you in your broken state, but one way or another He will lift that cross up so you can breathe again. That “Simon” who may help you could be a doctor with certain medicine, or a medical treatment, or it might be godly comfort from a Christian friend. It could be a letter or card, a passage or just one verse. But whatever the means or manner of Simon, as the Father above knew Christ would collapse, and God had the relief pre-ordained, so it is and will be no different in your life. You should not then feel too bad when you break under the strain of your cross, but do not despair. The sins which grieve you most are also forgiven, carried away by Calvary. Jesus is stronger than Simon of Cyrene, Goliath, or Hercules, for Jesus lifted up and carried away the entire weight of this world’s sins, all upon Himself, by the cross. This burden being removed, all sins are now forgiven. What then does it matter if “We are troubled on every side”? We are not distressed! “We are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.”

And so we close tonight, remembering again that crown of thorns Walther had placed upon his desk as a reminder of all Christ suffered for him. So let us happily suffer all things for Christ, take up our cross and follow Him. As Paul said, “God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.” Gal. 6:14 Amen.

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