

Eternity Daily Bible Study - No. 326

Series: St. John's Passion - Gospel of John chapters 12-21

Verses: John 19:16-18

Topic: Bearing His Cross

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John 19:16-18 MKJV Then he delivered Him up to them that He might be crucified. And they took Jesus and led *Him* away. (17) And bearing His cross, He went out to a place called, *The Place* of a Skull (which is called in the Hebrew, Golgotha) (18) where they crucified Him, and two others with Him, one on either side, and Jesus in the middle.

The action suddenly moves from the Praetorium to Golgotha with the barest mention of the Via Dolorosa. "And bearing His cross He went..."

Pilate surrenders to the howling mob and lets Jesus be crucified. As a last gesture Pilate has the sign made saying that Jesus was the King of the Jews (more on that in the next Eternity DBS). And the chief priests and their attendants "took Jesus and led Him away". Evil had taken control.

For the righteous to fall into the power of the wicked is both unjust contrary to most teaching in the Old Testament which teaches that the righteous will always be delivered by God. Thus for the mob to be successful in crucifying Christ was tantamount to saying that God had lost control of the situation.

However God had not lost control, because three days later Jesus rose from the dead and did not remain in the power of the wicked, nor did His body see corruption and decay. God will deliver the righteous from the power of the wicked!

Today there was a terrible hostage crisis in Russia with terrorists taking children captive at a school and hundreds killed. Such evil seems so insane and so terrifying and so unjust that God "cannot have been in control". Certainly man was not in control, - the shoot-out was unplanned and brutal. It was frenzied evil – much the sort of out of control rage that the Pharisees seem to have been possessed by, just in a different context. And caught up in the dark terrorist maelstrom were Russian children on one hand, and the Son of God on the other. Mad, meaningless, murderous evil - it has to be factored into our human existence.

Jesus responded to the maelstrom by entering into it, in all its darkness and bearing His cross to Golgotha. Sometimes we have no choice but to suffer evil – and in such cases we must suffer to the glory of God as Christ did. I do not mean to glorify suffering, it is to be avoided, and biblical wisdom helps in avoiding unnecessary suffering. But suffering comes to all of us – and then what do we do? Do we join the rage? Do we sink into despair? Or do we bear our cross?

While John certainly portrays Jesus as being treated brutally and unjustly He makes no explicit mention of the personal sufferings of Christ or of His physical anguish. It

is obvious that Jesus is humiliated, scourged, treated cruelly and crucified, but there are no morbid musings in the account. The cruelties are noted as occurring but are never described in any detail. We need to bear this in mind as the Passion DVD comes out this weekend.

Not only John but also the entire New Testament puts little emphasis on the personal sufferings of Christ and much greater emphasis on the saving work of Christ. The focus is not on Jesus' personal pain on the cross (which is never mentioned in any detail) but rather on Jesus' death and resurrection and ascension into Heaven to the right hand of God. This saving work of Christ should be the main thing that we proclaim - for we do not have the sad and morbid faith of eternal victims – but a joyous and victorious faith of those who are “more than conquerors”.

“He went out to a place called, *The Place of a Skull* (which is called in the Hebrew, Golgotha)”. There is quite an interesting debate about why it was called “the Skull” but you can look that one up in a Bible dictionary, we do not have space for it here. The point is that Golgotha was a place of death. There is even a tradition (Origen 185-253 AD) that it was the burial site of Adam, the first man and therefore the fitting place for the second Adam also. According to the ISBE: “The tomb and skull of Adam, still pointed out in an excavated chamber below the traditional Calvary, marks the survival of this tradition on the spot.”

“where they crucified Him, and two others with Him, one on either side, and Jesus in the middle.” There were three people suffering the same terrible fate in three utterly different ways. If you have spent much time in hospital (as I unfortunately have in my missionary work) you will see very different reactions to suffering among people – even in the same ward. The angry seem to suffer twice as much - as not only the pain, but their own rage tears them apart. And one of the thieves was angry and cursed God and abused Jesus and died in his own personal hell. The other thief made it to Paradise, the pain opened him up to repentance and faith and a moment of personal transformation.

Pain is merely a circumstance, a temporary physical sensation. We can learn from it, fight it, ignore it, dull it with alcohol or soothe it with sex. There is nothing automatically redemptive about pain. Pain teaches a few and destroys many. The angry thief suffered more and learned less. Fools suffer greatly. Masochism does not produce sanctification: “Colossians 2:23 ISV These things have the appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion, humility, and harsh treatment of the body, but they have no value against self-indulgence.”

“and Jesus in the middle.” Where He always is! Jesus mid-way between earth and heaven, in the midst of two thieves, in the middle of suffering, dying humanity, in the middle of the crowd around the cross, in the middle of Israel, in the middle of the continents of the world. Jesus is always in the center of the circle. There is no ladder up to Jesus, He is right in the midst of you! (Romans 10:6-8, Matthew 18:20). We are all part of the circle around Christ and are either moving toward Him or moving away from him.

In Christ God came into our midst and He is still there, Immanuel, God with us. . In Christ God abolished the old “Jacob’s Ladder” approach of spirituality where we arduously climb a path of spiritual ascent. Now God is close to us, in our hearts and in our mouths, He is not far from any of us and in Him we live and move and have our being. (Acts 17:27,28; Romans 10:6-8)

Blessings,

John Edmiston

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