

A BYSTANDER

1st in Series: “What If *YOU* Were There?”

Perth Bible Church, March 21, 2010 AM Service Rev. Todd G. Leupold

INTRODUCTION:

“*Were You There*” has long been one of my favorite Easter Hymns that never fails to deeply move and challenge me. I think this is principally because it forces me to focus on the Passion events in a very personal manner in addition to it's facts, teachings, historicity and theology. ALL of these are very important, but above all else what the Passion Week was, is, and should always be is a deeply personal encounter!

The events of this week are not just about history or 'religion.' They are events that carry timeless, cosmic significance for all of Creation for all of time! They are a collective event that requires ALL human beings, regardless of time, place or ethnicity, to make a choice about how they will respond which will affect them for all eternity. Anyway who confronts this event WILL, as a result, find themselves either compelled closer to a personal relationship with the One Triune God or repelled from the same.

The Passion is not just about Jesus, His disciples, or the people living in Jerusalem 2,000 years ago. It is every bit as much about you and I here today. That can be an easy thing to say, but a difficult thing to truly comprehend and feel. This year, our focus for the Passion Season will be to help all of us do just this marvelous thing.

What if, literally, you or I had been there first-hand, up-close and personal? Would it change our understanding? Perspective? Convictions? Priorities? Lives?

To more deeply explore these essential questions, we must acknowledge that, just as there were different groups of people historically present at the Passion with different perspectives on all that transpired, so we are comprised of different groups of people with different perspectives. This morning, we will focus on what it must have been like to be a bystander – a part of the common crowd – during this monumental week. In the weeks ahead, we will re-examine the same events from the perspective of a disciple, the penitent thief, and finally Jesus Himself.

PRAYER

I.) A **TRIUMPHAL WELCOME?**

Mt. 21:1-17; Mk. 11:1-11; Lk. 19:28-48; Jn. 12:12-19

A.) An **Odd Request**

- Imagine yourself a common blue-collar person living in a modest village outside the great city. On one seemingly average day, two strangers – wandering, homeless vagabonds – walk onto your property, straight to your young donkey who is just about ready to be put to work, and then begin to untie it.
- Perhaps with Scythe or pitchfork in hand, you run over and demand to know “What do you think you're doing?” These wackos respond with an air of authority and the words of a royal levy (the right of a king to require his subjects to give any item or service requested), demanding: “*It's Lord is in need.*”
- **Now, how do YOU respond? . . .**

- This man willingly gave them his donkey, which he had been saving and maturing all this time and before he himself even had a chance to use or benefit from it.
- *Why did Jesus even need such a donkey anyway?* To take the next step in His journey, properly fulfilling the mission God the Father entrusted Him with.
- **What should we learn from this?:** ALL of us have a 'donkey' that our Lord Jesus will one day, unexpectedly, ask us to give him. It probably won't be a literal 'donkey', but it will be something that we have greatly invested in and value. It will be something that might seem a strange request, but it is a greatly important one nevertheless.
- **Psalm 24:1** *The earth and everything in it, the world and its inhabitants, belong to the LORD;*

B.) A **Confused** Reception

- As Jesus, riding His new donkey, enters Jerusalem He is met with three different responses from three different groups.
- Those crowds who had previously heard His teachings and witnessed His miracles with their own eyes and ears ran ahead to welcome Him as the Messiah-King who is coming to physically and politically overthrow the Romans and establish His authority and reign over all the earth.
- Some of the Pharisees demand that Jesus reject the pomp and circumstance and, ultimately, the Messianic expectations.
- The real bystanders, the citizens of the city who likely heard of but never before personally encountered Jesus, however, responded with confusion and fear. **Mt. 21:10-11**
- **With which group to you think you would most identify? . . .**

C.) A Captivating **Tantrum**

- So, there you are checking out this man many call a Prophet and even Messiah. You have observed His entrance into the city, His appearance (disappointingly common and ordinary) and the reactions of the different people. *Now, what will He do? What will be His first significant words? Where will He go first?*
- Of course, to the Temple complex. Surely, He must be going to offer sacrifices to God in order that He Himself may be cleansed. I wonder, for one who looks some common and yet is proclaimed by many to be the Messianic King, what sacrifice will He offer? It must be an extraordinary and impressive one, not just a lame dove like most people. Yet, I don't see any worthy sacrifices amongst His entourage. Perhaps, then, He will first go to the Temple market and there buy something. Perhaps, the best most unblemished bull they have?
- Wait, what's going on now? He's not buying a sacrifice, He's throwing a 'holy hissy fit' on all of the sellers. What's He doing? Wow, now He's not only screaming at them, but whipping them as if they're trespassers and thieves! Not only that, He's violently overturning all their tables and booths and releasing their sacrificial animals! Look at them run!
- What is that He keeps saying? ***"It is written, My house will be a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of thieves!"***
- *WHO, really, is this man and what is He trying to do? Why is He attacking those providing sacrificial animals instead of going after the Romans?* THIS is going to make a lot of people very unhappy. There goes His popularity, there goes His Kingdom 'election'!

II.) A PUBLIC **SENTENCING**

Mt. 27:15-31; Mk. 15:6-20; Lk. 23:13-25; Jn. 18:28-19:16

- A couple days pass while rumors and verbal news flashes are spreading throughout the city like wildfire!
- One of Jesus' own disciples, in fact His trusted treasurer, has turned Him over to the Sanhedrin as a blasphemer and rebel. The Sanhedrin held an unusual (many say illegal) midnight trial and convicted Him of blasphemy, then turned Him over to the Romans for permission to sentence Him to death. At first, it seems Pilate doesn't care about Jewish law or squabbles, but then the Sanhedrin say Jesus was planning a violent insurrection and even planning on overthrowing Caesar and declaring Himself King over the whole world. Pilate was still skeptical, but this was something that just couldn't be ignored, especially in light of the fact he was already on thin ice with his superiors. Next, Pilate tried to 'pawn' the whole thing off on Herod, but Herod just sent Him right back. Now, it's been announced that Pilate will publicly present this case before the public at his annual Passover Festival address and clemency. Word is that Pilate must be planning on dodging this one by giving Jesus the Festival Clemency.
- Wow, this place is packed – everybody is participating and paying attention this year! And, oh yeah, everybody has an opinion too!
- **Mt. 27:15-18**
- I can't believe it! Pilate is actually giving us a choice which includes Barabbas? Sure, he's a mean, nasty dude who I'd never want for a neighbor but at least he understands that the way to overthrow the Romans and establish peace and prosperity is on the edge of the sword and not just a bunch of words and magic tricks! Even our religious leaders are making sure everybody knows this. In fact, now they are saying Barabbas is a hero and this Jesus is the dangerous one who'll eat our children.
- I don't know what to think any more. This is all so confusing, but there's no time to think. I must shout my vote or vote for nothing. *What will I do? . . . What will everyone else do? . . .*
- **Mt. 27:20-23**
- Blood lust it is. Now, they not only want the murderous Barabbas free and they want to see this Jesus tortured and executed 'the Roman way'? *Who is responsible for all of this? Am I?*
- **Mt. 27:24-31**

III.) **A SPECTACULAR EXECUTION**

Mt. 27:32-56; Mk. 15:21-41; Lk. 23:26-49; Jn. 19:17-37

- At the foot of Golgotha, the crowds regathered. Not so much for justice, as for an opportunity to feel themselves good and fortunate and, yes, perhaps for entertainment.
- There is much, mostly of the most awful and gruesome sort, that could be described about these proceedings. The blood. The agony. The nakedness and utter humility. The screams. The sweltering sun. The mocking and insulting. The piercing wailing of the grievers – personal and professional. But, that is all normal for a crucifixion.
- What was most memorable and unsettling about this crucifixion, was just how extra-ordinary it was – full of the unexpected and unexplainable! The quiet, accepting, even confident demeanor of this Jesus. The way He simply accepted it all without any fight or protest. His clear dignity even in a most undignified position. The circus-like attention and above-normal mocking and blood lust. The sudden, unexplainable noontime change from sunny and cloudless to utter darkness. The earthquakes. But what stuck out the most were the words.
- **Luke 23:33-34**
- *How could this man ask the Heavenly Father to forgive us, especially those most responsible and most enjoying His crucifixion? . . .*

- *How can He say that they don't know what they are doing? . . .*
- Yet, still, they return His grace with insult!
- **Luke 23:35-37**
- They belittle Him. They question and mock Him. They pour verbal salt into His wounds. They demand that He save Himself and insist on this as the test of His character and truth.
- *Should I join in? Do I? . . .*
- They know, see, and accept so little of who He truly is, that they give not even a moment's thought into the possibilities and consequences if He really is who He says He is! There is no reverence, no fear, and certainly no trembling. In their absence, they turn to the only thing that is left, the only thing they really know – mocking and boasting.
- And so, He breathes His last. But wait, who is that centurion shouting above the wailing? How can he sound so happy and excited at a time like this?
- **Luke 23:47-49**
- *WHO really is this man? What am I truly to believe? How will or should this affect me and my life?*

CONCLUSION: WHAT ABOUT YOU?

Matthew 22:42 *"What do you think about the Messiah? Whose Son is He?"*

Matthew 24:13-14 *But the one who endures to the end will be delivered. This good news of the kingdom will be proclaimed in all the world as a testimony to all nations. And then the end will come.*

Matthew 24:38-42 *For in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah boarded the ark. They didn't know until the flood came and swept them all away. So this is the way the coming of the Son of Man will be: Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and one left. Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and one left. Therefore be alert, since you don't know what day your Lord is coming.*

We ALL have been or are bystanders. There is a singular choice before all of us. **Who is Jesus?** How each of us answers this question will determine our present and eternal futures

In Jesus' first and last sermons, He preached the same message: choose between the easy and obvious path, the popular route, the less demanding journey and reach a God-less existence of eternal misery OR choose the more difficult, less obvious path, the unpopular route, the sacrificial journey and reach a Day of absolute forgiveness, incorruptible transformation, and eternal bliss in the full and permanent Presence of God Almighty. It all depends on how we answer the question that Pilate wouldn't: **Who is Jesus?**

Acts 4:10-12 *let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene--whom you crucified and whom God raised from the dead--by Him this man is standing here before you healthy. This Jesus is The stone despised by you builders, who has become the cornerstone. There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to people by which we must be saved."*