

“Jesus Condemned”

Text: John 19:5 INI Lent Mid-week 6 Wayzata 3/24/10

The word “Condemned” echoes through the centuries for the whole human race. We were condemned when Adam and Eve were condemned. Jesus is condemned and connected one with all humanity. Without what Jesus went through for all of us our lot would continue to be cruelty, misery, and death without hope..

Pilate thought that the spectacle of Jesus beaten and broken by the scourge would set the people’s hearts to bleed for him. He thought the indignities heaped on Jesus, the robe, the crown and the scepter would make the people take pity. Pilate said, “Behold the man.” The people should see the reality of their accusation against him. He was no king, nothing special. He was only a man. Look at him. Did Pilate pity Jesus as he saw him standing there beaten, bloody, bruised?

Some say maybe Pilate had pity on Jesus. Remember Pilate was a pagan, a soldier, a man used to blood, wounds, torture, and the humiliation of the hated enemy. Roman soldiers treated other humans worse than most people treat dogs. He had no pity on Jesus. His words mocked Jesus and the Jews. He wanted them to see how ridiculous Jesus really was. He found nothing wrong with him yet had allowed the savagery on one whom he thought was harmless. Such is the humanity of man without Christ.

Jesus was a man. No one would dispute that. He had been born. People in Galilee who knew his family and their trade had real difficulty believing Jesus. Especially when he told them God called Him as the prophet Isaiah foretold so long ago.

They wanted to take him outside their town and throw him from a hill, stone him for blasphemy. At the time even his own brothers believed he was only a man, flesh and blood, nothing special, a carpenter’s apprentice. How could he make those claims for himself, Son of God, Messiah?

Conventional wisdom believed God would send the Messiah secretly to the Temple in Jerusalem. He would be a conqueror like David. Jerusalem would be his capital and he would rule the world from there. Jesus, the Messiah, impossible!

The Bible Scholars would not believe him either. He didn’t fit the image. He talked of suffering. They could not reconcile that with what they knew of the Messiah.

The Pharisees could not bring themselves to believe it either because he hobnobbed with sinners, prostitutes, publicans. No one could do that and not be tainted by their presence. Besides the Messiah would be righteous and like them have nothing to do with what was unrighteous.

The Political could not bring themselves to see Jesus as the Messiah either. He did not possess the skills necessary to start a kingdom of his own. He did not bring people to the fury of battle. He spoke about love and peace. The teachings that he presented were too radical for some. He spoke about God’s love. They knew God’s wrath. He told them to not seek revenge or to use their strength against the weak, or to despise people of a lower station in life. It just wasn’t natural.

The Jews told Pilate he claims to be the Son of God. Jesus would be condemned by both the Sanhedrin and the people not on some trumped up charge but on the actual facts of his claim.

The Jews said Jesus called himself the Son of God. That astounded Pilate. In his religious world he was no stranger to the idea of the gods coming to earth to cohabit with mortals and thus have offspring that were unusual. Suspicious Pilate wanted to make sure he was not going to anger one of these beings if Jesus really were one.

None in the pagan world or outside the revelation of Scripture could ever guess that God would have a real Son who would be both true God and true man. Even if Pilate caught the faintest glimpse of the reality of Jesus he did nothing about it. He asks only the sarcastic question: "What is truth?" One that our day asks too.

We live in an existentialist world where truth is different for every person. This discounts the Lord who fashions absolute truth and absolute love showing them to all in His one and only Son Jesus.

The Israelites often confessed the truth of God's sovereignty over the created world. There was no other God than the Lord. He was real and what he said was real. He was a God whose relationship to his covenant people was one of forgiveness and restoration. His love was shown in every act of deliverance in the Old Testament.

Now in Jesus his love is even more clearly shown. God's absolute wrath over disobedience to his word is absorbed by his one and only Son. If we miss this point in Jesus then we stagger around like Pilate wondering if there really is something greater and if it really cares.

God loves the very creature that earned his wrath by disobedience, rebellion, and unrighteousness. That concept makes demands of conscience, obligations of love, commits us to service.

If God can so love us then we ought also to be able to love each other and so loose the energy and impetus of cruelty and misery that one person inflicts on another, or one group inflicts on another.

We are reminded over and over of our own sin. We have been called and cleansed by God to higher life than what it was before. Being told of our sin, specifically, should not inflame us but lead us to repentance. Seeing Jesus in the condition he was in inflamed the crowd to demand his blood. Others have died pitiable and senseless deaths because of the cause they espoused. Jesus died for no cause. He died a substitute for the whole human race.

One newly made Christian in China was asked what it felt like to be a Christian. He said it felt like two dogs fighting within him. When he was asked which one was winning he said, 'The one I feed the most.' It is true with us too. In Jesus death we are spared. In his suffering we are made noble and our deeds noble. In his willingness to have this happen to him we are given willing hearts to serve him.

No other week in all the world was as important to humanity as Holy Week. Not even the week of creation. God has a right to be angry over sin. He also has the right to punish sin. Eternal punishment does not negate the fact of a loving God. His love and his care are shown in who ends up receiving the brunt of his anger and who ends up being punished, God himself. Not some mere human being, but Jesus who is both God and man.

Pilate says behold the man. It means to look at God who is man so beaten and bloodied because of my sin and ready to be crucified in my place just so I could go scot free, never having to pay the price. What do you see in Jesus when the words are said: "Behold the man?"

Are we sorry that Jesus had to be put through that for us? Do we ask why there wasn't there another way? There are so many different ways to look at it. We need to look with eyes of faith. See Jesus bleeding and beaten, bruised and broken as we have so often been by Satan, the world and our own flesh. Jesus went through death for us and rose. We have the chance of new life. Let Pilate show us Jesus and tell us Behold the man. Let us see him in faith as he who reigns in our hearts with love, who calls us to repent, and who forgives us freely. He was condemned so we never would be. Amen.