



Grace Christian Church, LeRoy MN, Palm Sunday 2010

#5 The Darkest Day in All of History

Texts: Mark 11:1-11, 15:25-38, John 19:38-42

1- Palm Sunday - the events leading up to defeat at the great battle with evil did not predict how terrible it turned out to be.

- Mark was the first to give a brief summary of Palm Sunday (*Mark 11*) and that was cited by both Matthew and Luke in their gospels.
- The joyful, even triumphal, entry by Jesus into Jerusalem late in the day, was NOT the important event of that week.
- Christians celebrate it, however, NOT because it was the beginning of the end.
Instead we celebrate because it was the end of the beginning.
- The main purpose of Jesus WAS the death, burial, resurrection.
- All his 3 years of ministry were preparation.

2- Jesus' final hours on the cross (*Mark 15*)

- humiliating and scornful sign above him... "the king of the Jews"
- hung between two notorious robbers, public enemies of both Jewish citizens and Romans
- rowdy crowd hurling insults... "you said you'd destroy the temple and rebuild it in 3 days, so come down from the cross and save yourself."
- chief priests and rabbis watched and mocked among themselves, "he thinks he can save others, let him save himself first. Let this Messiah show us is King of Israel and come down from the cross and we will believe also."
- soldiers on the execution team joined in the insults, too.
- And there was certainly Jesus' own suffering as a totally innocent man. "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" he said and struggled for his very last breath.
- So terrible was this event there was both a total eclipse of the sun and an earthquake strong enough to damaged the temple, ripping the thick curtain that separated the two inner chambers. (*John 19*)

None of us who follow Him must ever forget what terrible things happened

that day. Some criticized the brutality of Mel Gibson's film, but I think he was right to graphically remind every viewer what the whole story was.

- 3- In the midst of that crisis you'd never suspect who some of the brave people were who stepped forward. *Mark 15:40-47 & John 19:38-42*
- 2 Marys - Magdalene & Jesus' mother were daring enough to follow and see the grave where he was hastily taken.
 - Joseph of Arimathea - a member of the Sanhedrin who condemned him took a huge risk by asking Pilate for the rights to bury Jesus.
 - Only John tells us, many years later, that Nicodemus was also there. (chap 3 - He secretly came to Jesus and engaged in deep discussions with Jesus. He struggled with the idea of new birth and we are not told there how he responded. Now we know.)
 - Others had been at the cross, Mary the mother of James, Mary Jesus' mother and John were also close enough to see everything and hear Jesus speak. A number of others were further away. Except for John, we do not read of any other one of the twelve.

But, no matter how dark the night, daylight comes at last. (My own personal example is one summer working in ND to get money for the next year at college. I was just starting a job in the gravel pits and the first night I had no money. So I slept in a farm implement yard in Oakes, ND. Finally the night ended with the relief of the warmth of the morning sun. At last a very bleak night for me was ended.)

Jesus did not remain in a grave. But we are getting ahead of today's story, let's get back to the day Jesus died.

- 4- Late that Friday afternoon, was the saddest moment in the lives of those who loved Jesus, their darkest hour. THEY were shattered...
- All the things they imagined would happen... would not come true.
 - The friend whose whole being far surpassed all others... was gone.
 - Like multitudes since, their personal despair finally led them to "let go" and "let God."
 - Nothing is more important than letting go.
 - Example of Charles Colson back in 1973 when Pres Nixon's chief lawyer was convicted and went to prison. He tells what happened in his book, *Loving God*, (Zondervan, 1983) p. 247-248.

Hymn: The Old Rugged Cross - If it hasn't yet changed you to very core of your soul, let go and let God.

20 years ago I became aware of an amazing group of psychologists, physicians, and others who do neurofeedback to help all kinds of people improve their health, their relationships, their moods. One of the most successful of them used simple phrases when he recognized a client's EEG was going into tight, rigid, holding on, fear patterns. He would just tell them, LET GO. And their brains did relax, they 'let go', their EEGs showed it and they got better.

Did you hear that...? LET GO. LET GO. LET GOD.

Charles Colson tells of his conversion in one of his early books, *"Loving God"* Zondervan, 1983, pp. 247-248. As the Watergate scandal was crashing down on him and others, he had a discussion in the driveway of an aid who pointed out that he found peace because he had accepted Jesus Christ. Colson surely did not have peace, he did not even realize he was "dead" inside and actually was searching spiritually. Since he was the top partner of the top law firm in Washington DC, he could not let on to that man. But when he got to his car the tears came gushing so fast he could not even see to put the key in the ignition. That was the night Charles Colson gave his life over to the Lord. Ten years later Colson said of this experience, "the years before my conversion were death, the years since have been life and the adventure of loving God, the purpose of that life. With each passing day, my gratitude to God for what he did for me -- at Calvary and that night in my friend's driveway -- grows deeper and deeper." --Colson, Charles, *"Loving God"* Zondervan, 1983, pp. 247-248.

He wrote that 27 years ago, just 10 years after Watergate and the imprisonment his misdeeds brought him. Today Charles Colson is a warrior for Christ. There are many thousands of prisoners whose lives have been lifted up by Prison Fellowship that he helped start.

It is just for countless situations like his and in the lives of all kinds of people that the darkest day of history caused the brightest days of their lives for B I L L I O N S of believers for nearly 2000 years, now.