

Text: Mark 15:1-47 A Palm Sunday 4/10/22 Psalm 146 Responsive Psalm: 24
 Hymns: 162, 725, 172 (1, 4, 6, 8), 724

THE SON OF GOD DIED ON THE CROSS FOR OUR SINS

Dear fellow believers in Christ,

Of all the forms of torture and execution conceived by the human race, among the cruelest is crucifixion. So why do we Christians wear crosses as jewelry, and have crosses on our altars and in and around our churches? What message are we giving to the nations of the world by glorifying the cross?

Our text begins, *“The chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole Council. And they bound Jesus and led Him away and delivered Him over to Pilate.”* Why was Jesus Christ put on trial, condemned, and executed? What had He done that His enemies hated Him so much? The Jews accused Him before the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, of telling them not to pay taxes to the Roman government. But Jesus had said, *“Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s”* (Mt. 22:21). The Jews also misrepresented Jesus’ claim to be their king, trying to make Pilate think that Jesus was leading a revolt against him. But Pilate told them, *“You brought me this man as one who was inciting the people to rebellion. I have examined Him in your presence and have found no basis for your charges against Him.”* There were other accusations the Jewish leaders made against Jesus. But Pilate could see that they weren’t true, and he told them so more than once.

In John’s Gospel we read that Jesus told Pilate, *“My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, My servants would fight to prevent My arrest by the Jews. But now My kingdom is from another place.”* *‘You are a king, then!’ Pilate said. Jesus answered, ‘You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to Me’*” (Jn. 18:36-37). Whenever lies were told about Jesus during His trials, He didn’t say anything. The lies were obvious, and He let them speak for themselves. But when Jesus was asked to tell the truth about Himself, He did. Luke tells us that when Jesus was on trial before the Jewish Council, He was asked point blank, *“Are You the Son of God?”* He answered, *“Yes, I am”* (Lk. 22:70). Jesus Christ is our Heavenly King, the Messiah God had promised to send through the Jewish race. Jesus died on the cross as the Savior of the world.

O sacred Head, now wounded
 With grief and shame weighed down,
 Now scornfully surrounded
 With thorns, Thine only crown.
 O sacred Head, what glory,
 What bliss, till now was Thine!
 Yet, though despised and gory,
 I joy to call Thee mine. (TLH #172:1)

Before our text, Mark tells us that while on trial before the Jews, *“The chief priests and the whole Council kept trying to obtain testimony against Jesus to put Him to death; and they were finding none. For many were giving false testimony against Him, and yet their testimony did not agree”* (14:55-56). Later, Jesus was crucified along with two criminals. One of them said to the other, *“We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve.”* Referring to Jesus, he added, *“But this man has done nothing wrong.”* God had commanded His Old Testament people that when they brought animals to sacrifice to Him, the animals were to be without any defect. This was a picture of the innocent, sinless Son of God who sacrificed Himself on the cross. The seventh chapter of Hebrews says that Jesus is *“holy, innocent, undefiled, separate from sinners”* (v. 26). Peter tells us, *“You were ... redeemed ... with precious blood, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot, the blood of Christ”* (1 Pet. 1:18-19).

Since Jesus was innocent, why did He have to die on the cross? Paul says, *“[God] made [Christ] who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him”* – 2 Corinthians 5:21. We are the guilty ones. God transferred all of our sins to Jesus. Bearing the sins of every person who will ever live, Jesus was punished in our place. Looking ahead to Christ’s suffering and death on the cross, Isaiah had prophesied about Him, *“Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all”* (53:4-6). Jesus died on the cross for our sins.

My burden in Thy Passion,
 Lord, Thou hast borne for me,
 For it was my transgression
 Which brought this woe on Thee.
 I cast me down before Thee,
 Wrath were my rightful lot;
 Have mercy, I implore Thee;
 Redeemer, spurn me not! (TLH #172:4)

When on trial before the Jews and Pilate and Herod, Jesus could have easily defended Himself and proved His innocence. But He didn’t even try. Jesus could have more than satisfied Herod’s curiosity about Him and performed great miracles in Herod’s presence, proving He is God. But Jesus did and said nothing. During Jesus’ crucifixion, many challenged Him to prove He is the Son of God by coming down from the cross. He could have done it, and shown them all. But Jesus proved He is the Son of God by staying on the cross. The Bible says that *“the wages of sin is death”* (Ro. 6:23). If Jesus hadn’t died on the cross for our sins, you and I and all people would have to be punished for our sins forever in hell. Hebrews 12:2 says that *“Jesus ... for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising”* (*“thinking lightly of”*) *“its shame.”* The joy of our salvation is what made Jesus willing to suffer and die for us.

Jesus cried out on the cross, *“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”* When Jesus was whipped, it literally tore flesh off His back and beat Him half to death. During His various ‘trials,’ the Jewish leaders weren’t interested at all in determining the truth about Him or seeing

that justice was done. Their only purpose was to find a legal way to kill Him. Pontius Pilate was the Roman authority. He knew that Jesus was an innocent man. Pilate could have set Jesus free. But he was afraid of trouble from the Jewish leaders, so he let them take Jesus away for execution. So many lies were told about Jesus, and so many cruel and unfair and blasphemous things were said and done to Him. The crucifixion itself was a horrible way to die, usually taking days for the heart and lungs to slowly, agonizingly fail. As terrible as Jesus' physical suffering and death were, if all you and I do is feel sorry for Him, we're missing the whole point of what He did. We need to be sorry for our sins that made it necessary for Jesus' suffering and death. Because Jesus was forsaken by His Father for our sins while He was on the cross, God will never forsake us for our sins.

There were two criminals crucified along with Jesus. Luke tells us that one of them admitted to the other that they had lived such bad lives that they deserved to be put to death. Yet he had heard about Jesus. He had been observing Jesus, and he had heard Jesus ask His Father to forgive even His enemies. The criminal pleaded, "*Jesus, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.*" He was confessing his sinfulness to Jesus, and asking Jesus to forgive him and save him. Jesus died for his sins, too, and Jesus forgave him and promised to take him to heaven that very day. (Lk. 23:41-43) Jesus promises us, "*Truly, I say to you, whoever believes in Me has everlasting life*" (Jn. 6:47).

We're told that just as Jesus died, "*The curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.*" That curtain was sixty feet long, thirty feet high, and about an inch thick! Tearing such a curtain completely in half was no accident! The curtain separated the Most Holy Place in the temple from the rest of the temple. The curtain represented the separation between sinful mankind and the holy God. Once Jesus died on the cross, He took our sins away and removed the separation between God and us. The tearing of the curtain, which was a terrible shock to the Jews, has wonderful meaning to us believers. "*Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, ... Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need*" – Hebrews 4:14, 16.

We're told, "*When the centurion, who stood facing Him, saw that in this way He breathed His last, he said, 'Truly this man was the Son of God!'*" "*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life*" (Jn. 3:16). God loves the whole world so much that He sent His only Son, Jesus Christ, to die for our sins on the cross. Everyone who believes in Jesus has his sins forgiven, and is going to heaven to live with Jesus forever.

"*There were also women looking on from a distance, among whom were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. When [Jesus] was in Galilee, they followed Him and ministered to Him.*" These women had been followers of Jesus from the beginning. They had helped to care for His needs and, no doubt, for the needs of the disciples as well. While the women didn't fully understand everything yet, they loved Jesus and believed in Him as the Messiah. They had walked out of Jerusalem to Calvary to be near Jesus as He died.

“Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the Council, who was also himself looking for the kingdom of God, took courage and went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. ... And Joseph bought a linen shroud, and taking Him down, wrapped Him in the linen shroud and laid Him in a tomb that had been cut out of the rock. And he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb.”

Most of the Jewish religious leaders hated Jesus. By God’s grace, Joseph of Arimathea was a happy exception. He believed in Jesus as the promised Messiah. The Son of God was crucified as a terrible criminal, but Joseph made sure Jesus received the honorable burial He deserved. For openly demonstrating his faith in Jesus, Joseph almost certainly ended up being cast out of the Jewish Council and of the synagogue and temple worship and from Jewish society altogether. But Jesus had suffered and died for his salvation, and this was the greatest treasure in all the world to Joseph.

We Christians have every reason to glorify the cross! It was on the cross that **THE SON OF GOD DIED FOR OUR SINS.**

What language shall I borrow
To thank Thee, dearest Friend,
For this, Thy dying sorrow,
Thy pity without end?
Oh, make me Thine forever!
And should I fainting be,
Lord, let me never, never,
Outlive my love for Thee. (TLH #172:8) Amen.