

Expectations. The very word brings to mind that which is positive and negative. We become happy or peaceful when our expectations are met and we become angry or fearful when they are not. In his book *Instruments in the Redeemers Hands*, Paul Tripp writes about how our *expectations* are born when he points out that the Bible tells *our sin struggles begins with the desires of our heart*. While “the objects of most of our desires are not evil . . . the problem is the way they tend to grow, and the control they come to exercise over our hearts. Desires are part of human existence, but they must be held with an open hand. All human desire must be held in submission to a greater purpose, the desire of God for his kingdom. This is what Christ expressed in the Garden of Gethsemane when he cried, ‘*Not my will, but yours be done*’” (Luke 22:42). The problem with desire, Tripp says, “is that in sinners it very quickly morphs into demand” and “demand quickly morphs into need” and “need inevitably produces *expectation*.” And while fulfilled expectation produces happiness, unmet *expectation* “quickly leads to disappointment” which Tripp then tells us “leads to some form of punishment” (pages 85-88).

This is the context we step into today. Last week we followed Jesus as he was questioned by Pontus Pilate; and flogged, beaten and dressed as a king by Roman soldiers; then found guilty for claiming to be God by an angry crowd of Jews – the very same crowd who just a few days before “*took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, crying out, ‘Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!’*” (John 12:13). Jesus had not met the expectations of Pilate, the chief priests or the crowd, who then shouted: “*Crucify him, crucify him! . . . Away with him, away with him, crucify him!*” (John 19:6, 15). John 19:16a: “*So he (Pilate) delivered him over to them to be crucified.*” This is not something Jesus’ disciples had *expected* to happen; so they had deserted him when he was arrested. We, who know what happens next, do not *expect* Jesus will escape being nailed to death on a cross.

Of the four gospel writers, it is believed that John was the only eye-witness of Jesus’ crucifixion; in John 19:35 he writes: “*He who saw it has borne witness—his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth—that you also may believe.*” And while each gospel writer each adds their own insight into what took place when Jesus was crucified, John omits much of what they recorded. In knowing that we should understand the events of that day were *more than historical*, John records the event as we know it in the Apostle’s Creed: “He was crucified, dead, and buried.” Jesus’ crucifixion, death and burial continued to fulfill John’s purpose in writing his gospel, which we read of in John 20:30-31: “*Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*” John first tells us we will have life in Jesus when we believe he was *crucified*.

So they took Jesus, and he went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called The Place of a Skull, which in Aramaic is called Golgotha. There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, and Jesus between them. Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It read, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.” Many of the Jews read this inscription, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and it was written in Aramaic, in Latin, and in Greek. So the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, “Do not write, ‘The King of the Jews,’ but rather, ‘This man said, I am King of the Jews.’” Pilate answered, “What I have written I have written.” When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his garments and divided them into four parts, one part for each soldier; also his tunic. But the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom, so they said to one another, “Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be.” This was to fulfill the Scripture which says, “They divided my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.” So the soldiers did these things, but standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, “Woman, behold, your son!” Then he said to the disciple, “Behold, your mother!” And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home. John 19:16-27

After Pilate pronounces the death sentence for Jesus, John takes us from the judgment seat of Pilate to the “*Place of the Skull*” (*Golgotha* in the Aramaic) to be crucified. Crucifixion – being nailed to a cross through the hands and feet and left to die - was the cruelest form of execution devised by man, a mode of capital punishment that was reserved for the lowest kind of criminals, particularly those who promoted insurrection. Today, we think of the cross as a symbol of glory and victory; but in Jesus’ day, the cross was a symbol of the most dishonourable kind of rejection, shame, suffering, and death. It was customary for the criminal to carry his cross, or at least the crossbeam, from the place of judgment to the place of execution. As Jesus began the mile-long walk of carrying his cross, Mark’s gospel tells us that at some point he needed help and was relieved by Simon of Cyrene whom the Roman soldiers coerced to carry Jesus’ cross. Scripture is silent as to why Jesus needed help.

When Jesus finally arrived at “*Golgotha*” John does not belabor the process of crucifixion, but simply says: “*There they crucified him.*” We read that he was crucified with “*two others, one on either side, and Jesus between them.*” It is significant that Jesus was placed in the center. Surely he was the focus of this event, as everyone seemed to know, and as those who passed by could see for themselves. Since it was also required that the cross of a criminal’s being crucified bear a sign declaring their crime, Pilate himself wrote one for Jesus, which said: “*Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.*” John tells us the Jews protested the title, but Pilate refused to change it – and because of his deep hatred for the Jews he took an additional thrust against them and wrote it out in Aramaic (Hebrew), Latin and Greek, so that everyone from every nation who passed by for the Passover would see and understand it - for Aramaic (Hebrew) was the language of religion, Greek of philosophy, and Latin of law; and *all* three combined to crucify the Son of God. Romans 3:23 tells us “*for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*”

While executions today are usually carried out in almost clinical privacy, Jesus was nailed to a cross and hung up for everyone to see. During the Passover thousands of visitors would be in Jerusalem and Golgotha was on the main road just outside the city where many would pass by. At this point Jesus would have been a well-known figure to some degree, and so many would have naturally gathered and watch Jesus’ crucifixion. Soldiers were always present at this time, both to carry out the crucifixion and to stand guard against any intervention. At most Roman executions, a centurion would have been assigned with four soldiers to assist him. Again, there may have been more because of Jesus’ notoriety. John focuses on the four soldiers. They appear to be oblivious to the suffering of Jesus and the other two men hanging on their crosses. According to Luke 23:36, the soldiers joined in with the others who mocked Jesus, virtually daring him to come down from the cross to save himself. John focuses instead on how the soldiers divided up Jesus’ clothing and they “*cast lots*” (gambled) for Jesus “*tunic*” which could not be divided into four because it “*was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom.*” Lest we be too quick to judge these soldiers, we must keep in mind that we all often ignore our true need of the cross of Christ in our lives in lieu of what we might gain in this world. Jesus sacrificed his life on a cross so we might know forgiveness and eternal life rather than the gain and prosperity of this life.

At this point John gives a picture of Jesus hanging naked on a cross, bearing the punishment for our sin. What a contrast to when humanity was created by God in the image of God and He said it was all “*very good*” (Genesis 1:26-31). But after mankind rebelled and sinned against God, all was not good. After sin, the God-created nakedness of men and women was no longer good, but shameful. Sin is why we see Jesus beaten, bloody, forsaken, naked, hanging on a cross. In Psalm 22:16-18, King David wrote of our Lord’s thoughts on that day: “*For dogs encompass me; a company of evildoers encircles me; they have pierced my hands and feet—I can count all my bones—they stare and gloat over me; they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.*” It is no wonder that Matthew (Matthew 27:46) and Mark (Mark 15:34) would record that Jesus would ultimately cry out the words of the first verse of this Psalm as he hung on the cross: “*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*” (Psalm 22:1). Jesus bore the shameful curse of our sinful nakedness, so that we might be clothed in his righteousness.

But even at this moment of deep shame and pain and forsakenness – we see God’s love for us. Hanging naked on the cross we see Jesus making arrangements for the care of his mother. In stark contrast to the four dice-rolling soldiers, John tells us there are four women who are dedicated to following Jesus – even to the cross. John specifies their names: Mary, the mother of Jesus; his mother’s sister (Salome, the mother of James and John); Mary, the wife of Clopas; and Mary Magdalene. As they courageously stood with Christ in the midst of hatred and ridicule, we read: *“When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, ‘Woman, behold, your son!’ Then he said to the disciple, ‘Behold, your mother!’ And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.”* As we have seen before *“the disciple whom he (Jesus) loved”* was John himself. Most assuredly Jesus assigned John to care for his mother because he was the one closest to the heart of our Lord - and most likely because in John 20:8 we read that John was the first disciple to believe that Jesus rose from the dead. We read that John does take Mary home and adopt her as his mother, and we do know that he cared for her as Acts 1:14 tells us that she was among the first believers in the risen Christ who prayerfully waited in the Upper Room for the coming of the Holy Spirit. And after Pentecost, those who believed Jesus had been *crucified* and had then had risen from the dead received eternal life. After Jesus was crucified, he suffered on the cross and then he died. We will also have life in Jesus when we believe that Jesus *died*.

After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), "I thirst." A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, "It is finished," and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.
John 19:28-30

Here again we see the sovereignty of God in Jesus Christ. In being God, Jesus was fully in control over everything that was happening to him – even as he was crucified and hung on a cross: *“Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), "I thirst.”* Of all the gospels John’s Gospel most emphatically underscores the fulfillment of prophecy in the events surrounding our Jesus death. Three times in our text for today (verses 24, 36 and 37) John specifically informs us that prophecy has been fulfilled. The cross had been God’s plan and purpose from the beginning, and everything – both good and evil – were at work fulfilling God’s plan and purpose. And when he said: *“It is finished”* Jesus was proclaiming that he had fulfilled – *“finished”* – God’s plan and purpose. The word Jesus used here for *“finished”* (*telēō* in the Greek) means “to bring to an end, to close, to execute, to complete, to fulfil.” In other words: “It is finished, it stands finished, and it always will be finished!” The phrase *“It is finished”* was a common phrase in Jesus’ day. A servant when completing a task for their master, an artist when completing a picture, a writer when finishing a manuscript would all say: “It is finished!” Perhaps the most meaningful use of the phrase was when it was used by merchants when a debt was paid in full - *“It is finished!”* When Jesus sacrificed his life on the cross, he fully met the righteous demands of God’s holy law. Jesus death paid for the debt of our sin in full so we might know the fullness of life in God. We even see this in the *“sour wine on a hyssop branch”* that was held up to Jesus’ mouth, as hyssop was used to spread the blood of the sacrificial Passover Lamb to protect God’s people from death: *“Take a bunch of hyssop and dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and touch the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood that is in the basin. None of you shall go out of the door of his house until the morning”* (Exodus 12:22). Jesus’ death is the finished work of the Passover Lamb. All throughout the gospel of John we have seen Jesus at work toward fulfilling that purpose – from the creation of the world to his baptism to performing wondrous miracles until our text for this morning when Jesus proclaimed: *“It is finished.”* In John 10:14-18 Jesus said: *“I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.”*

Jesus gave up his life on the cross; it was not taken from him. The death of Christ is a major theme in the Gospel of John, as a number of pictures point towards his death: the slaying of the lamb (John 1:29); the destroying of the temple (John 2:19); the lifting up of the serpent (John 3:14); the shepherd laying down his life for the sheep (John 10:11–18); and the planting of the seed in the ground (John 12:20–25). Clearly Jesus' death was a divine appointment. He was not murdered; he willingly gave his life for us so we might know forgiveness and redemption and a new life through him. Jesus' death "*finished*" that plan and purpose. We will have life in Jesus when we believe he was crucified and died. John now tells us that finished work of Christ is not only that he was crucified, dead, but also *buried*.

Since it was the day of Preparation, and so that the bodies would not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken and that they might be taken away. So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first, and of the other who had been crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water. He who saw it has borne witness—his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth—that you also may believe. For these things took place that the Scripture might be fulfilled: "Not one of his bones will be broken." And again another Scripture says, "They will look on him whom they have pierced." After these things Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus, and Pilate gave him permission. So he came and took away his body. Nicodemus also, who earlier had come to Jesus by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds in weight. So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews. Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. So because of the Jewish day of Preparation, since the tomb was close at hand, they laid Jesus there. John 19:31-42

John chooses not to repeat much of what the other Gospels recorded about what happened after Jesus died. Instead he focuses on how the Jews continue to push things ahead and get Jesus out of the way. Just as they were forced to go through the formalities of a trial and then try to obtain Pilate's cooperation in crucifying of Jesus - they were now under even greater time constraints because this was the day of preparation for Passover, and crucifixions had to be done by evening so they could begin to observe the Sabbath. Normally, death by crucifixion would take much longer, and this was no problem to Rome. While the Romans liked to leave the bodies of those crucified exposed for some time, to serve as a warning to all – Jewish law would not allow these bodies to remain exposed after nightfall. The men would have to die more quickly than normal so that their bodies could be taken down and so the Jews convinced Pilate to speed up the process. And as the soldiers went out to carry out Pilate's orders to break the legs of those who were crucified, so they could no longer hold themselves up and stay alive - notice that they followed Pilate's orders when it came to the two men who were crucified with Jesus. But when it came to Jesus the Roman soldiers did not do what they were commanded to do (break the victims' legs) but they did do what they were not commanded to do (pierce the Saviour's side). In both matters, they fulfilled the Word of God. The bones of the Passover lamb were not to be broken (Exodus 12:46: "*You shall not break any of its bones*"; Psalm 34:20: "*He keeps all his bones; not one of them is broken.*") and the Savior's side was to be pierced (Zechariah 12:10: "*And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced*"; Revelation 1:7: "*Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him.*") When the soldiers were through with their gruesome work "*Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus*" approached Pilate and asked for Jesus' body - and "*Nicodemus. . . who earlier had come to Jesus by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes*" joined Joseph of Arimathea in preparing Jesus' body for burial. So they "*bound*" Jesus' body "*in linen cloths with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews*" they put Jesus' body a new tomb. John 19 ends with Jesus being *crucified, dead, and buried*.

Expectations. The very word brings to mind that which is positive and negative. We become happy or peaceful when our expectations are met and we become angry or fearful when they are not. I suspect all of these emotions were abundantly present on the day Jesus was crucified and then died and was then buried, depending on what your relationship with Jesus was like. Those who hated him were glad, those who loved him were sad. But the cross is more just about emotions. The cross is about truth - the truth that Jesus is God, the Son of God, the Creator of the Universe and the Savior of the World, who came to earth so he might sacrifice his life on a cross to pay for our sins, so that in surrendering our hearts and lives to him – he would forgive our sins and transform our hearts and redeem our lives and restore our souls back into the relationship with God that we were created for. And who wouldn't want that? I am sure Peter wanted that; he boldly declared his allegiance to Jesus, regardless of what may come; in John 13:37 Peter promised Jesus: *"I will lay down my life for you."* Yet when push came to shove, Peter never expected an army of soldiers to show up to arrest Jesus – and after his vain attempt at fighting for Jesus, when faced with the truth of Jesus, he fearfully denied that he ever knew Jesus. But of course where we see fear and failed expectation, God sees His sovereign plan and purpose heading towards glorious fulfillment. But the way getting there is fraught with great fears, countless failed expectations and deadly crosses. Jesus said it would be that way. In Matthew 7:14 he said: *"For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few."*

Luke gives us a picture of that in the life of Peter. In his gospel he shares the story of Peter's claim of untold devotion to Jesus by revealing what Jesus said first: *"Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers."* Peter said to him, *"Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death"* (Luke 22:31-33). And of course before the rooster crowed, Peter would deny Jesus three times – and not long after Jesus was crucified, dead and buried. Though we don't know where Peter was during this time, he knew what happened. And we know from Peter's reaction later on that because of Jesus was crucified, dead and buried Peter had learned by experience what good intentions are really worth. He had been sifted by his sin and his faith had failed him, but he would turn again to the One who was crucified, dead and buried because the truth is we all desperately need Jesus. Sin is a cancer of the soul that infects every fiber of our being. Because sin separated us from God, we are hopelessly and desperately lost on our own. This is the cry we hear from the apostle Paul in Romans 7. As he tries to explain how deeply his thoughts and behaviors were affected by his sin, he just finally concludes by saying: *"Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?"* (Roman 7:24). And it's in the next verse that Paul ultimately reveals who was crucified, dead and buried to deliver us from our cancer of sin: *"Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!"* (Romans 7:25).

"It is finished!" Because the sovereign plan and purpose of God is *"finished"* Jesus promised us that when we follow him *we will know* joy and hope when we reach the end of our lives – and *we can know* joy and hope in the midst of the pain and struggle of unmet expectations of everyday life. Because we have *"all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"* (Romans 3:23) we all will fall short of God's expectations almost all of the time. Sometimes we are clearly and uncomfortably aware of that - and most times we are vaguely and deliberately not aware of it because we tend to lean towards Peter's bravado when it comes to our sin. It's hard to stop sinning; the apostle Paul would say it's impossible and most of us would just prefer not to think about it. But when the time of the sifting of our sin comes and when our faith begins to fail, we are always awakened again to our desperate need for God. On the other hand, when we do try our best to stop sinning, we become ever so more aware of how big are the rocks and the roots of our sin that lie in the depths of our souls. I am reminded of this every time I have to dig a hole in our yard to plant a bush or tree; it seems to take me forever because I always have to chop through roots or dig up rocks that are in my way. And the deeper I go, the bigger the rocks and roots – so much so that sometimes I just have to start all over someplace else. Our yard hard is a ground with a lot of rocks and roots – but you'd never know it by how green the grass is on top.

In a spiritual sense, this is just like us. Because we are sinners, our souls are hardened with the rocks and roots of iniquity – even if the surface of our lives full of lush green grass. But even in the best of lawns, you always have to fight the weeds. This is why Jesus speaks of our need for salvation in such vivid and drastic terms. The image is always somewhat like being in a boat helplessly adrift heading downstream towards a waterfall. God is serious about sin. He hates sin; He condemns and punishes and pours His wrath out on sin. And the cross is a great revealer of that truth. The cross is the measure of the magnitude of our sin. When we read of what took place at the cross, we should tremble at the way men mocked Jesus, knowing that had we been alive then, we would most likely have joined them, apart from the grace of God. The cross reveals to us the wickedness of our sin – and that’s why a cross was required to remove our sin. If the price of the removal is also the measure of the magnitude, sin is a horrible condition. While the cross is the measure of God’s hatred of sin it is also the measure of God’s mercy, grace and love poured out on those whom God chooses by the faith He gives them.

While the cross is horrific, it is also wondrous and beautiful for those who surrender their hearts and lives to Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. The first Sunday of every month we gather to celebrate the Lord’s Supper, the sacrifice that Jesus made on our behalf, through broken body and the shedding of his precious blood for the forgiveness of our sins. Those of us who have surrendered our hearts and lives to Jesus Christ should be stirred in our souls every time we read of our Jesus death. In Romans 5:10 the apostle Paul said: *“For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.”* If you are here today and have not yet grasped the fact that the death of Jesus Christ is more than just historical fact – know today that Jesus Christ died on the cross for the full and final payment for the penalty of your sin – and that if you open your heart and give your life to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, you will receive the finished work of the cross of Christ - which is the forgiveness your sins and a transformed heart and a redeemed life and a restored soul, back into the relationship with God that you were created for.

While you and I are responsible for putting Jesus on the cross, the cross is the very place where Jesus freed us from our sin. And so the cross is our only hope. To understand the depth of what that means, we need only look at the crowds who had praisefully followed Jesus into Jerusalem, but not long after who rejected Jesus because he did not meet their expectations. In Matthew 27:24-25 we read that, *“when Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, ‘I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves.’ And all the people answered, ‘His blood be on us and on our children!’”* Thirty years later, on that very spot, judgment was pronounced against some of the best citizens of Jerusalem as 3,600 victims people were flogged and crucified when the city fell to the Romans. History tells us that when Jerusalem fell, the city “space was wanting for the crosses, and crosses for the bodies.” After Jesus was condemned to the cross Judas committed suicide, the house of the ex-high priest Annas was destroyed, the high-priest Caiaphas was deposed, and Pilate removed and took his own life. There is a high price to be paid for the sin. Romans 6:23 tells us: *“For the wages of sin is death.”* But the rest of the verse says: *“but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* Jesus paid the high price – the ultimate price of his life – for death by taking the punishment for our sin on the cross. Jesus was crucified, dead and buried so we might know his forgiveness and his redemption and his restoration when we receive him and embrace him as our Lord and Savior. Our sin struggles begins with the desires of our heart. Because we need Jesus, may he be the greatest desire our hearts. And because Jesus sacrificially loved us, he will always give us much more than we deserve, and abundantly more than could ever expect.

2013-03-24

Pastor Leland Botzet

Arrowsmith Baptist Church