

Vantage Point 1 – Good Friday

Thank you for being here to remember Jesus' sacrifice.

I want us to try to imagine what took place on the day Jesus gave His life. I want us to really SEE the events of the day and the heart of our Lord.

To really SEE we need to be in a good position. A good viewpoint requires a good position. This is what we call a vantage point.

Tonight could we position ourselves to see.

Jesus was taken in the night from the garden of Gethsemane. He was taken prisoner and was the victim of an unjust court that literally broke the law time and again, lied time and again, abused the system time and again, to get a conviction on Jesus the Christ.

While this was going on there was a man in the shadows named Peter. Can we position ourselves to see what Peter saw? From Peter's vantage point we see Jesus, the man that Peter swore his life to protect. Peter swore that he would always follow Jesus as servant and protector. But from Peter's vantage point, Jesus is so far away. Jesus is standing in the spotlight of accusation and Peter is standing in the hidden shadows.

Suddenly Peter realizes he is not hidden enough. He is recognized, once, twice, & a third time. Each time he looked the person in the face who said "don't I know you? Aren't you one of Jesus' followers?"

The man who swore his devotion to Jesus, instead swears curse words at the idea that he had ever met the man. Peter runs off and is nowhere to be found in the rest of tonight's story.

Jesus is taken to the Roman authority Pontius Pilate. Pilate hears the accusation and from his position, he looks at Jesus and declares "I find no fault in this man..." I find no basis for a charge against this man."

Pilate sends Jesus to Herod the Jewish political figure head. Pilate hoped that someone else would take care of this problem. He saw Jesus as an inconvenient problem... and innocent man that for some reason a huge angry crowd wanted dead.

Herod now has Jesus in his eyesight. The Word says...

Luke 23:8-11 When Herod saw Jesus, he was greatly pleased, because for a long time he had been wanting to see him. From what he had heard about him, he hoped to see him perform a sign of some sort. 9 He plied him with many questions, but Jesus gave him no answer.

Herod wanted to see Jesus and here Jesus was. But Herod wanted to see Jesus on his own terms. He wanted to control Jesus and make Jesus do a miracle.

10 The chief priests and the teachers of the law were standing there, vehemently accusing him. 11 Then Herod and his soldiers ridiculed and mocked him. Dressing him in an elegant robe, they sent him back to Pilate.

Jesus is once again Pilate's problem. He offers a solution.

Luke 23:14-16 “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. 15 Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us; as you can see, he has done nothing to deserve death. 16 Therefore, I will punish him and then release him.”

The crowd wanted more than punishment, they wanted blood. The crowd shouted CRUCIFY CRUCIFY CRUCIFY. The crowd demanded that the man that was scheduled to be crucified, a man named Barabbas who was a rebel and a murderer, be set free and that Jesus stand in his place.

Luke 23:22-25 22 For the third time he spoke to them: “Why? What crime has this man committed? I have found in him no grounds for the death penalty. Therefore I will have him punished and then release him.”

23 But with loud shouts they insistently demanded that he be crucified, and their shouts prevailed. 24 So Pilate decided to grant their demand. 25 He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, the one they asked for, and surrendered Jesus to their will.

As Jesus was led away, Pilate saw an innocent lamb being led to the slaughter.

The crowd tried their best to position themselves to see what was about to take place. They wanted to see...

Jesus being shoved around by soldiers.

Jesus being scourged. His back beaten by a whip called the cat of nine tails. Chunks of his skin being sliced and pulled away.

Jesus being forced to carry the cross timber of his cross. It weighed about 80 pounds.

Jesus having been badly beaten was likely having trouble carrying the heavy cross beam. So the Soldiers called a man out of the crowd known as Simon of Cyrene and forced him to carry the cross the rest of the way.

Mark 15:21 A certain man from Cyrene, Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by on his way in from the country, and they forced him to carry the cross.

What must the man named Simon who was just passing by think about Jesus? Being so up-close to Jesus may have revealed something to Simon? The Apostle Paul mentions a Rufus in his letters and men from Cyrene were converted at Pentecost... Could this moment, and this position, brought a view of God's son to Simon that the rest of the crowd couldn't see.

People saw Jesus have a crown of thrones shoved on his head. They saw him ridiculed by being dressed in purple as a king, only to be stripped of his clothes and left practically naked. They saw his hands and his feet be nailed with spikes into the tree. They saw the sign hung about his head – King of the Jews.

2 thieves had a close up vantage point of Jesus. There Jesus was in between them and they had entirely different responses.

One thief cursed Jesus and mocked him. “If you are the Messiah then save yourself and us.” He said.

The other thief declared “this man has done nothing wrong.” Then he said “Jesus remember me when you come into your kingdom.” And Jesus said “Today you will be with me in paradise.”

What about the family of Jesus? What did they see?

Most of his family were not present. Scripture never mentions his brother’s presence. Only one of the disciples is actually present – John. And John is there with Mary, Jesus’ mother. What did they see? Mary saw her son, but she also saw God’s son hanging on the cross. We know that Mary was filled with the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2.

What agony Mary must have felt? Wanting to rescue her son, but believing this pain was God’s will.

The Pharisees were also there at the cross. They smiled and joked about Jesus’ pain. They misquote Jesus. When Jesus said "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" which means “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” These Pharisees with their skewed viewpoint said “He is crying out for Elijah to come save him.”

Jesus dies. He breathes his last and gives up the ghost. The sky grew dark. There was an earthquake, and the veil in the temple tore in half.

How could someone experience this moment and not realize Jesus was the Christ. The Pharisees, men of the Jewish faith did not recognize the Christ even though they were here in this moment.

But the pagan Roman soldiers saw this moment and they were terrified and said allowed “Surely he was the Son of God.”

They were in a position to see how Jesus responded to the abusive hatred. This vantage point brought them to a belief in the Son of God.

What about Jesus? What did He see?

He saw all the people. He saw Pilate & Herod. He saw His missing disciples. He saw the crowd & the Pharisees. He saw Simon of Cyrene, Mary & John, the thieves, and the centurion, but Jesus also saw you.

The Lord saw you from the Cross. His blood is for you. The stripes of his beating are for you. He sees you and includes in his prayer from the cross.. “

“Father forgive them, they know not what they do.”

This is the part of the story where we usually shift to the Sunday resurrection, but tonight let’s stay at the cross. Tonight, let’s think about what we see.

Where do you stand? Are you positioned to see Jesus on the cross?