**Calvary Fellowship 4.7.2023 Matthew 27:51-66 “Making Arrangements”**

* **When my wife was pregnant w/ my youngest daughter Livi, we bought a mini-van to fit everyone**
* About 2 weeks after we got it, Carey went to Publix & when she came out, there was a smash on the side of the car - it looked like a white car had hit the door
* So Carey walks out & sees this & she starts screaming & crying b/c someone has done this to our new car - then Mia & Xander start to cry too
* As she’s shouting, she says, “Mia, your father is going to kill me!”
* Mia gets really concerned & says, “Mommy, is Papi really going to kill U?”
* Carey says, “No, but he’s going to be really mad b/c he worked so hard to get us this van & now it’s smashed!” - At this point she’s hysterical in the parking lot
* So much so, that people from Publix come out to see if she’s OK
* This woman comes over to calm Carey down & says, “Sweety, this is my car.”
* What Carey didn’t realize as she kept pushing the button for the trunk to open is that the min-van right next to her - that trunk was opening & closing
* Carey realizes this & she ays to the woman, “Can I hug U? B/c I’m so sorry that this is your car, but I’m so happy that it isn’t mine.”
* **It’s amazing how people can see the same event differently**
* At the cross when Jesus was crucified, there were those like the religious leaders who were scoffing & mocking, those who were indifferent & passing by
* There were family members weeping, a disciple sad & confused
* And Roman soldiers who are just doing their job
* The cross meant something different to all of them
* But after Jesus died, the cross took on new meaning & made everyone around the cross take inventory of their own lives & decide what they believed
* **So we’re in message #46 of our series in the Gospel of Matthew & Jesus has just died - it’s 3pm on the day of the Passover**
* But the weirdest thing has happened, at noon there was darkness over the land of Israel for a period of 3 hours
* We don’t know how this happened - it was Passover, so it would be a full moon, so an eclipse wouldn’t be possible - it’s a supernatural darkness
* It makes sense - when He was born, there was a light that lit up the sky as angels sang that the savior was born
* But now, the 1 who was called the light of the world has died & there’s darkness
* But as the darkness begins to lift, the spiritual blindness lifts as well
* And we’re going to see 3 reactions to the cross that are so powerful b/c the cross is making us choose - here’s how Paul explains it…
* “Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.” (1 Corinthians 1:22-24 NIV)
* Did U notice there’s only 2 places to stand here? In the place where the cross is foolishness or the cross is saving U b/c it’s the power of God
* This is always how it works - the cross makes us choose & we see that here…

**———(v. 51-53)———**

**#1 - God is Making a Statement**

* **There are several things happening all at once here - the 1st is that the veil of the temple was torn in 2 from top to bottom**
* Before I tell U what this means I want to tell U how big this veil was
* According to the Roman historian Josephus, the veil of the temple was 60 ft high & 30 ft wide - it was 4-5 inches thick - as thick as your hand
* This wasn’t something that U could cut w/ a boxcutter or knife
* But the other thing is that it was ripped from top to bottom - that’s an odd detail
* So let’s explain what it is - first, let’s talk about the temple - (pic)
* This is Herod’s temple - it sits on about 40 acres of land
* This actual building is what’s called the temple proper - as U can see, compared to the land, it’s a fairly small building
* It was 90 ft long, 30 ft wide, & 60 ft high (pic) - the veil is what separated the holy place from the holy of holies
* The holy of holies was a 15 by 15 room that originally contained the ark of the covenant (pic) - but it wasn’t in Herod’s temple
* So the holy of holies was an empty room at this time
* The day of atonement was the 1 day in which the high priest would go into the holy of holies to atone for the sins of the people
* He would sprinkle blood on the mercy seat 7 times - by the way, how many places did Jesus bleed from in His body? 7 places
* The veil is what separated God’s presence from everyone else
* **So why is the veil torn? B/c God is saying, “The separation is over”**
* When Jesus died, access to God was available to everyone at any time
* The veil was a constant reminder of man’s sinfulness & the separation that it causes between God and humanity - But now, U can come to God freely
* “Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” (Hebrews 4:16 NIV)
* U & I can come to God & seek wisdom, help, grace, & favor, but b/c we’re awesome, but b/c of Jesus - the veil is torn & we have access to God
* I hear Christians all the time who give up b/c “God didn’t open a door” - have U ever thought God wants U to crash through the window?
* What if God is calling U to create a door? There was no door to get into Jericho, so God destroyed the wall & created a door
* There was a veil that separated God’s presence from people, so God tore the veil after Jesus died showing us that we can come to Him freely
* The blessing of God can create opportunities & takes further than our effort ever could - but that doesn’t mean we don’t put forth any effort
* **Some of U know I used to run a college before starting Calvary**
* 1 of the things I did while I was there was get an accreditation for the college so the credits students earned could transfer anywhere
* To get final approval I had to go to Tampa & present our case to this accreditation board - so I flew to Tampa & went to the meeting
* There were 20 other schools on the list - I was 19th
* For 6 1/2 hours, I listened to this board yell & scream at the people who were applying - I listened to the applicants yelling back arguing their case
* Schools brought entire teams of people, lawyers, & other officials
* I sat there alone at 25 years old w/ all of my paperwork, thinking, “I have no idea what’s going to happen when it’s my turn.”
* Well, my turn came around & I went up, handed the board all of the documentation I had prepared - I was 23 years old at the time
* The chairman of the board (who was a rough guy) said, “Calvary Chapel. Is this school associated w/ Pastor Chuck Smith out of CA?”
* I said, “Yes? I think. Would U like it to be?” - I said, “Yes it is sir.”
* He said, “I used to listen to Pastor Chuck on the radio years ago. That man’s teaching blessed my life. I approve of this school.”
* Then 1 of the people on the board said, “We haven’t discussed this & the other board members haven’t weighed in.”
* The chairman said, “Do any of U have a problem w/ this?” - They all said, “No.”
* He turned to me & said, “Young man, go do what God has called U to do. You’ve approved.” - I ran out of there before they could change their minds
* There is no way I could have orchestrated that situation, but I’ve learned that some days God shows up in your life & other days He shows off
* That’s what happens w/ the earthquake & graves being opened & godly people walking around - there’s never been anything like it
* Listen, 2,000 years of church history & people are still unsure what it means
* What we can know is this - God the Father was highlighting resurrection to every person in Israel & getting people talking about it
* And these saints of old were testifying to the fact that God raises the dead
* All of this was so people who believe in Jesus who was risen form the dead

**———(v. 54-56)———**

**#2 - A Soldier is Coming to Faith**

* **I think about this verse around Easter every year b/c of a movie I 1st saw when I was a kid & have seen it several times since then**
* It came out in 1953 - the movie was called ,”The Robe” & it stars Richard Burton who was a huge movie star in that time
* But it follows the story of a Roman soldier named Marcellus Gallio & a servant named Demetrius - But Gallio is commanded to crucify Jesus
* And he is tormented by it & seeks to learn who Jesus is & eventually becomes a Christian - it’s a really wonderful movie
* **But here’s what is so powerful to me about this proclamation that the centurion - he was Roman, he wouldn’t have understood “son of God”**
* That’s not a phrase that Romans used - that’s a phrase he borrowed from the priests or other Jews he knew
* Understand, death was this centurion’s business - he had no doubt witnessed the execution of countless people - most of them begging for their lives
* Most of them, declaring their innocence - Not Jesus - Jesus made 7 statements from the cross & none of them were about Him
* **But there’s something important for us here - why is this seemingly random comment in the Bible? Who cares what a centurion thinks?**
* It makes more for the Gospel of Mark to mention this moment (which it does), & Mark was written to a Gentile audience, so a Roman soldier’s remark would have stood out to them - but why would Matthew include it?
* Matthew is writing to a Jewish audience prove that Jesus is the Messiah
* B/c there’s something profound here - Jesus suffered well & it impacted this centurion to recognize that Jesus was the Son of God
* “Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.” (1 Peter 4:12-16 NIV)
* Peter is saying, “So you’re blessed if U suffer for the cause of being a follower of Jesus, that’s ok. People are watching to be how U handle it.”
* But that doesn’t include difficulties that arise for being a knucklehead
* **A few years ago, our family went to go see Black Panther on the day of release - we were all very excited to see it - however, I did have 1 problem**
* It was a lunchtime showing & movie theater food doesn’t jive very well w/ my eating habits, so I had smuggle some food into the theater
* So I brought some almonds & a salad into the theater, but I bought a bottle of water just to keep it real w/ the theater
* So we get our seats as the movie is about to start & U could hear a pin drop in this theater as the movie was starting - so I get my lunch out
* I grab my salad, my utensils, & the container of dressing I put in there & I poured the dressing, then I close the lid & I started shaking the salad
* I talked about this on Sun, but it’s the best way to evenly distribute the dressing
* Well, imagine taking a Tupperware container filled w/ Legos & shaking it
* It was so loud, people were looking at me, some were yelling, & the big dude next to me was not happy that we were going to be that close for 2 hours
* But I was over, I opened the container & everything was fine… until I took my first bite of romaine & it sounds like I was landing a 747 in that theater
* Now if someone had walked up to me & grabbed my salad container & beat w/ me w/ it, I couldn’t claim Christian persecuted - it would’ve been theater justice
* **Here’s the reality - trials & challenges are part of the Christian life**
* Why? B/c that’s where faith gets formed & people are watching
* They aren’t so interested in how U handle blessing - everyone feels like they can have joy & be happily married & love their kids when things are god
* They want to know how U handle adversity, b/c that’s what will tip the scales to know your faith is real
* This Roman soldier believed not b/c he had ever heard a sermon, seen a miracle, or even talked to Jesus
* He believed after he saw Jesus suffer - and my friends, I am convinced there are people in our lives who will believe when they see us handle adversity well

**———(v. 57-66)———**

**#3 - A Disciple is Standing Up**

* **Understand, Jesus dies at 3PM, so this conversation happens somewhere between 3pm-5pm, before dusk which would bring in the Sabbath**
* Remember, in the Jewish tradition, days are from sunset to sunset
* Also, for Pilate to give the body to Joseph of Arimathea was a departure from the Roman customs involving crucifixion
* Before we talk about the new character who shows us in our story, let me give U some background on what typically happened to bodies after crucifixion
* **Romans did 1 of 2 things w/ their crucifixion victims**
* 1st, Romans would left their crucifixion victims on the cross for days, at times to the point where the body would begin to decay or be eaten by birds
* When the bodies were finally removed, they were thrown into the town garbage dump outside of Jerusalem that was call Gehenna
* The way garbage was handled back in that day was to incinerate it
* So there was this constant fire that would never go out b/c there was always new garbage that was being added
* Gehenna is a greek word that is almost always translated hell in the NT
* Jesus uses garbage dump as an illustration of an eternity separated from God
* The other way Romans dealt w/ crucifixion victims was that they immediately took them down from the cross & immediately threw them into Gehenna
* “Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the Council, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for Jesus’ body. Pilate was surprised to hear that he was already dead. Summoning the centurion, he asked him if Jesus had already died. When he learned from the centurion that it was so, he gave the body to Joseph.” (Mark 15:43-45 NIV)
* Pilate wants to be sure that Jesus is dead & the centurion gives confirmation
* So who is Joseph? Joseph of Arimethea was rich & prominent -he was a member of the Sanhedrin & he was a disciple of Jesus, but in secret
* However, seeing Jesus die changed that & he stood up
* “Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jewish leaders. With Pilate’s permission, he came and took the body away. He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds.” (John 19:38-39 NIV)
* If U remember, Nicodemus was the teacher of Israel & also a member of the Sanhedrin - he came to Jesus by night in John 3
* But seeing what Jesus did, they walked into Pilate & asked for Jesus’ body
* And here’s what Joseph knew - that making this request would cost him something - that it would cost him his prominence & seat in the Sanhedrin
* The Sanhedrin was essentially the Jewish Supreme Court - they were the most respected & influential people in all of Israel
* But Joseph & Nicodemus put everything on the line in service to Jesus b/c it’s the only response to someone who just witnessed Jesus’ on your behalf
* “He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth.” (Isaiah 53:9 NIV)
* This is important b/c it’s a fulfillment of 1 of the many prophecies in Isaiah 53
* But this section is also important b/c the Jewish elders want to make sure that the tomb is impenetrable - just in case someone wants to steal the body
* So the Jewish leaders, still leaning hard on Pilate get him to give them a detachment of troops to guard the tomb & they place a Roman seal on it (v. 66)
* This is very significant b/c even touching the stone w/ the Roman seal would put U under penalty of death
* **But I love that in the midst of all this, Joseph steps out of the shadows & models what it looks like to serve Jesus even when it costs us something**
* There comes a moment in every believer’s life when they have to stand up
* U have to decide if you’re going to follow the crowd or you’re going to walk w/ God - and I remember when it started for me
* My family started doing things on Sunday & I wouldn’t go b/c I was going to church not matter what b/c I wanted to learn God’s Word
* And my family jumped up & down & said, “But it’s ok to miss church sometimes
* I said, “Maybe for other people, but not for me”
* And they said, “Then U don’t love your family” - I said, “I do love my family & I’ll be there any other time, but not before 1PM on a Sunday”
* And do U know what happened? They changed their time
* It was such a simple thing & yet it was all part of putting God 1st
* **And it happened over & over again - I remember when my band got invited to South by Southwest, which is a huge music festival in Austin**
* And I had just become a Christian & I knew this was the moment I had been working for since I was 13 years old - getting a record deal
* And I quit the band b/c I knew if I went to Texas I was going to get caught up in the music business & my young faith wouldn’t survive
* So I walked away b/c I decided that walking w/ Jesus was more important than anything else in my life - I did it, but I was devastated
* I second-guessed my decision, I cried, I thought I had thrown my future away
* I thought, “What am I going to do? Being a musician is the only thing I’m good at.” - little did I know I had gifts that were completely untapped
* Joseph learned what every follower of Jesus learns at some point - that life is better when U do it God’s way
* That U might lose some things, but what God does is so much greater than anything U can ask think or imagine
* **On Good Friday, we remember the Passover meal that Jesus celebrated w/ His disciples**
* When we celebrate communion, it’s us remembering 1 part of the Passover meal that’s celebrated w/ unleavened bread
* That’s bread that hasn’t risen - Exodus teaches us the reason the people had to use unleavened bread at the Passover was more than they didn’t have time for the bread to rise when they left Egypt
* Bu the rabbis teach that this is a lesson in humility - b/c we by nature want to puff ourselves up & make ourselves seem like more than we are
* We want to seem like we’ve got it under control & we’re self sufficient
* But communion reminds us of who we really are - the unleavened bread reminds us that we are broken people who need a Savior
* We aren’t all wise & all powerful - instead, we only see a fraction of what’s really going on - that’s why trusting God is always your safest bet w/ your life
* We’re people who don't have it all together & that’s ok - God is still working on me & in me & communion is our reminder that He’s going to complete what He has started…