

Living The Good Life, Part 9

- The gospel of John is quite different than Matthew, Mark & Luke. While the first three writers major on describing EVENTS in the life of Christ, John emphasizes the MEANING of these events. For example, all four gospels record the feeding of the 5000, but only John records Jesus' sermon on "The Bread of Life" that followed.
- Today, with our world once again at war and so much uncertainty all around us, let's look one more time to John's gospel for a recorded EVENT with a much deeper MEANING ...
- **John 20:26-29** And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you. Then saith he to Thomas, reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing. And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God. Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.
- The human imagination is an absolutely incredible faculty. With it we can make the printed page come alive as we create a mental image of people, places, and events that we have never seen. Imagination serves us well, but it is severely limited. So many times even with Scripture we have such a 'sanitized' mental image of a scene that we rob ourselves of much of the impact of the actual event. The most obvious example would be the crucifixion of our Savior ...
- **Crucified! No death is so agonizing. No shame is so complete ...**

First there was the scourging. It was called "the little death" because it preceded "the big death" of the cross. The scourging post was two feet high, with an iron ring close to the top projecting from two sides. Clothing was ripped away from a prisoner so that he stood naked, absolutely humiliated. Roman lictors were professionals, and they could beat a victim until only the barest spark of life remained.

The Roman scourge was a short-handled whip consisting of several thin iron chains which ended in small weights. The prisoner's wrists were firmly shackled to the iron rings, then he was stretched face down with his feet spread away from the post. Even the tension of awaiting the first blow was cruel; the body went rigid, the muscles knotted in tormenting cramps, color drained from the cheeks, and the lips were drawn tight against the teeth.

As the whip descended, the chains fanned out across the back and each link cut through the skin and deep into the flesh. The weights crashed with bruising force into the ribs and curled biting around the chest. Sweat burst from the brow and stung the eyes, and at each stroke of the whip a victim's body twitched involuntarily like a beheaded chicken. The very juice of life was torn away with every lash. There was only blinding, burning pain as the cruel whip whistled again and again through the air and across the back and shoulders.

Under Hebrew law the lashes were restricted to thirty-nine, but Roman punishment was not so limited. A Roman scourging could literally flay a man alive. There was only one rule for the lictor – the victim must not die. A spark of life must be sustained for the agony of the cross. Many men bit their tongues in two under such beatings. But after the scourging, their humiliation had just begun. The limp body of the victim was cut away from the post, and then he was slowly paraded to the execution ground along public streets, as a warning to others that Rome dealt quickly and mercilessly with those it found guilty.

A centurion usually served as the executioner. As four soldiers held the prisoner, he placed a sharp five-inch spike in the center of the wrist. A few strokes would hammer the spike deep into the rough wood, then a last blow turned it up so that the hand would not slip free. As the victim writhed in agony, nails were driven into the other wrist and through both feet. The wounds sent throbbing, horrible, endless fiery pain coursing through the limbs.

A curious crowd gathered like vultures around the cross as it was raised into place, sadistically fascinated by the gruesome torture. Dying should be a private thing, not a public spectacle. There is something obscene about having a mob of people standing around waiting for you to die!

Before long, the victim would begin to experience an agonizing sense of thirst, as his mouth grew parched and his skin became fevered. The greatest of all needs at that moment was just a drop of cold water. Of course it was denied by the soldiers, who drank in the presence of the dying man just to add to his mental torment. What once was saliva now felt like uncombed wool in the mouth. Swelling began in the hands and feet even as the tongue began to thicken. The cross was positioned so that the sun shone directly into the eyes of the crucified; even when the eyelids were closed, a red glare penetrated. And the real horror had only begun.

It was impossible for the victim to turn or change his position. The muscles of the back began to violently twitch, then gather in tight, knotty cramps. There was no escaping them, no gentle massaging hands to ease them away; they moved relentlessly across the shoulders, then down into the abdomen. After two hours on the cross, every muscle of the body was locked in solid knots and the agony was beyond endurance. The mucous membranes dried to the consistency of fine gravel, tearing at the tortured throat and sinuses. Layers of tissue ripped from the eyes every time the victim blinked. Many men shrieked themselves into insanity.

Man with all his genius has never devised a crueler nor more agonizing death than that of crucifixion. Each hour was an eternity. A man longed for death; it was his only ambition. On the cross, there was no end of suffering – it was only the manner of suffering and the degree of agony that changed. Could there ever be a more intense suffering this side of hell? And yet, Jesus Christ was crucified – for me! He took my place; it was my sin that sent Him to Calvary.

- BLESSED ARE THEY THAT HAVE NOT SEEN, AND YET HAVE BELIEVED! I didn't see Jesus' crucifixion, but I believe that it happened – and better yet, I believe that He died for my sins.
- **Colossians 2:14** Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross;
- **Galatians 6:14** But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.
- I didn't see His resurrection either, but I believe that Jesus broke the very laws of nature to rise from the dead!
- **1 Corinthians 15:17-20** And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept.
- The Greek word KYRIOS occurs about 750 times in the New Testament. It is translated "Lord" 667 times, "lord" (small 'l') 55 times, "master/Master" 13 times, "sir/Sir" 12 times, "owner" 1 time and "God" 1 time. It was used for slave masters, husbands, fathers, and even as just a polite form of address. It means the possessor, the owner, the sovereign, the master.

- While this was its customary usage, Jesus Himself assumed the title intending it in the higher sense of deity. That is why most New Testament references to Him are translated with the capitalized "Lord." But His purpose did not become clear to the disciples until AFTER His resurrection. When Thomas realized the significance of **a mortal wound in the body of a living man**, he immediately put this title of respect together with the absolute title of Deity, exclaiming "My Lord and my God!" (KYRIOS and THEOS) in John 20:28. According to the historical record, KYRIOS was never used after this by the New Testament Apostolics to address anyone except Jesus, OUR LORD AND GOD!
- **John 20:28-29** And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God. Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.
- This is really the concluding statement of John's gospel (chapter 21 is a postscript), that Jesus is who He said He was – GOD IN FLESH!
- **John 20:30-31** And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.
- Along with Thomas' concluding statement of doctrine comes Jesus' statement of blessing ... BLESSED ARE THEY THAT HAVE NOT SEEN, AND YET HAVE BELIEVED. I'm more blessed than Thomas – he saw and then believed, but I believe though I never saw!
- I'm also more blessed than the prophets, and even the angels!
- **1 Peter 1:10-12** Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into.
- The prophets didn't understand many things about salvation, but there was one thing that especially puzzled them – the Spirit of God revealed that the Messiah would experience suffering first, and then great glory would follow. They just couldn't understand God's plan!

- That's exactly what Jesus is saying to Thomas in John 20 – "Thomas, I'm standing before you bearing the marks of death in my body – but now I'm on the other side of the resurrection! I've been through incredible suffering, but now I'm experiencing glory!"
- Why would Jesus go through the agony and suffering of the cross for us? Perhaps the simplest answer is just that He loved us. But there is another part of the answer that is just as important and just as great – **Jesus could see the glory beyond the suffering!**
- **Hebrews 12:2** Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.
- Human beings were created with an inborn eternal instinct that knows there is something beyond this life. Even though we know that everyone eventually dies, death always seems unnatural and unfair to us. The reason we feel we should live forever is that God wired our brains with that desire!
- For most people this adds much frustration to their lives, because they keep trying to understand life from an EARTHLY instead of an ETERNAL perspective. That's why suffering is so confusing to us – it seems to serve absolutely no purpose. But this is where Christians have the advantage, because we understand from God's Word that there is glory beyond the suffering!
- **Philippians 3:19b-20 (NLT)** All they think about is this life here on earth. But we are citizens of heaven, where the Lord Jesus Christ lives. And we are eagerly waiting for him to return as our Savior.
- The fact that earth is not our ultimate home explains why, even as Christians, we experience difficulty, sorrow and rejection in this world. It also explains why some of God's promises seem unfulfilled, some prayers seem unanswered, and some circumstances seem unfair. **THIS IS NOT THE END OF THE STORY! AFTER THE SUFFERING COMES THE GLORY!**
- God allows us to feel a certain amount of discontent, discomfort, dissatisfaction, discouragement, disillusionment and disappointment in this life – because He doesn't want us to get too attached to it! We're not completely happy here because we're not supposed to be!
- But when Christians experience suffering, they pick up the binoculars of FAITH and they LOOK BEYOND the suffering to the glory!
- **Hebrews 11:1** Now faith is the substance (SUPPORT) of things hoped for, the evidence (PROOF) of things not seen.
- My faith SUPPORTS me when life lets me down! My faith PROVES to me that God is faithful when I don't understand what He is doing!
- Nowhere does the Bible promise Christians a life of ease; in fact, many Scriptures say the exact opposite ...
- **Psalm 34:19** Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the LORD delivereth him out of them all.
- **John 16:33b** In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.
- Satan has practiced his arguments for thousands of years and learned his lines well, and he never misses an opportunity to accuse God and His dealings. "There is your God for you! He lets you work like a slave, pray without ceasing, pour out your heart, and give till you drop, and then He rewards you with trials and suffering. Do you deny these facts?" "NO." Well, what do you have to say to this fine mess?" "Just one thing ... I CAN SEE BEYOND TO THE GLORY!"
- **Hebrews 11:13-16** These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.
- I can't tell you why our prayers are not always answered the way we think they should be. My only answer is the answer of Glen Dudley when he was so sick with cancer ... "VICTORY EITHER WAY!"
- If I don't have happiness here, I'll have happiness over there!
- If I die here, I'll live forever over there!
- If I don't have riches here, I'll have a mansion over there!
- If I don't get my healing here, I'll get my healing over there!
- Somewhere between here and there, there'll be a healing service
The blinded eyes shall see and the deafened ears shall hear
And those that couldn't talk will talk and the crippled will walk
When we have that healing service in the air.

- By and by when the morning comes
When all the saints of God are gathered home
We will tell the story of how we've overcome
And we'll understand it better by and by.
- **2 Corinthians 4:17-18** For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.
- **John's ninth snapshot of the Spirit-filled man: He sees life from an eternal perspective!**
- One moment of Heaven's glory will be worth more than all the days, weeks, months or years of suffering you went through on earth!
- There's a reason that I can't turn back now
I've come too far to turn around
There's a reason that I can't stop running this race
I've got to see Jesus face to face

And even though the way I take seems so hard sometimes
And when I cry in the midnight hour, it seems so dark sometimes
And even though the load I bear seems so heavy sometimes
And when all my friends have left, I feel alone sometimes
But I'll keep on fasting, keep on praying, keep on believing
Just stay in the race, till I see Jesus face to face

Oh, when I see Him, I'll fall on my knees when I see Him
I'll praise Him forever in that heavenly place
When I see Jesus face to face.
- BLESSED ARE THEY THAT HAVE NOT SEEN, AND YET HAVE BELIEVED!
- I'm physically near-sighted, but I'm spiritually far-sighted! I've got my BINOCULARS OF FAITH, and while the view might not be so good from here, it's spectacular over there!
- **Acts 20:22-24** And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me. But **none of these things move me**, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.