

**ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S CHURCH IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA, NY**

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***"Overcoming the Sting of Death" (part 4)***

**JESUS SHOWS US THE WAY**

We all know that this season of Lent is a time we remember how Jesus suffered and died for our sins. And we know that He did it to demonstrate His great love for us. But did you know that Jesus walked the way of death for two other reasons? He did it to show us that He knows exactly what we are going through when we have to deal with death. And He did it to give us an example for how we should face death and our own mortality.

It is quite remarkable when you think about it. What other world leader in the history of the world has willingly died as an innocent man? Jesus didn't call his lawyers. He didn't round up his followers to protect him. He didn't have a last stand. He willingly died as an innocent man. What other world leader preached forgiveness to His followers when it came to those who would kill Him? What other world leader or god for that matter would give it all up, suffer a terrible death so that others may live? And what other world leader in the history of our world would suffer and die just to show the others how to deal with the terrible sting of death? Yet, that is exactly what Jesus did.

What I would like to talk about this morning is how Jesus faced His own death. You see everything that Jesus did was for a reason. It was for our benefit. That's why Jesus said, "***Anyone who hears my words and does them is like a wise man who built his house on the rock, and when the rain fell, and the floods came, and wind beat against that house, it did not fall because it had been built on the rock.***" (Mt. 7:24-25). That's why after washing the disciples feet to show them they needed to be servants of others, Jesus said, "***I have given you an example that you do as I have done to you?***" (John 13:15.) And that's why Jesus said, "***Just as I have loved you, so you are also to love.***" (Jn. 15)

In other words, Jesus taught time after time that if you want to be a success in life in God's eyes, then you need to follow His example. And when we follow Christ's example not only will we be doing what's right, we will be impacting our world for Christ and we will be building a foundation that will be remembered for all eternity. Jesus said, "***Don't build up for yourselves treasure on earth, but build up for yourselves treasures in heaven.***" How do build up for yourself treasures in heaven? You seek first the Kingdom of God. How do you seek the Kingdom of God? You follow what Jesus taught and what He did.

Now last week, I said for the believer, death is a friend – because we receive all the blessings that God has promised us in Christ. But even knowing that death is a friend, I don't think it really makes anyone here want to die. While death may be a friend for the believer, it is still something to be abhorred. Why? Because we were created for life – and if you are in good health, it is farthest removed from your mind. That's why someone once said, "***Everyone wants to get to heaven, but no one is dying to get there.***"

Now think about Jesus, for a moment. He was in good health. He was only 33. He had developed a close relationship with His disciples. He had seen them grow emotionally and spiritually. He had close relationships his mother, Mary and certainly his brothers and other relatives. Yet, He was going to have to say good-bye. Worse, He was going to have to suffer a horrible death, and they would

have to witness it. And not only would He have to suffer physically and emotionally, He would have to suffer spiritually – the sins of the whole world would be brought to bear on His shoulders. The pain and stress was so great that at one point, Jesus would cry out to His Father, ***“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me.”*** No doubt, Jesus felt the same sense of impending doom and loss that we may feel when it comes to death. I mean, can you imagine? If Jesus’ birth is incomprehensible to our finite human minds, so too is His death - that the God of the universe, the God of life would stoop down to suffer the indignity of an unfair trial, be beaten, mocked and whipped, and only to die in a way that we wouldn’t even put an animal through. So how did Jesus deal with this inevitable journey?

### **JESUS PRAYED TO HIS FATHER**

Well, do you remember what was the first thing that Jesus did in the Garden of Gethsemane? He said to His disciples, ***“Sit here, while I go to pray.”*** The first thing that Jesus did was to pray. He sought His Father out in prayer. Prayer is simply communicating with the God. It’s seeking Him, thanking Him, asking Him for strength and guidance and comfort. Jesus knew that the road ahead would be exceedingly difficult and so He went to His Father, in prayer. Now if Jesus needed to go to His Father in prayer – how much more do we? Notice what Jesus prayed. He prayed, ***“Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me.”*** (Mt. 26:39). I firmly believe that if we or our loved one is sick or near death, we are to pray for healing, for deliverance. But if healing does not seem to be the direction the Lord is taking us, then we are to pray for an alleviation of the suffering. That’s what Jesus prayed, isn’t it? And yet, Jesus also prayed, ***“Not My will be done, but Your will be done.”*** In other words, if we do have to suffer, if we do have to die, not our will, but your will, Lord be done. We may not understand all the whys, but we can’t forget that God is with us and that He will strengthen us. And the only way we will be able to do it is through prayer. After Jesus prayed earnestly we are told in **Lk. 22:43** that an angel came and strengthened Him.

### **JESUS DESIRED FELLOWSHIP**

The second thing that we find Jesus doing in facing death is that He desired fellowship. You know God has designed us to be in relationship with others. We are born into an earthly family and we are made members of a spiritual, heavenly family through Christ’s body, the Church. Even though as the Son of God, Jesus had a perfect relationship with the Father, Jesus did not want to be alone. He desired the presence of His disciples. What did Jesus do on the last night before He died? He spent time with His disciples. He ate with them. He washed their feet. He prayed with them and He continued to teach them. And then He asked them to stay awake one hour to watch so that Jesus could pray.

Who will help us face the chilly waters of death? Our family and friends. I know that when I lost my brother to cancer, it was the prayers and presence of my Church family that made all the difference. And those prayers and that presence is like having the wind at your back. We may need time alone, but we also need time to be with others. And let me add that when we are with those who have lost a loved one, it is our presence that is most important. Don’t worry about what words you’re to say. When I visit the funeral home, I am there to be with the family, to say prayers with them, and to let them know they have someone to lean on. I don’t worry about having the right words to say. People don’t need to hear your words to make them feel better, they just need to know that you are there. And it’s normal to be frustrated with those who do not watch with us one hour. So don’t feel guilty for wanting to talk with others or for feeling frustrated when others don’t make time for that fellowship. Jesus believed fellowship is essential if we are to face death.

### **JESUS MADE PROVISION FOR HIS FAMILY**

But not only did Jesus pray to His Father and desire fellowship, Jesus made provision for His family. When He was on the cross, Jesus looked down and saw His mother Mary standing beside his disciple John, and He said to her, "*Woman, behold your son.*" And then He said to John, "*Behold your mother.*" And then we read in **John 19:27** that from then on this disciple took her into his home.

In His dying hours, Jesus was making sure that John would take care of His mother. It is appropriate that we make sure our family is taken care of after we die. Do you have a living trust for your children? Have you made out your will? Do you have a living will? Depending on which stage of life you're in, have you made your funeral plans known to your loved ones? All of these things are done to make life for our family a little easier when we are called home to be with the Lord. I know it isn't always a pleasant thing to talk about, but such plans should be made.

And let me also say that if we have unforgiveness in our hearts or if there are broken relationships by all means try to mend them. At least forgive in your heart before God. There is nothing worse than dying when such things are not resolved or to lose a loved one that you are alienated from.

### **JESUS EXPRESSED HIS FEELINGS**

What else did Jesus do when facing death? He expressed His feeling. He wasn't afraid to show his emotions. While on the cross, and feeling alone and rejected, Jesus cried out in aloud voice "*My God, My God why have you forsaken Me?*" (**Mk. 15:34**). When experiencing the agony of severe dehydration on the cross, Jesus said, "*I am thirsty.*" (**Jn. 19:28**). Earlier in his ministry when He heard of the death of His friend Lazarus and came to the tomb, Jesus wept. He cried. (**Jn. 11:35**). We need to feel free to express our emotions to God and to others. We shouldn't keep them in. Crying actually is a way for our bodies to release the chemicals that are produced by stress. It is part of the grieving process and it is part of the healing process. To keep our feelings bottled up inside is not only unhealthy, it is unbiblical. And when we take our feelings to the Lord who loves us, not only will He be there for us, but we will gain His perspective. As St. Paul says in **Romans 8:18**: "*I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us.*"

### **JESUS TURNED TO HOLY SCRIPTURE**

A fifth thing that Jesus did when facing death was that He turned to the Scriptures. He was quoting the Word of God, even as He was dying. Remember Jesus crying out **Ps. 22:1**? There is no other time when we will need the Word of God more than when we lose a loved one or when we have to face our own death. But the only way we are going to be able to recall it is if we have been spending time in the Word daily. Why every day? Because we forget. When we're young we may have good memories but we are just learning the Word, so we need to be in it daily. And then when we are older, we may have learned a lot more, but we forget more. So whether you're young or old, you need to be spending time in the Word of God. And the Holy Spirit will bring into our mind the Scriptures we need (**Jn. 14:26**). But the Holy Spirit can't bring into your mind something that's not there. So let me ask you, "Have you hidden the Word of God in your heart for the day of your greatest test?"

### **JESUS WITNESSED WHILE DYING**

Not only did Jesus turn to the Scriptures while dying, He witnessed while dying. Of course, His whole experience of suffering and dying on the cross was a witness for the whole world. But remember

what Jesus did with the thief on the cross? The thief said, "***Remember me when you come in Your Kingdom.***" But Jesus said, "***Truly I tell you, TODAY, you will be with Me in Paradise.***" (Lk. 23:43). Even on the cross Jesus was letting others know about the Good News that can only be found in Him.

I am reminded of the example given by the late Dr. Bill Bright, founder of the international ministry, Campus Crusade for Christ. He tells of a dear friend, (we'll call her Beth) who had been admitted to a Florida hospital with brain wave problems. Because of the neurology section of the hospital was full, she was placed for one night only in a cardiac care unit. Next to her was an elderly woman. She was able to get to know the woman a bit and found out that she was Jewish. The woman was in intense pain and had expressed great fear in dying. Around 3:00 AM, Beth heard the woman groaning and crying out: "I'm dying, I'm dying." Although Beth could not walk, she got down from her own bed and crawled across the room on her hands and knees to go to the dying woman's bedside. As she pulled herself up she whispered to the woman about the love of *Yeshua*, Jesus, Savior of all. Beth shared the good news of Jesus and prayed with her the simple prayer, asking God for salvation through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Beth asked the dying woman to squeeze her hand if she understood and if she had prayed the suggested prayer. The woman squeezed Beth's hand positively, and "her countenance changed completely," Beth recalled. Within minutes she was rushed away and did not return. Later Beth learned that the woman had died. But her destination was heaven, because of the faithfulness of a faithful believer who witnessed through her own pain. Amazingly, Beth had been specifically praying for Jewish people before she even met the woman!

### **JESUS SETTLED ACCOUNTS FOR ETERNITY**

Finally, before He died, Jesus settled accounts for eternity. We read in **Jn, 19:30**: "***When Jesus had tasted the hyssop of sour wine, He said, "It is finished!" Then He bowed his head and gave up His Spirit.***" Jesus had completed what He had set out to do. He had accomplished His mission and He was able to commit His Spirit to His Father in heaven.

When we commit our life to Christ, when we acknowledge His Lordship, we are not only opening our lives to the Lord's work and power, but we will be fulfilling the destiny He has already planned for us before the beginning of time.

And so I ask, have you settled accounts with the Lord? Have you committed yourself – your body and soul to Him? Life is not an easy road, death can be painful and hard, yet the Lord says, I have gone before you. Trust in Me and I will lead you home. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. AMEN!