

Sermon Questions for Life Groups

Good Friday & Easter

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Friday, April 3 and Sunday, April 5, 2015

These questions are generated by several authors for Life Group discussions or family or personal devotions

Good Friday - The Centurion (Mat. 27:54, Mark 15:39, Luke 23:47)

1. From your historical and biblical knowledge, what is generally known about centurions? Read also Matthew 8:5-13 and Acts 10:1-2 where the Bible mentions other centurions. *"The centurions mentioned in the New Testament are uniformly spoken of in terms of praise, whether in the Gospels or in the Acts. It is interesting to compare this with the statement of Polybius (vi. 24), that the centurions were chosen by merit, and so were men remarkable not so much for their daring courage as for their deliberation, constancy, and strength of mind."*, Dr. Maclear's N. T. Hist.
 - Discuss why the Bible would include these events involving centurions? Share if you think these converted centurions could become effective disciples and why that might be?

2. One of the main points leading to this man's declaration was found in his observations about Jesus' words spoken from the cross. Read Luke 23:26-49 and answer the following questions:
 - a) How would most people have behaved and spoken during the process of dying?
 - b) How did Jesus speak and behave throughout the process of dying?
 - c) How would the difference in Jesus' behavior, compared with others, have impacted a man so experienced with death?

3. Easter is about the salvation story and the forgiveness of our sins. How does the potential salvation of this Roman Centurion give us hope about God's ability to save us from our sins?

4. Romans 10:9 says that: "If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." How do the soldier's words (found in Mark 15:39; Matthew 27:54) demonstrate the requirements necessary for salvation?

5. Pastor John noted that "Best job I ever had!" was a memorable line from the movie Fury, and suggested that this could have been said by any service member during any conflict. The centurion likely felt this before Christ's crucifixion – what do you think his response would have been by the end of the day of Christ's crucifixion? What would he be thinking by the end of the third day?

Easter Sunday - Salvation's Story, Romans 10:5-13

6. What is the greatest tragedy in relation to our sin problem? How do you live out this tragedy?
7. Did you ever despair over your human condition?
8. How effective was the Law in bringing salvation to us?
9. Why is the confession that "Jesus is Lord" and the belief in Christ's resurrection necessary for salvation?
10. Read Romans 10:8, “. . . The word is near you, it is in your mouth and in your heart, that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming”. Pastor John mentioned that this signifies how close Salvation is to us. Now read verse 9 – “That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved”. Why would Paul write this if people often do not mean what they say? What do you think is the great caveat in verse 9 that people cannot just gloss over with their mouths?
11. How is it possible that Paul could declare that this salvation is equally accessible to all?
12. Can you find Scripture passages that tell what faith is and where it comes from?
13. What is the purpose of striving to live a life without sin, if Christ has secured our salvation?
14. Will good works assure your salvation? What is the purpose of good works then ? (Read Eph 2:4-10 and Eph 4:11-13)
15. Is there **anything** lacking in the salvation that God has provided through Christ for you?
16. Consider the attached article on **The Right Way to Meditate Upon Christ's Sufferings:**

This is taken from an internet article by Matthew Block called “The right way to meditate upon Christ’s sufferings.” Found at the following site:
<http://www.firstthings.com/blogs/firstthoughts/2013/03/the-right-way-to-meditate-on-christs-sufferings>

It is holy week, a time devoted to prayer and reflection on the sufferings and death of Jesus Christ. But there is a danger for Christians that, if we are not careful, we externalize the event too much. We watch the story from afar: We see Christ arrested by others, beaten by others, crucified by others. In so doing, we can fail to see our own place in the story.

That’s a point Martin Luther makes particularly well in his sermon “concerning meditation on the holy sufferings of Christ,” a 2004 translation of which has just been (partly) reprinted in the Canadian Lutheran, “You should believe, and never doubt,” writes Luther, “that you are in fact the one who killed Christ. Your sins did this to Him. When you look at the nails being driven through His hands, firmly believe that it is your work. Do you see His crown of thorns? Those thorns are your wicked thoughts.”

Luther’s point is an important one: If we do not see ourselves as the persecutors of Christ in the passion narratives, then we read them wrongly. As the disciples failed to keep watch with the Lord in Gethsemane, we too in sloth ignore him. As Judas betrayed him with a kiss, so in our thoughts, words, and deeds we betray him daily. We reject him like Peter, wash our hands of him like Pilate, call for his death like the crowds, and lead him out to Golgotha. We crucify him and hurl insults at him as he hangs dying on the cross. We kill God.

“Were you there when they crucified my Lord?” go the words of the old spiritual. “Were you there when they nailed him to the tree?” And while there is a place for such songs, a steady diet on them is unwise: they externalize too much the story as something “they” did. We must never forget that *we* were there—that *we* crucified the Son of God.

This recognition should fill us with fear. As Luther writes, “When we meditate on the Passion of Christ the right way, we see Christ and are terrified at the sight. Our conscience sinks in despair.” For in the suffering of Christ, we see God’s great wrath at sin. Sin is not something God simply ignores; he does not “look the other way” from our failings, whether great or small. They are inexcusable and require judgment.

But while Christians should consider their sins during Passion Week, they ought not remain focused on sin alone. “When a person, whose conscience has been filled with terror, understands his sins in this light,” Luther writes, “he needs to watch out that his sins do not remain in his conscience, for then nothing but pure doubt will result. Just as our sins flowed out of Christ and we became aware of them, so we should pour them back on Him again and set our conscience free.”

Yes, God’s judgment on sin is severe. But in mercy, God has borne the punishment for sin himself. As Isaiah writes: “He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed” (53:5). We see in the cross not only God’s anger at sin, but also his immeasurable love for sinners. “Look how full of love God’s heart is for you,” Luther urges. “It was this love that moved Him to bear the heavy load of your conscience and sin.”

Passion Week must culminate in the darkness of Good Friday’s eclipse; in liturgical churches, we signify this through the gradual extinguishing of the candles in the tenebrae service. But at the end of the service, after the strepitus has sounded and the altar has been stripped—one candle is returned. Its small flame signifies hope in the midst of darkness. Easter will come.

We must let the Passion narratives of Scripture do their work and terrify us with the Law. But we must not remain in its darkness forever. We must turn at length to the light of the Gospel, to hear Christ calling, even as we crucify him, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34). We must, in the end, “see our sins laid on Christ and see Him triumph by His Resurrection,” Luther writes. “This is how we know God as He wants us to know Him. We know Him not by His power and wisdom, which terrify us, but by His goodness and love. There our faith and confidence stands unmovable.”