

“Christ’s Passion: Ordinary Evil People”

March 17, 2019

Luke 22:63-23:12

SI: It’s five weeks until Easter.

We’re spending each Lord’s day leading up to Christ’s resurrection by meditating on his suffering for us.

We’re trying to see how each stage of his suffering or each facet of his suffering was part of his substitutionary work, atoning for our sins.

Not just the cross and the crucifixion , but everything about his passion was for us.

Have you ever heard anybody say something like:

I’m not perfect, I might have done some bad things, but I’m not a bad person.

Let’s see how this passage sheds some light on that common self-perception

INTRO: There's a retired minister in our denomination who I've heard tell the story of his childhood.

His mother, as he put it, was always looking for love in all the wrong places.

She had six children by different men. He didn't even know his father's name. They lived in poverty. All six children slept in a bunk bed, three on the bottom and three on the top. All of them wet the bed.

He said he wet the bed every night for as long as he could remember.

Eventually the state took the children.

He was in eight foster homes over the next few years.

One of the reasons he was transferred so much was his bedwetting.

His foster parents couldn't tolerate it.

One foster mother would scream at him every morning, Bad boy, bad boy!

One of them treated him like she was housetraining a dog and would force his nose into his urine soaked sheets. Another wouldn't let him drink after 3PM. And the worst of all was one who wrapped him in his wet sheets and made him stand on the front porch with a sign that said: I wet the bed.

The house was right across from his school and the kids saw him and gave him a nickname: Bobby Bedwetter.

He tried everything to quit. He would hide his bed wetting in the morning by making his bed, then at night he would have to crawl under damp, stinking covers. He lived with shame and despair every single day.

Nobody wanted him. He begged God to help him, but prayer didn't work.

Either God didn't care about him or wasn't listening.

When you hear his story your heart aches for him and you're angry and disgusted at all the adults who failed him and made his life miserable.

His mother, the string of men who impregnated her, the government workers who put him with those foster families, the foster parents themselves who treated him like an inconvenience and bother.

What was wrong with those people?

Why would they have inflicted such humiliation on a little boy?

He was deprived of everything a child should have.

He wanted to change but didn't know how.

Why would they have added to his misery?

Well, of course, there are two sides to every story. What would they have said?

His mother would have told you about her own terrible and abusive childhood.

She needed men and alcohol to make her life bearable.

She didn't hate her kids. She wasn't a bad person. Was doing the best she could. Those men in her life, they would say she was the one chasing them.

They didn't intend to get her pregnant. It wasn't their fault.

Those foster parents, they wanted to help.

But what were they supposed to do? They weren't trained for this.

They couldn't be expected to wash sheets every day of their lives.

The boy had to change or move on to somebody else.

They would say: We may have made some mistakes, but we're not bad people.

In this reading from Luke we meet a lot of people.

There are upper class people and lower class people, wealthy, educated, connected men as well as tough soldiers and guards. There are churchmen and laymen.

There are powerful politicians, even a king, and there is a crowd of onlookers.

The soldiers probably cussed a lot, but we wouldn't hold that against them.

The politicians were probably always angling for an advantage,

but we would understand and give them a pass because that's their work.

The religious leaders, they were probably a little stiff and formal, but we could overlook that because they are cordial and decent people.

Here's my point, if you had met most of these people in other circumstances, they wouldn't have seemed like bad people.

If you spent time with them, saw them in their homes, went with them to their workplace, chatted with them, they would have seemed like ordinary people.

They loved their mothers. They would sometimes do something nice for somebody. Many of them were religious.

But what did these ordinary people do?

They did horrible things to the best and most beautiful man who ever lived.

And just like that little boy's story gives a snapshot of the true human condition, this part of the passion story does the same. It shows the evil of ordinary people.

It shows there is no one righteous, not even one. It shows how much we need grace

Let's look at this passage under two headings:

First, let's see how Christ's passion reveals your true moral condition

Second, how Christ's passion redeems you so we can be a good child of God

Credit where credit due: Robert Rayburn sermon on passage

MP#1 First, let's see how Christ's passion reveals your true moral condition

We're going to do that by looking at these people who were cruel to Jesus and

what they did. But deeper than that, let's try to figure out what motivated them. Because it's the motivations of the heart that are important.

That's a measure of the real person. When we get to the level of motivations it's a lot harder for us to point the finger at the bad behavior of other people without also looking inside ourselves.

Let's start with the men guarding Jesus. There were two groups of them.

The guards connected with the Jewish court mocked, beat, and blindfolded him.

Then King Herod's soldiers ridiculed and mocked him.

Usually for soldiers to bully and mock someone there has to be encouragement to do so by their superiors or at least toleration and turning a blind eye.

Remember the Abu Ghraib prison scandal in Bagdad several years ago?

When American soldiers abused Iraqi prisoners?

Those in charge tolerated the behavior so it got out of hand.

It's obvious in this case that those in charge of the guards not only tolerated it, but actually encouraged it. Especially Herod.

But why would these soldiers do it in the first place?

Why would they beat up and make fun of a helpless person?

Why would they make sport of another human being?

There's nothing manly about doing that.

Was it hatred? They didn't even know Jesus. Was it amusement?

It was probably something deeper.

It was probably a way of making themselves feel superior.

They crushed another person so they could feel powerful.

This was a way of dealing with own their own feelings of shame and inferiority.

Let's look at the men who sat in judgment of Jesus, starting with Herod.

Herod was the king of Galilee and he was a good ruler in some ways.

He built some impressive cities.

His Jewish subjects hated him because he was a half Jew, not religious, but he kept the peace with Rome and that was good for everybody.

But there's a story about Herod in the Gospels that reveals the kind of man he was.

During a banquet, in front of all his guests, he made a promise to a dancing girl to give her anything she wanted. He was showing off for his guests.

She asked for the head of John the Baptist.

And because he didn't want to lose face, he murdered forerunner of the Messiah. Someone like that, we aren't surprised at his mistreatment of Jesus.

But it's still interesting to ask what might have motivated Herod.

This detail about dressing Jesus in an elegant robe gives a clue.

That had to be Herod's idea. It was one of his robes. He was making a joke. When you combine this with the story of him making the boastful promise to the dancing girl in front of his guests, you realize this was a man who loved an approving audience. He loved to make people gush and laugh. And if that involved hurting another person, so what?!

Let's think about Pilate. What motivated him? He's an interesting case.

A Roman governor. A man with a legal mind.

He's the most objective person in the whole passion story.

He immediately recognized that Jesus had not broken any Roman laws.

Jesus was no threat to Rome. This was a Jewish religious dispute.

But Pilate was in a tough situation.

Judea had a history of rebellion and Rome expected him to maintain order.

There were times Pilate had to use deadly force and Rome backed him up.

But only to a point. Rome didn't want a full-scale revolt.

If things got out of hand, he would lose his governorship.

So this uproar about Jesus, this was a real pain in the neck.

Pilate realized it could develop into a serious problem if he didn't give them what they wanted and execute Jesus. But his Roman sense of justice went against that. He resented being put in this situation. That's why he sent Jesus to Herod.

He was hoping to distract Jesus' accusers, put off having to make a decision.

Herod played his part, let the religious leaders vent, mocked Jesus, but in the end he supported Pilate's judgment and sent him back. Jesus did not deserve death. The distraction didn't work.

As you know, the Jewish leaders came back even more determined and in the end Pilate killed a man to make his life more convenient.

That was his motivation, convenience and self-preservation.

What about the Jewish religious leaders? The elders and priests?

The leaders of these two parties the Pharisees and Sadducees?

What was their motive?

The Jews had vicious theological and political disagreements among themselves.

The Pharisees and Sadducees hated each other.

I saw a poll recently asking Democrats if they thought America would be better

if all Republicans were dead and asking Republicans same question about Dems.

I can't remember what percentage of each party said yes.

I'm sure some of the Pharisees and Sadducees felt that way about each other.

But they didn't try to murder each other like they did Jesus.

It's a big jump from wishing someone dead because of a religious differences

to actively trying to get them killed.

We've seen a lot of murders in the name of religion, the Middle East, Bangladesh, Burma, 9/11 here in the United States, massacre this week in New Zealand.

The shooter had a religious-like manifesto.

But I think it's a fair question to ask if those ideas are the true motivation.

People certainly say they are the motivation, but do you know what the Bible says was the motive for the Jewish religious leaders wanting to kill Jesus?

Envy. They envied the crowds he was drawing. His connection with the people.

They imagined having that influence and knew they never would. Infuriated.

A great many so-called religious and political murders are really motivated by the same thing. By envy. By frustration at one's condition in life.

By jealousy. By a desire for power. By a bitter sense of inferiority.

And somebody pays the price for that envy as Jesus did here.

Christ's passion gives us a snapshot of the human heart. All these evil motivations.

A desire to feel superior,

a desire for an approving audience to laugh and gush,

a desire for convenience and self-preservation,

a desire for what other people have, discontentment frustration at your lot in life.

And these desires work themselves out in the mistreatment of other people.

Not always murder, of course. God's common grace preserves society.

It's usually petty stuff, verbal cruelty, little jabs, selfishness, apathy

But these are the same motives that killed the Son of God.

There's no one good in this story. Not even the disciples. They were hiding, or swearing they didn't know Jesus, like Peter did.

At this key turning point of human history, there is only one good man, and that's Jesus Christ himself. And for our salvation, and as our substitute, he willingly subjected himself to all the evil motives of the human heart.

MP#2 Let's see how Christ's passion redeems you so you can be a good child of God

First you have to accept that the Bible's indictment of you is true.

There are many places the Bible says things like:

There is no one righteous, not even one, no one who seeks God.

All our righteous acts are like filthy rags, and so forth.

Here we see it in living color.

These were ordinary people. Their mothers loved them, they did some good deeds from time to time, many of them could tell a good joke and cheer you up, but they murdered the Savior of the world.

And they did it because it was so natural for them to love themselves more than their neighbor, and to lie to themselves about how good they are.

The point is, you're in this story. You're one of the people here.

You belong with the soldiers and the priests and with Pilate and Herod.

You belong in the crowd of onlookers who later chanted for crucifixion.

And as God's grace comes into your life, and as the Holy Spirit begins his work, you start to see this about yourself.

How did John Newton put it?

"Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me."

Look again at our confession of sin.

This is from the old Book of Common Prayer, there is that line:

"And there is no health in us."

That doesn't mean physical health it means spiritual health.

It's saying our problem is not just the bad things we do, our problem is systemic, it's motivational, it's who we are.

It's like Jesus saying in Sermon on Mount, if eye unhealthy, unsound— your whole body will be full of darkness, and if the light in you is darkness, how great is that darkness.

Your spiritual problem is not that you do bad things from time to time, if you're blind, it effects your whole person.

A wretch, no health, blind, not righteous, filthy rags

Selfishness, pride, pettiness, jealousy, mistreatment of other people, indifference to the pain of other people and so on.

We see it all in this story and the finger is pointed at us.

Of course most people don't accept this about themselves.

But that's the nature of the problem. Our pride and self-interest blinds us.

But you have to accept this judgment, and then you have to accept that Jesus Christ came into this world to die for you.

Your sin had to be laid on him, or you would have had to suffer the penalty of guilt yourself.

And here in this story we see something that is so amazing about the passion.

Part of Christ's saving work was to bear the petty, selfish evil of ordinary people like us. He did it because he loved us, so we can be forgiven and free.

Back to that retired PCA pastor I told you about.

He was a twelve year old boy and still wetting the bed every night, still being passed around from one foster home to another.

There was a childless couple in their mid-forties. Christians.

They were hard-working people, the husband was a commercial fisherman.

They really wanted a child so they decided to pursue adoption, early 1960s.

A state social worker showed them a notebook full of children in foster care.

As she handed them the notebook she said:

Please remember, all these children are damaged goods.

They began to turn the pages, looking at the photographs, and then the wife stopped and said: That's the one. That's him.

When he was told a couple had adopted him, you would think this would have

been a great relief to a boy who had been passed around, rejected so many times.

But he was terrified he was going to ruin it.

He was sure when they found out he wet the bed, they would get rid of him.

The first evening they were together they took him bowling.

He had never bowled in his life but he realized you were supposed to knock down all the pins so he tried real hard to make a good impression, but rolled gutter balls.

Then they took him to a Chinese restaurant. He had never eaten Chinese food.

They were eating with chopsticks and asked him if he wanted to try but he couldn't do it and actually pushed some food off his plate into his new dad's lap.

He was terribly embarrassed and was sure they were thinking they had made a mistake in adopting him.

So when they got home that first night, he figured better prepare them for the worst.

He told his new mother: I'm going to wet the bed. I always do.

She said: We know. It doesn't matter. I've put a rubber sheet on the mattress.

And if you wet the bed tonight, in the morning and every morning you'll still be our son.

Then she clutched him to herself in a big hug and she said:

I've been waiting for you all my life.

And that night, for the first time, he didn't wet the bed, and he never did again.

What is the answer to our shame?

What is the answer to our shameful behavior with which we cope with our shame and try to hide it even from ourselves?

What is the answer to the evil of selfishness that we inflict on others and have inflicted on us? It's love.

Christ's love. His self-giving, sacrificial, conquering love.

That is what we see here and will continue to see through Christ's passion as he progresses to the cross.

Shameful behavior overcome by love.

Jesus didn't have to suffer this from them.

He could have called down legions of angels to wipe them all out.

But he endured it to save us.

So as we come to the Lord's Table, picture Jesus standing there surrounded.

People mocking him, abusing him, striking him with their fists, making fun of him.

It's a picture of who we are in sin, and it's also good news.

Jesus willingly suffered that evil and died for our sins so we can live with God as his good children.

The Bible says: He who has the Son has life; and he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. That says it all.