

Series: Making a Messiah

Sermon:

April 14, 2019

Key Texts: Matthew 27:45-56; Mark 16:1-8; John 20:11-29

Key Words: Roman Soldier, Mary, Thomas, Doubt, Disappointment, Son of God, My Lord and My God, Belief

Summary: Baptism is a picture of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. When we identify with Jesus in baptism, we come to grips with who we are, who He is and what stands in our way.

Ruby Chitsey is an 11 year old girl. She accompanied her mom to where she worked at nursing homes. Often she would get bored, so she decided to ask the residents 3 things they wished for. She expected them to say, money, houses or cars, but they said things like “I would really like an electric razor.” “I could really use some house shoes.” “I love Vienna sausages.” Ruby said for some reason, old people really like Vienna Sausages. Ruby and her mom started getting some of the items. Others heard what she was doing and chipped in and then a GoFundMe Page was started called 3 Wishes for Ruby’s Residents. The expenses are minimal, but make no mistake, this is not about the physical gift of sausages or a razor. She is satisfying a more basic need...to be remembered and to be cherished by a child.

Our stories matter. They make a difference. Today, I want to tell you the story of 3 different people. Since it is Baptism Sunday, I want to try to blend their stories with the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. One guy was right there as Jesus was dying. There was a woman who was right there in the grave yard where Jesus was buried. And the last guy’s story, the resurrected Jesus appeared to him, removing anything that stood in the way of him believing that Jesus was the Son of God.

Today, our hope is that you would make a decision to become a follower of Jesus by believing that he is the Son of God, confessing that before others and being baptized.

Let’s learn about our first person...

The cross...it is an interesting symbol that has become a symbol of faith. For Rome, it was an instrument of torture reserved for the worst of criminals. The Emperor of Rome chose crucifixion because it was painful. It was a slow, slow death. It could lengthen someone's death 2 or 3 days as they hung on the cross in misery.

The man I want you to meet carried out crucifixions every day. You've seen Mike Rowe on Dirty Jobs...this job went beyond anything you could think of. This guy started lowly in the ranks of soldiers, but now he commanded all the soldiers. He only had to take the prisoners about a mile, but his job was to make sure everything went off without a hitch. They would strip the prisoner down of any possession, humiliate the prisoner when they could and they would beat the prisoner within an inch of their life. It was all to lead to one of the most violent types of deaths the world has ever known.

You would get used to the begging of the prisoners. You became calloused to the tears of the family. It was easy to become hardened. You had to become hardened soldiers. You lived for the moment. You lived to get through the day.

As a Roman Soldier, you didn't care for Jews. All they did was cause problems. You had seen Jews kill Roman soldiers, your friends, when the mob got out of control. The prisoners weren't just the enemy, the entire crowd was the enemy.

The day known as Good Friday didn't end the way it started for this soldier. It was just another day to get through. It was just another crucifixion to make sure it ended the way all of them do. There were many people gathered around the cross: 2 other criminals, his mother, a disciple, Roman government officials, Jewish religious leaders and just passer-byes because it was on a main thoroughfare for everyone to see.

Something opened the eyes of this soldier or maybe someone opened his eyes. This Jesus didn't seem angry. This Jesus wasn't scared, but he did seem sad, but something pushed him toward what most people pulled away from. It wasn't a normal day. It wasn't a normal crucifixion. This wasn't a normal prisoner. He wasn't a normal man. There was something bigger going on.

Usually, this Roman soldier didn't think about what he was doing or who he was doing it to, but on this day...everything that was done to Jesus, he seemed to see and feel, which he hadn't done in a long time. The words that this man said penetrated where nothing before had. It was almost as if Jesus was unmasking who he really was. This Roman Soldier had put blinders on to life and now Jesus seemed to be forcing him to take them off.

Jesus talked to this God as his Father. He talked of forgiveness. He even showed kindness to another criminal on the other cross. One of the phrases he said was, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Initially, this soldier thought,

“I know exactly what I am doing.” But throughout the day, what if there was something to this guy. What if what they were saying about him was true? When he said, “It is finished.” What if he was a part of a bigger plan? What if this was not just a crucifixion of criminal? What if this was God dying for more?

And it wasn’t just what he saw in Jesus. It was what he saw in himself. Maybe he wasn’t just a Roman soldier. Maybe his life really was out of control. Maybe he had become the monster all the Jews said he was.

As Jesus took his last breath, Matthew, Mark and Luke all write about what this soldier said as Jesus died. “This man truly was the Son of God.” Something changed in this man from someone, who just tried to get day of doing the same old thing every day probably hating most of what he did and who he had become. On this day, his life was interrupted by the death of Jesus. Crucifying people has to have an effect on you over time. On this day, Jesus’ death was affecting him.

I wonder if Jesus death forced this soldier to see what is sung in the song by the Sidewalk Prophets in their song, *But You Love Me Anyway...*

I am the thorn in your crown. But you love me anyway.

I am the sweat from your brow, but you love me anyway.

I am the nail in your wrist. But you love me anyway.

I am Judas' kiss, but you love me anyway.

See I am the man who yelled out from the crowd for your blood to be spilled on this earth shaking ground.

I turned away with this smile on my face. With this sin in my heart, tried to bury your grace.

Then alone in the night, I still called out for you. So ashamed of my life, my life, my life!

But your loved me anyway.

I believe this Roman Soldier did what we all have to do... ***We have to come to grips with who we are.*** I think Jesus death caused this soldier to look beneath the surface of his life. When we choose to be baptized, we have come to grips that Jesus is the Son of God, who was sent to do what we could not do for ourselves. We can’t connect with God, because we have a sin problem beneath the surface of our lives.

This Roman Soldier had to look at his life and the life that was dying in front of him. You and I are going to have to do the same. We are going to have to take a long look at our lives. ***We have to come to grips with who we are.***

You see, it is easy to go through the motions day in and day out. It is easy to bury stuff beneath the surface. Jesus death shook the soul of this soldier. It unearthed something to cause him to say "Surely, he was the Son of God."

Maybe you have been convicted during this series. Maybe your soul has been shaken by Jesus. Maybe something has been unearthed. Will your conviction lead to action? There was a study done on people who had heart by-pass surgery. Almost 700,000 people a year have by-pass surgery. Afterwards the doctor sits down and says, "This is a temporary fix. This is going to help you for a little while, but you have to make some changes and unless you make some changes, you are going to find yourself in the same situation again." The doctor will go through a list of things that the patient will have to do differently: diet, exercise, no smoking, no drinking, etc. Without exception, the patient will say, "I'm in. I will make these changes. I'm going to do somethings differently." Two years later, when they were interviewed. No changes. But, they are still planning to make the changes. They are still saying, "I'm going to do that." Over 90 % of the patients who said they would, hadn't done anything.

This Roman Soldier saw Jesus' death and he had come to grips with his sin. Wht are you going to do today? That is what we do each week around the Lord's table. We remember his death. You are going to have the opportunity to thank Jesus for taking your place. We have the bread and the juice at the tables. After our next song, you will be invited to come table. Since today is baptism Sunday, if you haven't been baptized, I would love to talk with you about that decision during communion. We are ready to baptize you today.

Message 2

The second person's story is Mary Magdalene. Mary Magdalene's story is quite different from the soldiers. She had come to grips with who she was...she was a woman, who had been healed by Jesus from having 7 demons inside her. She also, was at Jesus crucifixion. She developed a great faith, but her faith experienced great disappointment. Great disappointment is probably and understatement...her faith was shattered.

In the final chapter of Mark, Mary and 2 other women are going to the tomb of Jesus. They had spices to put on the dead body of Jesus, but they realized the stone in front of the tomb would be too heavy for the 3 of them to move. "But as they arrived, they looked up and saw the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled aside. When they entered the tomb, they saw a young man clothed in a white robe sitting on the right side. The women were shocked, but the angel said, "Don't be alarmed. You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He isn't here! He is risen from the dead! Look, this is where they laid his body. Now go and tell his disciples, including Peter, that Jesus is going ahead of you to Galilee. You will see him there, just as he told you before he died. The women fled the tomb, trembling and bewildered, and they said nothing to anyone because they were too frightened."

They were told that Jesus has risen from the dead, but they are still scared. Doesn't that last verse sound like something that happens at a cemetery? You told of hope, but you still hurt. You don't know what to say. Trembling and bewildered are very accurate and descriptive. Fear of the unknown and uncertainty of the future are very real. This is actually how Mark's gospel ends. If you looked in your Bible, there is a break and it says, most ancient manuscripts of Mark conclude with verse 8. That is a tough way to end. You almost want to say, "It can't end like that."

Today, I wondered how many of you are like Mary. You are living life with words that are big and real like fear, uncertainty, disillusionment, disappointment. Life has shattered your dreams and possibly your faith.

Let's look a little closer at this story. Jesus had been dead for three days by the Jewish way of counting. These woman take spices, maybe we could call them the Spice girls. They were mourning their faith that had died. They were doing the best they could with what they had. They had the spices, but they weren't certain they had the strength to move the large stone. See the tomb of Jesus was more like a cave and Mark writes that the stone was "very large."

They were worried about the stone, which means they were questioning their physical strength, but they probably didn't feel emotionally or spiritually strong. They were depleted. Let's look back at what we read. "But as they arrived, they looked up and saw the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled aside." God worked out what they were worried about. What if that is the case for you? What if God has already been working in some of these areas that you are worried about?

Here is one big key. The women took a step of faith when their faith was shattered. Notice they are the only ones who come. Where are the disciples? They could have helped with the stone. These women could have stayed back with everyone else and they would have missed what God was doing. Take a step faith today, even if you are hurting, even if your dreams have been shattered or even if you find yourself right smack in the middle of a graveyard like Mary....take a step and trust that God is working.

Now also notice, what they went looking for, they didn't find. Thank God, they didn't find what they were looking for, so understand, if you are willing to take a step, God will be working, but you may find something different than you started out looking for. I believe what you find, it will be better because the God of the universe has your best interest in mind.

After the realized the stone was gone, there was an angel, who had not only rolled the stone away, but was sitting down. As we have highlighted all throughout this series, notice the details of the eyewitnesses like Mark is writing here. He has told us it is "a very large stone" and he says the angel is "sitting down." Why does that matter? In Jewish custom, when a teacher got ready to teach, they sat down in a seat of authority because they had something to say.

I really believe he wanted the women to understand that what you thought you couldn't do, has already been done for you. Some of you today need to hear that you cannot go to the grave on your own. Someone has gone for you and he has done something for you that you cannot do for yourself. For some of you the decision to follow Christ may feel like a heavy stone, but there is nothing you can do or have to offer, because it has already been done. Can you accept the gift of God by believing, confessing and being baptized into what has been done for you?

The angel says one other thing. "The women were shocked, but the angel said, "Don't be alarmed. You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He isn't here! He is risen from the dead! Look, this is where they laid his body."

Can I just stop right there? I believe this is one of our challenges when it comes to becoming a follower of Jesus and being baptized. ***We have to come to grips with who Jesus is?*** This is the challenge that is put in front of Mary. You came looking for a dead body. There is a different verdict Mary. God is trying to give Mary a moment of clarity about Jesus. Maybe that is what he is trying to do for you today. Often the problem is not with Jesus. The problem is our perception of who we perceive Jesus to be.

The angel goes on, “Go and tell his disciples, including Peter, that Jesus is going ahead of you to Galilee. You will see him there, just as he told you before he died.” The angel is helping Mary out. He tells her that Jesus is a live...but there is more. He is telling Mary and you and I. This doesn’t end in a grave because there is more that Jesus wants to do.

Galilee was the place where Jesus spent about 80% of his time. It is where he called his disciples. It is where he did most of his miracles. This is where he preached to crowds. This is where he spent private time teaching his disciples. Galilee was a place of mission. And Galilee was the place of more where the mission would continue...it would not end in a grave.

You have to come to grips with who Jesus is. John’s gospel gives us further insight. After Mary runs and tells the disciples, evidently she returns to the tomb and she is standing outside crying. This still hasn’t made sense to her. A man, who she thought was the gardener says, “Why are you crying?” She starts in to say, “If you have taken his body, just tell me and I’ll go get him.” And then she hears, “Mary.” She had probably heard Jesus say her name a thousand times. And now she heard it for the first time that really made sense. He told her the same thing the angel...there is more. So, she goes and finds the disciples and says, “I have seen the Lord!” Her day ended very differently than it started.

We are going to continue worshipping and we are going to see some people’s day end differently than they started.

Message 3

Can I just tell you the point to the story we are going to look at? If you are going to become a follower of Jesus and if you are going to be baptized, ***you are going to have to come to grips with stands in your way.*** What is the hurdle you can't get over? Is it doubt? Are you a facts person that everything has to be black and white? Let me tell you an important truth, even when we have hurdles that seem impossible to get over, Jesus still shows up.

Look at what John writes. This is after the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. The disciples have heard that he is alive, but they haven't seen him yet. They are afraid that what happened to Jesus is going to happen to them. "That Sunday evening the disciples were meeting behind locked doors because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders. Suddenly, Jesus was standing there among them! "Peace be with you," he said." They were behind locked doors and they had confined themselves with their doubts and fears and Jesus shows up in their midsts. It doesn't say he jiggled the door, did the secret Jesus knock 3 times...he just appeared.

What does that mean? When you don't feel like you can get out, Jesus can always get in. Whatever hurdle you are facing, no door can stop him and no wall can keep him out. If you still have some doubts about your decision, this ought to pump you up.

But, let's go a little further. John 20:24, "One of the twelve disciples, Thomas (nicknamed the Twin), was not with the others when Jesus came. They told him, 'We have seen the Lord!' But he replied, "I won't believe it unless I see the nail wounds in his hands, put my fingers into them, and place my hand into the wound in his side."

Thomas missed it. I am sure he got tired of everybody talking about it. We have a big problem because we have a disciple saying he will not believe unless Jesus does this, this and this. John 20:26, "Eight days later the disciples were together again, and this time Thomas was with them. The doors were locked; but suddenly, as before, Jesus was standing among them. 'Peace be with you,' he said. Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here and look at my hands. Put your hand into the wound in my side. Don't be faithless any longer.' Thomas exclaimed, 'My Lord and my God!'

What I love about this passage...here has already showed up for everybody else and now he is just showing up for one. That is who Jesus is...he shows up for just one. He is willing to die, be buried and resurrected for just one.

What do you do when you have this hurdle in your way, when it feels like you don't have any faith? Thomas was really struggling, but he stayed around people who had faith. For 8 full days, he stayed with the group. He didn't run away. He didn't try to do it on his own. He didn't try to figure it out on his own. He stayed around people who could build his faith.

Can I just put a note of caution on Thomas' story? Sometimes we put unrealistic and unfair demands on God. Jesus showed up for Thomas and I love that, but I don't think God should have to or will he always condescend to our demands. We have to humble ourselves to his ways. I think Jesus loved Thomas dearly and that is why he showed up, but I can't imagine how humbling it was for Thomas to touch the nail scarred hands and the side where the spear penetrated.

If you feel like Thomas, I pray God will show up in a real way to remove any hurdles that are holding you back and you will be willing to respond in real humility to his love for you.

Conclusion

You have heard 3 stories. Their days ended much different than they began because they came to grips with who they are, they came to grips with who Jesus is and they came to grips with what was holding them back.

It would be easy to say, they saw Jesus. Did you know in Thomas' story Jesus says, "You believe because you have seen me. Blessed are those who believe without seeing me."

Baptism is something that we put a lot of emphasis on, but we want to be clear... baptism is not what saves you. The reason we put this kind of emphasis is because we believe this just reflects what you read all throughout the book of Acts. But, we don't believe that water saves a person, we believe the blood of Jesus is what saves person. Ephesians tells us, "We are saved by grace, through faith in Christ." So, it is not the water, it is Jesus who saves us.

Baptism is a picture of what God does in our lives when we choose to follow him by believing in him, confessing him and being baptized. Through baptism, we identify with Jesus in his death, burial and resurrection. We enter the water as people, who are broken, lost and disconnected from God. When we emerge from the water, it represents that we have been washed of our sins and made into a brand-new person. Baptism identifies us with the incredible work that God did through his Son. Baptism symbolizes that same incredible work going on inside of us.

If you have been baptized or if you are thinking about it, I want you to realize two aspects of baptism:

It is an inside job. We outwardly participate and identify with the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, but the real work is happening on the inside. There is nothing significant about who baptizes you. We don't have any special water brought in from any special place. But what is special and significant is the inward work that God is doing in our hearts and lives. Psalm 51:1-2 says, "Have mercy on me, O God, because of your unfailing love. Because of your great compassion, blot out the stain of my sins. Wash me clean from my guilt. Purify me from my sin."

It is a public declaration. You are declaring what God has done through his Son and you are declaring what you have decided to do. When you decide to be baptized, you know something is different. Sometimes people say, "Pray this pray." Raise your hand if you made a decision. I can't visibly see a difference. When you come up out of the

water there is a visible difference and we are trusting that it is a visible difference of what is God is doing on the inside.

For several months, we have talked about Jesus, but today we want you to experience the reality of being a follower of Jesus. We can talk about it, we can tell you what it is like but there is nothing like the reality.

Last year about this time, our daughter Mackenzie and her husband Billy, gave us a little box as an Easter present. We had no idea what it was and here was what was in it. They were pregnant. Around 8 or 10 weeks, we got a picture of the first ultrasound. We showed it to everyone. I think I showed it to you. We got other ultrasounds throughout the pregnancy, but I can now tell you from experience, there is nothing like the reality. This is Marley Ann Blankenship. Can I just tell you? Usually, I have a lot of thoughts and things I have to do up here, but when I am with her, all the other thoughts don't matter is much. She is what I am focused on.

Guys, if your life is like any of the stories we have talked about today. If things like no purpose, disappointment or doubt are the things that dominate your heart and mind, make a decision today where Jesus is going to dominate your heart and mind. Let him be the one who is your focus. Let him be the one who turns words like frustration, disappointment and doubt in to words like freedom, life and restoration.