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THE GORY DETAILS OF THE GOSPELS

APRIL

12, 2020

Facebook has its pros and cons, but I enjoy it. One feature I really like are Facebook memories. Each morning, I receive a notification that it has compiled all of my posts from previous years made on that day of the month. This week, I have been reminded of my trip to the west coast. In 2017, my husband and I traveled to Los Angeles to attend a conference and all of my posts have been shown up as memories. I thought back on our time there and recalled that this was also when we were studying John in Bible study and I was fascinated by John's account of Jesus' crucifixion. The hotel concierge suggested that we save money and travel for \$0.75 on the city bus rather than Uber, so we did. I read John's account multiple times, then on a particularly long bus ride with a hundred stops to Santa Monica Beach, I read Matthew, Mark, Luke's accounts, too! My husband was protectively watching the comings and goings of the public on and off the bus, and I kept elbowing him and reading passages aloud from my phone - a memory with neither photo nor Facebook post.

I cannot say exactly why I was so captivated by the four accounts of the crucifixion, but several reasons are possible. This was new information for me. I had not been studying the Bible for very long on my own, and these accounts were different, yet true for the individuals who wrote them. When we think of Easter, we focus on Christ's resurrection, not so much the details surrounding His death. I hate to admit it, but as a child, I questioned whether or not a man could really die from being nailed to a cross. I wondered how much blood loss there would have been. As a young adult, I wondered how, without modern technologies they were able to check for brain impulses - could Jesus have just been weak and dehydrated and they thought He was dead?

God, in His infinite wisdom, must have anticipated questions such as these, hence He inspired, not one or two, but four of the disciples to write down their account of the time they spent with Jesus on earth. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are the first four books of the New Testament, each was written by its namesake. Matthew was a tax collector (Mat. 9:9). Mark is believed to have been younger than the other disciples, possibly still in his teens, but after his encounters with Jesus he became an evangelist. Luke, later known as Saint Luke, was a doctor (Col. 4:14). John, later known as Saint John, was Jesus' cousin and he worked as a fisherman (Matt. 4:21). These were four real men who walked alongside Jesus, witnessed His miracles, heard Him preach, and were taught by Him, directly. There were twelve total disciples, but four of them were inspired to write down their account and they are in the Holy Bible.

Their accounts are very similar, but they differ in some of the details. If someone asks my children to write their account of this quarantine, they will be similar, but not identical because each of them have a different experience and memory. Matthew, Mark, and Luke say that Simon of Cyrene carried the cross, but John says Jesus was forced to carry His own cross. In prior verses we are told that Jesus had been flogged. The flogging likely made Him bloody and weak, so once he could carry it no more, Simon carried it the rest of the way. They all agree that the crucifixion took place at Golgotha, the place of the Skull. Matthew says Jesus was offered wine mixed with gall to drink, but Mark says it was wine mixed with myrrh. Luke and John do not mention this detail. All of them say, and “then they crucified Him,” none give details of the number of people with hammers or nails, etc. I supposed there was a standard way of crucifying someone as it was a common punishment for criminals of the day. They all write about Jesus’ clothes being divided up by people on the ground, and they all mention the sign that was posted, **THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS.** John tells of the brief argument between Pilate and the chief priests of the Jews about how the sign should have been worded. All except John write about the ridicule Jesus received as a common criminal. People questioned His power and authority telling Him that if He were really the Son of God, He should save Himself.

Mark 15:25 states, “It was nine in the morning when they crucified him.” All except John write that they experienced darkness from noon until 3 in the afternoon, “for the sun stopped shining” (Luke 23:45). At 3 in the afternoon, all four agree that Jesus spoke for the last time, and was offered wine vinegar on a sponge. John adds that it was lifted up to Him on a hyssop stalk. Matthew 27:46 states, “About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “*Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?*” (which means “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”) He then says in verses 50-51, “And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, the rocks split.” Matthew says an earthquake occurred, proving to the naysayers that Jesus was the Son of God. John tells us that the next day was a special Sabbath, and no bodies were to be left hanging and it was customary for the soldiers to break the legs of the crucified before taking them down. John 19:33-34 states, “But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. ³⁴Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus’ side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water.” All four of the Gospels indicate that Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for Jesus’ body. He wrapped it in cloths and placed it in a tomb in a nearby garden where no one else had ever been laid.

Reading the four accounts was sufficient to remove any doubts I may have had. People die everyday, but the sun doesn’t stop shining for 3 hours. Earthquakes don’t occur at the moment of death, unless it’s the Son of God. We read in John about the breaking of legs. With crucifixion, I [read](#) that the weight of the body pulling down on the arms made breathing difficult causing suffocation. They would break the legs of the suspects to make it impossible for them to push themselves up in order to breathe. When the time came to break Jesus’ legs, He was already dead, plus this fulfilled Old Testament prophecy - when the Israelites ate the passover lamb none of its bones were to be broken. (Ex. 12:46). Instead, a soldier pierced His side causing a spill of blood and water. Symbolically, we can interpret this as a proof of Jesus as the

living water He referenced in John 4:14, “but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” If we look at this scientifically, the combination of flogging and crucifixion would have caused His heart to beat rapidly, but be ineffective to move the fluids throughout His blood stream, a condition known as hypovolemic shock.

We all know that there are many different ways to die. If given the choice, crucifixion would not be among my preferred top three. To die by crucifixion was an excruciatingly long, painful process that was done with public witnesses. In the verses preceding those referenced above, in all four Gospels, there is discussion of the controversy surrounding the crucifixion of Jesus. He had not broken any laws. 1 Peter 2:22 tells us, “He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.” Basically, Jesus was crucified because He said that He was the Son of God, and that was blasphemy to those who did not believe Him. Additionally, and more importantly, He was crucified because God the Father planned for Jesus’ death to take place in this way. Jesus’ death was to serve a purpose.

Jesus was put to death because the penalty for sin is death. Sin and God cannot dwell together. Jesus, Himself, did not sin, but man sins daily. 1 John 1:8 says, “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.” We inherit a sin nature from the moment of conception because of the sins of the first man, Adam. Paul explains in Romans 5:12 (ESV), “¹²Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.” In the Old Testament we read of the animal sacrifices performed to cover for sin. Those sacrifices were a bandage for sin, but not a cure. God loves people. He loves you and He loves me. He created man in His own image and desires to be in relationship with all of mankind. Sin separates us from God. God’s solution was that He would send His Son, fully God and fully man, to live on the earth as a man and teach people the truth about how to live in love and holiness. Jesus suffered on the cross because of our sins - not because of His own. His suffering on the cross, paid the penalty for our sins - past, present and future. Because of Jesus, if we believe in Him, we are forgiven of our sins. When we die, our soul will live on, with God, in the paradise of heaven.

In all four of the Gospels, we read about the tearing of the temple curtain, but there is no explanation of this. In the book of Exodus 26, God gave instructions for how to build His temple, it would be His earthly dwelling place. One portion of the instructions were, “³¹And you shall make a veil of blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen. It shall be made with cherubim skillfully worked into it. ³²And you shall hang it on four pillars of acacia overlaid with gold...³³And the veil shall separate for you the Holy Place from the Most Holy.” Only the High Priest could enter the Holy Place and God’s dwelling place was the Most Holy, the two were separated by the temple curtain signifying that God was separate from sin. Upon Jesus’ death, the temple curtain was torn meaning the separation was gone. Sin received its permanent atonement, its cure, when Jesus died. Today, there is no sin that any man or woman can commit that would cause his/her eternity to be spent in hell - IF he/she believes Jesus is the Son of God who died to atone for his/her sins. This is the Good News we celebrated on Good Friday (April 10, 2020).

On the third day, today, we celebrate Jesus' resurrection. After He died, the soldiers confirmed he was dead, and God gave signs indicating His death. His body was wrapped and prepared for burial, and placed in a tomb. On the third day, He arose and walked out of the tomb. Jesus defeated death. Just like He defeated death and lived again, and so can we! Once our physical body dies, our soul can be resurrected to live forever, in heaven with God - if we believe that Jesus is the Son of God who died to remove our penalty of sin. That's even more good news!

This week, in the United States and worldwide, there have been a record number of deaths. I, personally, do not know anyone who has lost their life to Coronavirus, but I do know of people who have lost friends and loved ones. We are not privy to God's plans, but I admit, watching the numbers and observing how this virus can unknowingly infect people and stop their breathing, I have given some thought, this week, to my own death. We can hunker down in our homes, if we have a job that permits us to do so, but unless we have a farm in the backyard, eventually we must venture out to the grocery store, and that puts us at risk. There are many ways to die, but Coronavirus is a very real cause of death that we are all facing today. As I thought, this week, about my own potential death, where my soul will spend eternity is not a cause for fear. I know that when I die, whether due to Coronavirus or a car accident, my soul will live on, in heaven with God. I am sure of this. Do you know where your soul would spend eternity when you die? If you are not, please reach out to me or another believer to discuss it. God loves all of His children, and He desires a relationship with you. That relationship must begin while you are living, it is not a relationship you can begin once you die. There is no better time than the present to ask the questions you have and to invite God into your life. You are probably not in a physical church this week, but God no longer dwells in the temple, anyway, He dwells among His people. Won't you invite Him to dwell within your heart today?

Thank you for reading today!

Kim

Although no Resurrection Sunday service will be held today, my mother still went over to her church in Sumter, SC to prepare the living cross for the community and church family to enjoy.

