

Pastor's Corner 3-31-2018

The Path of the Cross

It was in the Garden of Gethsemane that Jesus faced the crossroads that would determine human destiny. Should he, the sinless one, take on the sins of humanity and thus secure salvation for our doomed race or should he cast off his humanity, rise to glory, avoid the suffering of the cross and abandon us to our fate?

As the sins of our fallen race were placed upon him, Jesus must have been tempted. His humanity shrank from the pain and misery that were to befall him at the hands of priests, Romans, and common citizens. His divinity shrank from the sins he was being asked to carry. Jesus prayed three times that the Father would show him another way and that God would allow him to drink a cup other than the cup of His wrath poured out without mercy.

But there was no other way. Jesus had only one option if he were to secure salvation for the world. He had to remain spotless and he had to bear the sins of us all. This then was the temptation that Jesus faced in the garden. Would he continue down the path of suffering and shame? Would he be the willing sacrifice that we needed?

Let's make no mistake, Jesus could have stepped off that path at any point. He could have tossed aside his humanity and laid claim to his full rights as the second person of the trinity. Nobody forced him to walk the path of the cross. He chose the path of his own free will.

It's interesting to me that once Jesus finally makes the decision to follow the Father's plan that there are several instances where he was given an opportunity to avoid the cross.

When Judas led the mob to meet Jesus there was a bit of a scuffle. As the betrayer approached Jesus the son of God asked them, "Who do you seek?"

When they answered, "Jesus," there was a flash of divine light. Perhaps an angel appeared, perhaps Jesus let a bit of his divinity shine through. Either way, the mob stumbled back stunned and terrified. At this point Jesus could have simply walked away. But his decision had been made, he will follow the plan given by the Father.

Judas was the first to recover from the divine manifestation and, knowing Jesus to be a man of peace, demonstrates that it is safe to arrest Jesus by walking boldly up to him and kissing him on the cheek. The mob realized that Jesus wasn't going to put up a fight so they rushed forward and tied his hands.

Just because Jesus wasn't going to fight doesn't mean his disciples wouldn't. Peter took out his sword and rushed forward to rescue Jesus. He swung wildly and lopped off the ear of the High Priests servant. Immediately, Jesus was at the poor man's side. The savior is no longer tied up (how'd that happen?) and he ministered to the poor guy who is now missing an ear.

As Jesus healed the man he turned to Peter and said, "Put away your sword, even now I could call on my Father and he would send twelve legions of angels to protect me." In case you didn't do the math, that's a full legion of angels to replace each of the 12 apostles. In other words, Jesus didn't need Peter's sword. If he wanted to avoid arrest and crucifixion all he had to do was ask the Father for his heavenly army and they would be there in an instant. This is Jesus' second opportunity to leave the path of the cross, yet he continues.

When he was taken before the Sanhedrin he was repeatedly questioned and false witnesses were brought before him. Jesus said nothing in his own defense and his accusers couldn't get their stories straight. The closest they could come to a consistent story was that Jesus had made the claim that he would destroy temple and rebuild it again in three days. But even here they didn't have their facts right. What it all boiled down to was that this was an illegal trial and there were not enough witnesses to convict Jesus. The Law of Moses said that every accusation had to be established on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Since they couldn't get two or three witnesses to agree on any testimony, the charges against Jesus should have been dropped.

This would have been an easy thing for Jesus to point out. He had confounded the lawyers and religious leaders on numerous occasions. He had avoided their traps in the past and he could have easily done so this time as well. Not everyone in the gathering was convinced that Jesus needed to die. A few words from the savior would have changed their minds and they would have released him on the spot. This

was Jesus' third opportunity to leave the path of the cross. But like a lamb before his shearers is silent, our savior spoke not a word.

At least not until the High Priest asked the right question. The only question Jesus answered was, "are you the Christ, the son of the living God?" To this question, and this question only, Jesus answered, "Yes."

That was all they needed really. It is blasphemy to claim to be God and so the High Priest passed judgment and sent Jesus off to the Romans to get official permission to have him executed.

When Jesus was paraded before Pilate he was given an opportunity to talk with the Roman governor in private. Unlike his time before the Sanhedrin, Jesus spoke freely with Pilate. However, the focus of the conversation was always to steer Pilate towards conviction. Jesus never spoke in his own defense and still Pilate could find no cause for Jesus to be executed. He even proposed to have Jesus beaten then released. Throughout this interview, Jesus could have persuaded Pilate to free him, but for the fourth time, the savior chose the path of the cross.

Jesus' fifth opportunity came when he was paraded before King Herod. Herod was quite excited to see Jesus because he hoped to see some kind of miracle or wonder. The king was to be disappointed, however. Rather than use his divine power to impress the King who could free him, Jesus again remained silent.

There was a sixth opportunity for Jesus to avoid his death on the cross and this one came while he was hanging between the two criminals. While he was dying there were three groups of people that tempted him to climb off the cross and save himself - the Romans, the priests, and the criminals who were sharing his fate. Even at this late hour, Jesus could have come down off the cross. Yet he chose to remain and pay the price for our sins.

Between Gethsemane and the cross Jesus had at least six distinct opportunities to walk another path, but he didn't. In each case he chose to continue to follow the plan the Father had given him. He did this out of love. Love was the only thing that kept him on the cross. During this Easter weekend let's remember the one who loved us so much that he willingly gave his life as a ransom for our sin.

Happy Sabbath,
Pastor Tyler