

Meditations on Holy Week by Glen Davis, 5 April 1998, Palm Sunday

Two things trouble me presently:

- 1) I will not be well enough to travel out to our kids for Easter this year, and
- 2) in the course of these tests, I have been made painfully aware of my great difficulty in breathing.

Item 2 wouldn't bother me so much except that it means I shall never be able to preach again. I always knew this, of course, but like some young couple hoping for a baby I always kept up my hopes for preaching again.

With this in mind I am determined to record some little meditations for my family to have. They are the very essence of brevity for I am simply "winded" ;-) and cannot be "windy" any more. I've written them out and am now taking little snatches of time to record them on my primitive equipment for I feel an urgency in getting this accomplished. That pasted below is what I am "preaching". It was done rather hurriedly for I must snatch quickly my "good" hours to do whatever work. As I did all from memory, the Biblical quotations are my own spur of the moment paraphrases as are some quotes here and there. Poetic license I guess.

In Christian love,
Glen Davis

Palm Sunday

In the Name of The Father, and of The Son, and of The Holy Spirit. Amen.

There are some very tragic and melancholy things that the world will never face up to. It just isn't in this Age's make-up and outlook to grasp what Heaven has sent to it. By this Age I am not only speaking of our own but of every generation of fallen human beings who've ever lived or will ever live. As one of the Gospels has it, "He came unto His own and His own received Him not ... He was in the world and He made that world, but the world did not recognize Him."

Could there be sadder words for a child to speak to his parent than these: "Mom, Dad, don't you know me?" Memories of a lifetime can be erased with certain illnesses, the consequences are heartbreaking for those who've loved and now are unknown and regarded as strangers.

There is much in similarity here to how the Creator of the World, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, was treated 2,000 years ago and is presently treated. He came to save us from sin, the ravages of eternal death, and hell ... He came to prepare us for everlasting and blessed life with the Faithful ones of all ages, "He came unto His own and His own knew Him not, but for as many as did recognize Him -- to them He gave eternal life!"

And thus there was that Palm Sunday, the beginning of our Lord's agonies, suffering, and death: the beginning of God's sacrificing Himself in order that we might recognize Him and in that recognition His Spirit would overcome our spiritual amnesia called sin.

The message has always been written in the Heavens, spoken with the passing of one season into another: "Man, remember who you are, dust -- and to dust you must return!" King Solomon musing

upon the reality of life and that death which is always around the corner on any given day proclaims of life: "Vanity of vanities!"

On this day the Lord rode into Jerusalem upon an humble beast, little children sang Hosanna before Him, palm branches and coats were thrown upon the road that even his donkey might not have to touch the dirt of that ancient path. The crowds were in adulation. This is the One who just raised Lazarus from the dead -- He is a descendant of the great King David. He shall be our King! Rome must move aside. Caesar must bow to the Messiah!

Here was the world in all of its forgetfulness beginning to have but a glimmer of light: they did not see clearly but their hearts knew that something must be done. Here was somehow the One whom they knew and yet did not know. When all else fails we turn to politics: they would make Him their King and surely then the Kingdom of God would be forced to come upon the earth. They did not own up to their actual need: as with all of us they were sinners and for that kingdom to dawn it must first come into our hearts and then into our thinking. Jesus would later tell His tormentors: "My kingdom is not of this world" but for now those tormentors were His adoring public.

Was ever a man more alone in all of the world than was Jesus -- alone amidst an adoring crowd. Alone because they did not adore Jesus as they supposed they were doing, they were adoring their own viewpoints, they were adoring a mere phantom and not the reality who rode before them: the God who was already King of Kings could not be crowned by mere mortals, the Man riding the beast of burden would soon be burdened with the sins of the world.

His disciples; shouldn't they have understood? He had told them plainly enough what was ahead but they refused to accept such a thing: Jesus surely meant something else. To be sure, a few of them had asked if they might have positions of great influence in His coming Kingdom and Peter had vehemently protested any thought of Jesus' death with his solemn words: "God forbid!" Even His precious mother had her difficult moments knowing all that she knew and pondered in her heart. At one point the family had driven her to seek to have Jesus brought home for her other children felt Him to be quite insane. And when those disciples assured Him that if necessary they would also go to the cross with Him. They knew not what they spoke.

Into Jerusalem our Savior rode; humble and upon a colt. His destiny was not an enthronement upon a splendid throne but the brutality of hanging from an ugly rugged cross. The only crown men would give to Him was the only crown any could give Him down here in this fallen, dark place; a crown of thorns. That alone was the crown He accepted as men spat upon Him and jested about His appearance. He alone knew the appropriateness of such a crown for it was with the thorns that God had cursed the earth when the human soul fell from its love of the Lord in those primordial days now called Eden -- it was an eternal fall from a state of immortality into time and space and sin and death. This King had now come to reign over the fallen ones as their only possible sacrifice and expiation, to reign from the cross.

Ride on, ride on in Majesty,
the wing-ed ones up in the sky
Look with sad and wondering eyes,
To see the approaching sacrifice.

Amen.

Holy Thursday

On the night Christ instituted the Holy Communion, all of faithful Judaism was observing its solemn Passover: the Seder. Thoughts were heavy in the air of how long, long ago God had led His people out of slavery and bondage: out of Egypt and the land of the Pharaohs; of how every faithful Hebrew's home was defended from the passing plague on the night before their deliverance by the blood of a lamb smeared over their door posts; of how He miraculously brought them through the Red Sea. The disciples had observed this holy custom all of their lives, as had Jesus. But tonight was to be different: tonight He would offer Himself as that one and only Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world.

The bread upon the table before them became a living symbol of His body broken upon the cross. The wine cup was passed to each as was the ancient custom -- only now He quietly said to them, "Let this cup represent My blood that will be shed for you in the New Covenant!" He spoke the words that were eternal for Calvary is timeless. It defies all definitions of time and space. While it was an event in history it was more than that; it was God sacrificing His life in order to pay the debt of sin and shame that none of us can ever pay. As the old hymn goes, "There was none other good enough!" And Christ, the Second Person of the Most Blessed Trinity who had taken upon Himself the true Humanity of His own creatures, drank the bitter cup that is common to those creatures, "death."

Judas had already disappeared into the heavy night, Satan had long since placed it into his pitiable heart to betray the Lord. Such things are always done in the dark and that darkness has more to do with our wretched fallenness than it has to do with the absence of the sun at night. Schemes, murders, violence, gossip, dishonesty of every sort; unfaithfulness -- all of them are done in the dark for they come from darkened hearts; the darkened hearts which Jesus came to save. And lest we be too critical of Judas and the pittance for which he sold our Lord, we must remember that Jesus is sold out by all of us for far less: a moment of anger, a word of deception, a love of this passing world and its junk which we have supposed to be treasures.

And singing an hymn they passed over the little stream called the Cedron, now scarlet with the blood of sacrificial lambs. There at a garden called Gethsemane our Lord agonized for He was both God and Man. The horrible death looming before Him was monstrous and He cried out in His dear Humanity: "Father, if it be possible to take this cup from me ... but not my will, Thy will be done!" He sweated blood droplets: medical people now know that such a condition occurs in extreme agony when the corpuscles just under the skin burst and the pore perspire huge quantities of blood. The sacrifice had already begun, His condition so weakened Him that He would later fall under the burden of that rail which He must carry up Calvary to be crucified.

There is a question He asked that night. It is the question He still surely asks of every church, of every man, woman, and child who has received Christian baptism. His disciples had fallen fast asleep while He prayed all alone and of them He asked, as Judas and the Temple Guards approached, "What? Could you not watch with me for an hour?"

Every prayer unsaid, every scripture word unread, every goodness undone, every kind word unspoken, every holy sacrifice unmade must need have that question asked of it: "What? Could you not watch with me for an hour?" The Enemy is upon us, the holy church is betrayed again and again. Our lives become more of this world and less heavenly. The spirit of Antichrist is alive in every age and generation: it is especially alive in our own. To our generation He is saying once more: "Watch and pray that you fall not into temptation." Amen.

Good Friday

"Good Friday" -- what a strange name for such a day of human infamy and diabolical torment. What was so "good" about that Friday? This sinful world attempted the murder of God! The ultimate depravity of our fallen estate manifested itself and there it was concentrated with all the demons of hell at a skull shaped hill outside the city walls of Jerusalem. Good Friday? Why not Black Friday or Bad Friday or Devilish Friday? Common sense would seem to dictate such names but never Good Friday.

What was the good of hanging Christ upon a cross, of taunting and mocking Him; of despising Him as He died? What was the good of driving those spikes just below the palms of His hands, between the two bones that made it possible to hang a human upon this hideous instrument of torture and death? What was the good of the hooting and the railing of the crowd: "If you are the Son of God then why don't you come down off of that cross?" Could there be anything good in Jesus' painfully raising himself up for a momentary gasp of air while His chest muscles caved in upon themselves? Was it somehow good that as He weakened physically He could finally not raise Himself for a breath of air, that He would suffocate and His heart implode upon itself?

No, there is never good in the purposes of fallen humanity or in the wickedness of the dark powers: that Friday was never intended to be good. It seemed the end of the world to His disciples, it seemed the end of an annoyance to the religious powers, it seemed just another execution to the Romans.

But it was the Friday that was good for us! It was the Friday that God Himself bore all the pain and torment of the Hell we all deserve and it was the Friday that God Himself died the death that the human race had inherited in its spiritual genetics. It was the Friday when, for but a moment, the devils and all wicked sorts of folk rejoiced: but as St. Paul points out, "Had they known who this really was they would not have so rejoiced!" In our Human clothing, with our Human heart and mind and soul, Christ faced all that otherwise we would have to face eternally ... He took His creatures tragedy upon Himself and played the Man to the end!

Thus was torn from top to bottom the veil in the Temple that hid the Holy of Holies: God had torn through the sin and darkness of our fallen natures and made us His beloved children by suffering our suffering, taking our Hell, dying our death. It was a Good Friday: Good for those who will now "Take up their crosses and follow Him to Heaven!" Little is good down here: that which is best we must lose, our loved ones die -- but oh the good that He has done by taking that very death upon Himself that we may never die alone and in terror: for it has been done and we are following His blood filled steps through the grave into the Heavens. Amen.

Holy Saturday

When we are young, we never really suppose that we shall die. Oh, of course we know it intellectually but there is a sense of immortality about the young that outruns the idea of death and probably the saddest of deaths is the death of the young. I once felt that way, for I once was young and well. Now I have lived with a rehearsal for death nearly seven years. I like to think that it has given me some wisdom, some insight that will help others as they grow older and, as the poet has it, "join that innumerable caravan moving toward the heavens."

Jesus was crucified on Friday: on that day God tasted that which is foreign to God, human death. His body would rest in the tomb Friday, all day Saturday, and He would return to this life early Sunday morning ... thus, for three days He journeyed that realm from which none returns. We may have insights into the next life thanks to the Near Death Experiences of some, but, at best (or sometimes at worst) they are only in the vestibule for a few moments and recalled to life whilst still on the front porch of death. That Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead after four days in the tomb would cause God the Son to weep: He knew the peace from whence He called forth Lazarus, and Lazarus knew by then something of eternal life.

Yet until Jesus' soul descended into the realm of the dead, it was a shadowy place and the blessed dead knew not the glory of their Savior. It was the valley of the shadow of death: and valleys in darkness are gloomy affairs. Now Christ has come to the spirits of the faithful dead and proclaimed His good news to them. All of the holy, the good, the noble, the pure in heart, the humble servants of the Lord from all generations rejoiced as He led them into Paradise. The promise from the cross was true for God had made it to the repentant thief: "This day you will be with me in paradise!"

And having taken the faithful dead to this place of light and glory He promised us as well that we would be there until He returns with us at the End of History to judge the quick and the dead. The ancient texts refer to it as Christ's harrowing out of Hades: He left that world of shadows to the unbelievers and the tormentors: it is Hell that remained for Paradise has been given to the Meek of the Earth. As the inevitable hour approaches for each of us we need have no fear. Of course it is only natural to fear the death process. That is human and nothing to be ashamed of. But what lies beyond the grave is Paradise. St. Paul could proclaim boldly, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?"

He descended into hell: on the third day He arose again from the dead. Amen.

Easter Sunday

The most widely attested fact of history is the Resurrection of Jesus Christ and the empty tomb He left behind. That He is alive and reigning has been attested to not only by those who actually saw Him but by 2,000 years of Christians who have followed Him. You cannot follow a dead man: we follow and bear our crosses in this life after Him "who was dead and now liveth."

Like some gigantic piece of a puzzle none of life makes sense. History is most futile; life itself an irony of ironies if the Resurrection is unknown. That which causes martyrs to embrace their torture and death from this world's Antichrists is not human courage so much as it is the knowing that Jesus is risen and awaits us in Paradise. Presently, 400 martyrs go to their deaths each day -- and their deaths are painful and dreadful in the extreme, but they go rejoicing for Jesus is alive and this world is passing quickly.

There can be no other explanation for that which defies explanation: how the church has survived and survives the constant blows of the powers of this world. There can be no other explanation for men and women whose lives once were lived disgracefully being transformed into loving and caring souls by the power of calling upon Jesus in repentance. What is a saint but one more proclamation;

"Alleluia Christ is risen!
Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!"

We live in apostate times: sound doctrine is scorned by many of our religious leaders and a soul can only wonder why some churches even bother to remain open since the Christ who is arisen is not really believed in many of them. There is this one glorious fact of history that drives the devils wild, that angers the false teachers in many of our seminaries, that causes bad bishops to persecute good priests: Christ is risen! Oh how the darkness hates those words for it knows its time of terroristic reigning is drawing to its inevitable close. That one who proclaimed to the rebellious angels: "I will not serve!" is the same one who has stolen the resurrection faith of many who once knew the Lord ... this thief is the devil.

But the hour comes when all shall see Him descending with His saints and angels. All shall see that He lives, all shall see the wounds in His hands and His feet and know that it was their unrepentant wickedness that did this to Him. Christ asks the church the same question He asked during His earthly sojourn: "Will there be any faithful when I come?" Even so, come quickly Lord!

Ascension

"He ascended into Heaven and sitteth on the right hand of the Father" ... After forty days upon this earth in His resurrected body, Christ receded from our human sight and into that invisible dimension just beyond our deaths -- as the ancients have it: "He ascendeth into Heaven."

This He did without dying. This He did gloriously and the angels had to chase the gazing disciples away for the Lord wanted them to await His arrival at the Father's throne that the Holy Spirit might fall upon the church. We are assured by those same angels that we shall see Him return even as we have seen Him taken up! Alleluia!

For now He is at the Father's right hand: He is there in His Divinity and His Humanity, our redeemed Humanity. We spiritually are with Him there in that Humanity which might be compared to God's clothing Himself in our Humanness. When the Father looks upon His Son He does not see our blemishes, our sinfulness, our shortcomings, our shames past or present. No, He sees us in Jesus. As St. Paul so movingly writes: "If anyone be in Christ he is a new creation ..." and again he describes the Ascended Christ as being our only claim to goodness, to righteousness, to salvation.

Oh how we ought to cry out in our churches in these evil times: "Look not upon our sinfulness, Oh Father, but upon Your Son our Savior!" Or, as the ancient church often expressed it, "His cross between us and Judgment Day. We shall be Christians because He has taken upon Himself all of our sins, our death, our humanity -- like an holy bridegroom He has exchanged vows with us giving us His righteousness and taking upon Himself our disastrous plight. Thus the rings have been exchanged and the Bridegroom waits until the moment when the last predestined soul has been brought safely into that true and invisible church that transcends every church, denomination, or Christian sect. Then He shall return with the shout of triumph and our souls shall accompany Him as our dust rises up from whatever grave or wretched condition, and is transformed into bodies like unto our Christ's. Amen.

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