

Text: Matt 25.26  
St Stephen's

March 16<sup>th</sup> 2008  
Palm Sun

## Freedom for Captives

It was an incredible three years. And now, Jesus had come to **Jerusalem**. The King, his disciples believed, had come to **claim his throne**. But in just five short days they found him mounted – not on a throne but on his **cross**. The journey of Jesus through this week to his cross is a remarkable event. **It is the most straightforward week in human history.**

Because it is here that **God's own heart** is finally and fully **put on public display**. It is here his **grace**, his gift-love, his unmerited, undeserved, one way love **is uncovered**, as the **blood of Jesus** flows it is **revealed**, and set in place as a Kingdom power beyond and above every other power in the cosmos.

But here is what else happens. As God uncovers his own heart in the passion of Jesus, **every other heart is uncovered** as well. As one theologian said, **"The cross says what a thing really is."** Put something next to the cross, and you see it for what it is. The cross **exposes** everything. **Masks** come off, **secret thoughts** are revealed, **hidden motives** are uncovered. Let's look...

### The Crowds

*As he went along, people spread their cloaks on the road.  
the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices  
"Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!"  
"Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"*

Luke 19:36-38 (NIV)

Five days later **they flipped...**

*With one voice they cried out, "Away with this man! Release Barabbas to us!" they kept shouting, "Crucify him! Crucify him!"*

Luke 23:18-21 (NIV)

**Masks** come off, **secret thoughts** are revealed, **hidden motives** are uncovered. And their demands were met.

## Jewish Leaders

They had shrouded their attack upon Jesus in the cloak of doctrinal purity, national security and moral righteousness, and swept Pilate into their net. But Pilate saw something else in their attacks:

*"He knew it was out of envy that they had handed Jesus over to him."* Matthew 27.18

**Masks** come off, **secret thoughts** are revealed, **hidden motives** are uncovered. And their plots succeed.

## The Roman Governor

Pontius Pilate. When Pilate spoke, Caesar spoke. Seasoned veteran of military & politics. Had some 5000 men under his command.

**When we see him**, Pilate is seated on the governor's chair, Jesus is on trial...

*Then Pilate announced to the chief priests and the crowd, "I find no basis for a charge against this man."* Luk 23:4

But the mob & Jewish leaders blocked his every move...

*"If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar."*

John 19.12

All of a sudden, it's.. **Pilate on trial** He twists, struggles...

- wife: *"have nothing to do with that righteous man"*
- conscience: *"he has done nothing to deserve death"*.
- But the mob is screaming: *"crucify him"*

**Masks** come off, **secret thoughts** are revealed, **hidden motives** are uncovered. Luke's blunt summary: ***"their voices prevailed"*** Lk 23.23

## The Disciples

On the night of their **Last Supper**, Jesus began to speak about leaving them, about a time of testing and trial. And about an approaching disaster.

*"Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me."*

*"Is it I, Lord?"*

They **protest the suspicion**. They **don't like the accusation**. And before the night was over, they **won't like the answer**. They won't like it at all. Matthew tells us that in the end,

*all the disciples deserted him and fled.*

Matthew 26:56 (NIV)

**Masks** come off, **secret thoughts** are revealed, **hidden motives** are uncovered.

Did you notice it? There is **failure everywhere**. As it all comes to a head, **everyone crashes**. There are **no heroes** here. No one stands tall. No one stands at all. Just wreckage. **What do you do make of this?**

I have three thoughts...

### **In The Week Of The Cross, We Learn We Are Captive.**

You and I are **caught** - in something beyond our capacity to fix, beyond our capacity to change. That is the power of sin. The old theological phrase for it is '**total depravity**', by which people meant that sin infects **every part** of us (the 'total' phrase). And it goes **deep** (the 'depravity' phrase). The result is that failure is a universal experience.

Why are we surprised that we cannot lose weight? Can't keep out of debt? Can't give up our anger? Can't break that habit? That change is hard? That we keep doing the same things over and over again? Why are we surprised at the fall of Gov **Elliot Spitzer**? The spectacular media coverage comes **not because he is unlike us** – but **because he is so like us** – his situation is ours – just writ large, uncovered, in full public display, in all its spectacular failure

Here is the point: We are **not 'free' people who make 'bad choices'**; we are **captive people** – captive to forces inside and outside us that often mean...

we **do not do** what we want to do - and  
we **do** what we wish we hadn't done.

That is how the Apostle Paul saw it. That's how we experience it

We learn that again in the week of the cross...

This means, I think, that **the first step to freedom**, is to **admit that you don't have much freedom**. To **admit that you are powerless**, and your life is **out of control**...

### **In The Week Of The Cross, We Learn Compassion.**

The moment that you come to see that **people are not as free** as they think they are, you **begin to have compassion** for them. The moment you realize that the **biblical metaphors** of blindness and bondage and slavery and captivity are talking not about someone else but about folks like you and me – then you find your heart opening to them – like God's heart is open.

If you think people are 'free' to choose and upon occasion choose poorly, you will always be critical, judgmental towards them. But once you see more deeply, that people are captive to forces larger than themselves – you begin to have compassion for them.

Did you notice that **Jesus doesn't criticize his disciples** for their failures this week? He does **speak honestly** about them, points out what is coming. Because he sees. But **he doesn't judge**. After he **tells Peter** that he will fail, spectacularly, he goes on to tell him that he has prayed for him that his faith would not, in the end die... **Jesus doesn't intervene** and prevent Peter's failure. Isn't that interesting? He seems to be saying that **our failure is the pathway to our freedom**. That the place where we will find God's mercy and freedom is 'at the end of our rope'...

And then Jesus turns back **to the cross**, the **one thing** that will take away the judgment, end the failures, set the captives free.

Don't you think that a whole lot of people would be **more attracted to Christ** if we **quit judging** them and instead **had compassion** on them?

## **In The Week Of The Cross, We Find The Key To Freedom**

If what I say is true, that we are not free men and women who occasionally make a bad choice – but captive men and women who need to be set free – then **it is a miracle** that we need.

But as his days on earth would to a finish, **his miracles wound down**. During his last week, there were hardly any miracles at all. Just a fig tree that was withered. And an ear that was healed. He said, *'my hour has come'*. So **to the cross he went**. Willingly.

Everyone around him saw it as **his failure**. Don't mistake that. Everyone saw it that way – Pilate, the Jewish leaders, the crowd, his disciples, and those who taunted him...

Everyone was **sure of this**: The cross & the claim to be the Son of God do not go together:

A miraculous healer who cannot rescue himself?

A messianic King nailed to a Roman cross?

These things do not go together....

They were sure. **Case closed**. Failure.

**But then the last mask** comes off, the **secret thoughts of God** are revealed, **hidden motives of the Savior** are uncovered. When all the 'free men' have fallen, Jesus alone stands – the true free man. And what does the free man do? **To his captivity, to his cross he goes**.

Where...

He **bears our failures** and gives his forgiveness

He **suffers our captivity** and sets us free

Three years earlier he started his ministry with these words. I cannot help but think they were on his lips at the end as well...

*"He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners*

*and recovery of sight for the blind,  
to release the oppressed,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."*

*"Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."*

Luke 4:18-21