

Palm Sunday commemorates the day Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a colt and the people welcomed him and his disciples by waving palm branches and laying their clothes on the ground along the pathway. It was a wonderful and joyous day for all who believed they were welcoming the one, true King.

Many storeowners and businesses look forward to the Easter season because of the mass sales of candy and chocolate bunnies. Not to mention the baskets, toys, and clothing. Like Christmas, it has been commercialized as well. If the world allows any reference to Jesus at Easter, we might feel a tinge of sadness from store displays of wooden crosses with a crown of thorns and a purple robe. Mostly we see frilly crosses for hanging in our homes or on our doors, spring flowers and cute little stuffed lambs, or the empty tomb with the stone rolled away.

Easter is so much more than pastel colors and chocolate rabbits. For Christians, Easter is an earthly reminder of our eternal hope. Jesus Christ took on the sins of every single person in the world and laid his life down as our sacrificial lamb, and if we believe he did this for us, we can live with him forever in Heaven. The hard truth about what Jesus endured on the cross is so much more than what we are privy to on a regular basis.

Perhaps if we try to understand more of what Jesus must have endured, we might grasp the necessity of that dark Friday afternoon.

I think Jesus was in constant prayer from the moment they led him to where they were holding their farce trial. Not for God to save him; he had already asked that question in the garden. He was likely asking for God to be with him in his answers to his accusers and to only speak when necessary. Knowing that God and Jesus are one person, it takes imagination to consider how one would pray to the other. Yet Jesus was also wrapped in human flesh, and when we are cut, we bleed. When we're in pain, we need God's strength.

In his humanness, don't you think Jesus feared the pain he knew he was going to go through? He knew his fate was going to lead to death, but he also knew Heaven was on the other side. His soul was already at home with the Father, but his body was about to go through hell, and even Jesus had no idea what it would feel like.

According to Isaiah 50:6, Jesus already knew that he would be spat upon, would have the hair from his beard yanked out, flogged beyond belief, and even crucified. "I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting."

Jesus was beaten so violently that "his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any human being and his form marred beyond human likeness." (Isaiah 52:14 NIV) Additionally, when the Romans were whipping him, the strips of leather were tied off with sharp metal pieces, literally ripping Jesus' flesh to the point you could see his bones.

Even the crown of thorns must have been agonizing. I can't imagine that wreath being shoved down on someone's head, probably with an extra push down for good measure. Truly, it's a wonder the crown of thorns didn't cause neurological damage by piercing Jesus' temples.

It's hard for me to picture our Lord standing before Pilate, half-naked and bleeding. No doubt, he left a trail of blood with every step he took. Pilate didn't want to be responsible for sentencing to death a man he believed to be innocent, so he let the people decide for him. After they chose Barabbas, Jesus stood there in unbelievable pain as he listened to the crowd shouting for him to be crucified. As if he hadn't suffered enough.

When Pilate released Jesus to the Roman soldiers to be crucified, scripture says:

“Finally, Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified. So, the soldiers took charge of Jesus. Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha).” (John 19:16-17 NIV)

Did Jesus take mental snapshots of the faces he saw along the way to Golgotha? No doubt, there would have been a mixture of those who shouted for him to be crucified and those who truly believed he was God’s son. I know we weren’t there, but do you ever wonder where you would have stood if you had been? Would you have been on the side that wanted Jesus to be crucified?

Did the pain his body experienced reach such levels that his nerve endings went numb? The crossbeam rubbing against the wounds on his back was painful enough, not to mention he had been awake for at least twenty-four hours if not more. I’m sure the physical and mental exhaustion was indescribable, and he still had to walk to the place where he would be crucified.

Do you think he could still pray to his Father for help, or do you think the moment they started to slap him and spit on him, God had to turn away? It isn’t until Jesus is hanging on the cross and the sky grows dark that we hear Jesus ask, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46 NIV)

I believe it began with the slap. Jesus went through unspeakable torture, but to be denied communication with the Father must have left him feeling desolate. Our sins were purged with every strike of the whip, with every slap on Jesus’ cheek, with every hateful thing that was said to him. I don’t think the physical pain experienced by Jesus was the most difficult. I believe the gaping hole in his heart from being separated from God was probably the most painful affliction he bore that day.

Even from the cross, Jesus was taking care of business. He asked God to forgive those who were responsible for his pending death. God couldn’t look upon him at that moment, but Jesus was still thinking about the souls of the people in front of him, and about us who were to come. He made sure his mom had a home by placing her in the care of his disciple, John. Until his last words were spoken, “It is finished,” and to his last breath, he did exactly what he was supposed to do. Thank God.

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Jesus’ death is not the end of his story. The fact that his dead body was placed in a tomb and on the third day he arose was just the beginning. That first Easter morning was the beginning for the disciples to see if they could continue with what they had been taught by their beloved teacher. Suddenly, all those times he mentioned that he would no longer be around started to make sense. So much so that these faithful men sacrificed their time, their families, and, for most, their lives to make sure you and I know about Jesus.

I would have loved to be one of those who encountered Jesus after he rose again. To be able to tell others that I saw him walking and talking with my own eyes. To know that my testimony would contribute to the proof that Jesus really is who I know him to be. And what about when he ascended back up to Heaven? Can you imagine witnessing that?

My friends, even more amazing than watching Jesus ascend to Heaven, will be to see him return, just as he has promised. I know it has been said for generations, but we really are seeing the signs of Jesus’ return, as written in the scriptures. In my heart, I believe Jesus is returning very, very soon. So soon, I will be surprised if he doesn’t come in my lifetime. Oh, to be a witness to that...Lord, Jesus. Come quickly.

Blessings,  
Lisa Jo