

## ***Easter 2021***

### ***Things are not always as they appear***

- When my kids come to my age they will see things as I do
- When they are in middle school algebra is not important
- If you raised a teen age girl and her boyfriend breaks up with her – she is sad
- You want to kill the fatted calf and celebrate – this daughter that was lost is back

### ***We don't always see things the same way***

TODAY what I want to do is talk to you about a relationship that is ***not necessarily as it appears!!!***

***SPECIFICALLY*** I want to talk to you about: **The relationship between LIFE and GOD..**

Because for many of us ***life and God*** get confused and they appear to be one in the same.

- So when life is good, ***GOD is good*** –
- When life is not good, ***God is not good!***

### ***And if life gets really bad***

- It is easy to assume that there is ***not no personal God***
- Or Perhaps there is ***no God at all!!!***

It is very easy for ***Disappointment with life*** to easily become ***disappointment with God***.

### ***We understand this when:***

- your dreams don't come true - when it's not working out - when you can't get a break
- when the people around you, it just all seems to be working out for them...

But, it just doesn't seem to ever work out for you –

- People say pray, trust God
- After a while you begin to equate your life experience with God

You then start to decide that

- God is not good or God is not personal
- God is not active or *perhaps there is no God at all...*

When dreams **don't come true** – we turn our frustration on God!!!!!!!!!!

*Now what makes this so complicated is –*

- If you were taught to believe in a personal God –
- Or God is behind everything –
- Or God is part of everyday life...

Then it's **virtually impossible** not to begin to confuse your life experience with God and to place on God the frustrations you have with life!!!!

It is easy for disappointment in life to become disappointment in God or even get to the place that you don't believe that God even exist anymore...

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Now that was the case with today's character –

- His life spun completely out of control
- We don't know how old he was or his name
- But - *his life spun out of control.*

He finds himself in a roman jail cell which was probably a hole in the ground and he is condemned to death!

He is so violent, so unpredictable that he can't even be trusted as a slave

His only value in life is to illustrate the futility of defying Rome because they had condemned him to death,

- They are going to **crucify him as a warning** to anyone else who would defy the Roman Empire.
- This man had seen crucifixions before – the aftermath of a crucifixion –
- He had seen the remains of crucifixion – He had **smelled** crucifixion!!!

He knew **exactly** what he was in for – he would **fight, curse, scream**, he would be **defiant and know that in the end death would take him.**

His body would be peeled down from the cross,

- Put on a wagon, taken to the south side of Jerusalem, down into the valley of Gahannan
- He would be **placed on the city dump** - NO one would be given permission to claim his body

***There would be no*** defense, no mourners, his friends, his family, his government and even his god - ***Had abandoned him!***

***He was to die as a common criminal*** – this man decided that he would die as he lived – he would **die defiantly.**

On that morning that they drug him out of his jail cell – he discovered that ***he would not die alone.***

There would be **two others crucified** that same day.

He discovered that day that JESUS the Jewish Rabbi from Nazareth had ***also been condemned to death and he would die with him...***

Maybe the silver lining in this cloud would be that there would be **a large crowd** comes to see **the Jewish Rabbi crucified...**

***Now Luke tells us how this worked out*** and this is really important especially ***if you're new to church or new with us.***

**This isn't a bible story** but ***this is a story that is written*** and at the very beginning of his account the document **the Gospel of Luke** that he **thoroughly investigated these things in detail.**

***To provide a chronological account of the life of Jesus –***

- This document was so accurate people begin to meticulously copy it
- Because people wanted to know the details of Jesus' life.

Over time ***The Gospel of Luke*** was gathered together with other accounts of the life of Jesus and ultimately about 200 years later were placed in and bound up into a book we call the Bible.

But, before there was a bible, before there was a new testament, before there was a church, before any of that – ***The Gospel writer Luke*** took pains to figure out exactly what had happened

***----- Here is what he discovered had happened the day that Jesus was crucified -***

*Luke says this: **Luke 23:32 NIV** - Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him (Jesus) to be executed.*

vs33 – When they came to the place called the skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals – one on his right, the other on his left.

- When you read through the scriptures like this you read it and you keep going – but, there is ***so much packed into this little word (crucified)***.
- ***So much pain***, so much noise, so much terror, so much violence, so much agony, so much mourning,
- It took hours and sometimes days for someone ***to die***.
- People were crucified many different ways –
- Ropes, nails, ect. - The Romans used many things!!!!
- ***The romans did not*** create crucifixion, ***they*** perfected crucifixion!

***The scripture tells us that one of the other two people that hung to the left and right of Jesus***

- ***We're hurling*** profanity and curses at the Roman's and the people passing by and those who had come to watch ***this spectacle***!
- ***As the violence continues*** and the screaming continues, as the pain, all the commotion ***of this very horrific moment in time***

- In the midst of all that these **two criminals** hear the guy in the middle –
- **The Jewish Rabbi** utters a word that was rarely uttered from a Roman cross. –

**They heard FATHER.....**

- When men are dying they call for their Mother not their FATHERS

BUT, **the next word** was even more startling to them...

**Jesus said: Luke 23:34 NIV - “Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”**

**Jesus cried forgive them...**

- Why the Roman soldiers split up everything he owned
- Gambled to see who would win all of it
- While all of that is happening – men are **dying to his left and his right**
- As were going to see in a moment ---- **as his enemies are celebrating**

**Jesus from the cross prays for them** – Luke said I thoroughly investigated and here is what happened

There was people watching - people had gathered from all over town!

**Luke 23:35 – The people stood watching...**

- Everybody came out for the crucifixion
- Everyone came out for the spectacle of the crucifixion
- Especially a crucifixion so close to town
- No doubt they lined the walls, the hillsides, everybody gathered.

**We understand that** – There is something about tragedy and pain that is embarrassingly fascinating isn't it???

But it **wasn't just** the citizens or the people of Jerusalem –

**Luke says** there was another group their as well.

***Luke said: Luke 23:35 – NIV - The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, “He saved others; let him save himself if he is God’s messiah, the Chosen One.”***

***The rulers:***

- The very people that had Jesus crucified
- The very people that had Jesus arrested
- The very people who had been threatened by his authority
- Threatened by his miracles
- And threatened by his words

***They sneered:*** It wasn’t enough that he was dying!!!

***This was the group of people that had the most to lose from Jesus’ success –***

***This is the group of people who were constantly shamed by Jesus’ answers to their questions***

- Now there would be no more humiliating answers to their gotcha questions.
- Now there would be no fear on their part of the crowd
- From now on they were in charge and this was their moment to take out all the *revenge and all the anger* they had *held towards Jesus for 2 ½ years*.
- Now *they didn’t need to fear the crowd* – he was harmless – he was a caged animal...
- They were not about to let up even in the midst of watching him die!!!

***There was another group Luke said: Luke 23:36 NIV – The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar...***

- ***This is interesting*** – when you watch a movie and their crucifying someone – their feet are three or four feet off the ground.
- In reality Romans crucified people with their feet ***about six inches off the ground***...
- Because the whole idea of crucifixion was humiliation

- They were able to walk right up, **face to face** to **someone being crucified**
- And scream in their faces and spit on them and **then walk away**

**So the Roman soldiers walked right up to Jesus and hurled their insults at him**

The text says they offered him wine vinegar –

Which is basically their cheap soldier wine – and **they said to him**:

**Luke 23:36-37** NIV – and said, **“If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.”**

They referred to him as the king of the Jews because - when Pilate decided that Jesus would be executed He ordered that a sign would be made that said: **“King of the Jews”**

- The Jewish leader said, **NO**, **he claimed to be the “King of the Jews...”**
- Pilate said **NO**, it’s going to say: **“King of the Jews”**

**I want every to know that anyone who claims to be a king –**

- **Anyone** who would defy Caesar –
- **This is what they can look forward to.**
- So the Roman soldiers play off of that sign and **begin to mock him** as the king of the Jews.

Then finally as **if that wasn’t enough** the **other two criminals** –

**Maybe** they can’t stand **Jesus’ passive resignation** to these circumstances...

- The other **two criminals** turn and **they begin to pile on abuse as well.**
- Here is **something interesting**, Luke one of the Gospel writers begins to talk about one of the criminals hurling insults **at Jesus OUR GOD**
- **Matthew who was a follower of Jesus** and **no doubt** was in the crowd said that **both criminals** begin to turn their anger away from the crowd
- They begin to turn it away from the Romans and **turn it towards Jesus**
- The crowd, even the men to his right & left **begin to hurl insults at Jesus** and **there was a reason** why – It’s picked up in the things they say

Luke says: **Luke 23:39** -*One of the criminals* who hung there hurled insults at him...

Here it comes – Aren't you the Messiah – aren't you the special one sent from God –aren't you supposed to be able *to do* something about this???

**Vs39** – “Aren't you the Messiah? **Save yourself and us!**”

- But you aren't the Christ - **You can't** save yourself - And you **can't** save us

Besides, if there was a God ***none of this would be happening*** – There is no justice in the world – there certainly is **no just personal God**...

The interesting twist on this and we know this because we are looking back – if ***either one of these criminals*** would have said **where is God** – ***the answer would have been about 12 feet to the left of you***

Suddenly in the midst of the pain, the chaos the insults –

- Our guy – our criminal – he stops shouting –
- ***Because he begins to sense something extremely selfless about the Rabbi.***
- Something strangely different about the Jewish teacher

**He begins to think FATHER – FATHER – FATHER**

- **Forgive them** –
- ***Then it dawns on him – this in fact is a righteous man – this is in fact a man apparently sent by God – we've got it wrong*** –

***He says to the other criminal:***

***Vs 40 – But the other criminal rebuked him. “Don't you fear God,” he said, “since you are under the same sentence?”***

- Wait a minute **we got this wrong** –
- **Don't you fear God** since were under the same sentence?
- We're under the same sentence as him...
- ***He says look***, here is a man that is **suffering just like we are** -
- BUT - HE HAS NOT **abandoned his faith in GOD**



- Here is a man that is suffering unjustly but, ***somehow is able to maintain his faith in GOD***
- Here is a man that is suffering the same fate we are – ***experiencing life just like we are*** –
- But - Yet still believes that **God can be called FATHER**

***This man has not drawn conclusions about God based on the way life and others have treated him.***

Then suddenly for him and maybe suddenly for you – there is a ***brand new category...***

Besides: **vs 41** “We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. BUT this man has done nothing wrong.”

- Suddenly - ***the wheels are spinning***
- He begins to see Jesus in a way ***that no one else in the crowd does*** - nor does the other criminal on the cross – ***They aren’t seeing Jesus...***
- In this moment and this is so fantastic – this is so rich that at the very end of Jesus’ life –
- In his last conversation before he died...
- ***Jesus has a conversation*** with not a righteous man but with one of the most un-righteous men in the city of Jerusalem.

Here is how his thought process must have gone: ***If an innocent man who suffers like a guilty man can maintain faith in God...***

- ***If an innocent man who is suffering life just like me and is treated unjustly***

***How much more a guilty man for whom there is some justification for his suffering?***

- Then it dawns on him - Oh my God – ***THIS is the Messiah!!!***
- OH my God – the sign is correct!!!! ***This is our KING!!!***
- **And with all the** pain, the violence, the noise, all the sound, all the smell
- To the best of his ability **he turns his head towards Jesus and says:**

**Vs 42 – “Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom.”**

- It's a question it's a plea – a dying man's last request..
- Because I see it, I get it – YOUR KINGDOM

**Not because of anything I've done – in spite of everything I have done**

- Because if you can maintain Faith in a good God in the midst of these circumstances
- Perhaps there is a good and just God after all

**Vs 43 - Jesus answered him, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”**

- Today you will be with me – in spite of all you've done
- Not because you are rededicating your life –

**Rededicating your life on the cross is meaningless**

- There is no more from here on out – I promise – I'll never and I'll always – I'm going to change my life – there is no repentance from a cross – no I'm going to change my life from the cross...
- All there is from the cross is a desperate plea for grace and mercy
- And Jesus says: Today you will be with me in paradise

**Because – my thoughts about you are not reflective in what is happening to you!**

- My thought and my love for you are not reflective in what you are experiencing
- I am not and God is not your personal experience!!!!      **WOW**

***What if that is true???***

***What if life has left you broken, BUT not God???***

***What if life has left you abandon, BUT not God???***

***What if life has not reflected to you the true nature of God???***

***This is Jesus' last message before he dies! Luke said here is what happened next:***

***vs 44-45*** – It was now about noon, and **darkness came over the whole land** until three in the afternoon, for the sun stopped shining...

- They were drug out for crucifixion early in the morning..
- They hung there in misery...

The text tells us ***vs 45-46*** – And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Jesus called out with a loud voice...

- If you grew up in church you understand the significant of this...
- This was the curtain that hung between the Holy of Holy's –
- The place supposedly **where God dwelt** –
- It was an over engineered curtain that separated the rest of the temple –
- Essentially the rest of the world from the presence of God!

***The text tells us that when Jesus died that curtain was torn from the top to the bottom***

- To signify that everyone was welcome into the presence of God
- At this moment, everything that separated every man and woman and all of mankind from God was being taken care of on that hill **through the death of Jesus**

***Jesus made his last statement as he cried with a loud voice: Vs 46 – “FATHER, into your hands I commit my spirit.”*** When he had said this, he breathed his last.

- There it is again – ***FATHER*** – Father who could have stopped this –
- Father who could have kept this from happening – Father who could have spared me – Father who I decided to trust in anyway...

***The big question – So have you perhaps because of life confused life with God?***

***Have you drawn conclusions about God because of what you've experienced?***

***Have you drawn conclusions about God because of what has happened to you???***

- Based on prayers that were not answered
- Based on love ones that experienced things that you thought God shouldn't have let anyone experience.

**Have you drawn conclusions about God based on your experiences?**

- **It's natural**, it's easy, maybe in your case we would even say **it is almost unavoidable**

**If you were to tell us your story – we would say of course you have lost faith in God, of course you're angry – of course you quit praying – of course you walked away from church years ago. ***We get that!!!!!!!!!!!!!!*****

***But here is Jesus' message to you from the cross ----***

***As if to say, if you forget everything else, as if to say in case you didn't get this –***

In a sense he was saying this may be **one of the most important things I ever communicate - - - -**

1. **GOD MY FATHER – God is not what you have experienced.**
2. **God can be trusted in spite of your experience.**
3. **God is not your life.**
4. **God sent Jesus to bring you life.**

**Here is why we gather and here is the story of so many of us –**

That you will find in Jesus precisely what you have not found in Life!

**Grace, Mercy, and Love**

If you choose to read Matthew-Mark-Luke and John this is what you will discover about ***the life of Jesus***.

- That he took life right in the face
- Jesus experienced life like we experience life
- There were no shortcuts - **he never played the God card**
- **Never went to the restraint and said - I Am Jesus (give me the good seat)**

- **Never played the God card** – over and over again there was opportunities for Jesus to leverage being Jesus and ***Jesus never did it one single time.***
- **He knew what it meant** to be lonely – to be abandoned by friends in his darkest hour – he knew what it felt like **when God said NO...**

Here is the thing - Here is the message, here is the take away

**That Jesus is** – in spite of life confidence in God – in spite of experience –

***Jesus has paved the way for us to have in spite of life confidence in God as well...***

I've seen it and many of you have seen it and **it is overwhelming...**

Through the years I've seen so many people - face so many kinds of circumstances and **exhibit and cling to** and **in spite of life confidence in God.**

In Hospitals – gravesides – in the eyes of children whose families were blown up – I've seen it in the eyes of parents who lost children – couples who have lost jobs – **families** who could never seem to get a break and **yet week after week they show up and they worship and they serve...**

**CLOSE:** - And in fact you all are sitting around the **INSPITE of life FAITH PEOPLE TODAY!!!!**

At the end of the day we hope that you discover that ***Jesus' message on the cross for you is simply this:*** Yes - Life happens - **God can be** trusted

- **Experiences are experiences** - BUT, your experiences are not God
- And your disappointment with life **is completely understandable**
- *You do not have to live your life* **disappointed with God**
- **Because** life is going to happen **AND** **God can be trusted!!!!**

When you open your hands and surrender instead of clinching your fist in anger

When you finally get sick and tired of **living like this** (Fist Clinched)

And you **open your hands in surrender** instead of **clinching your fist in anger** –

**You become a candidate for the life giving – life changing – grace and love of God**

That will at some level **fill and define** your **personal experience**

**So the challenge is simply this** (fist clinched), **would you be willing to surrender**  
(hands open)

**PRAISE TEAM:**

**In spite of what life has delivered and handed you -**

***Would you be willing to surrender instead of clinching your fist in anger??? –***

**In spite of how life has left you!!!**

**That's the challenge and I want you to know that you are surrounded by people who would say "DO IT"**

Because of the **in spite of life confidence** in God **will change** your life.

**Let this truth settle in for a minute – *all of us struggle with this at some point***

**God I'm tired of living like this** – (open Hands) **I trust you!!!**

**Put your faith – your living active Faith in God who can be trusted, in spite of perhaps what life has brought your way!**

**Let me pray for you** – Heavenly FATHER it's easier to preach about than it is to actually do...