

## When A Dream Dies

On Sunday, we concluded our sermon series on the Meaning of the Cross by looking at what the cross teaches us about life's unwanted, unexpected, and sometimes devastating interruptions.

1. Warm-up Question: Life is full of interruptions both large and small. Let's start small. Over the past week, have you experienced any annoying interruptions in your daily life?
2. Death is the ultimate interrupter. When you lose someone, it's devastating. When Jesus died on the cross, all those who were close to him experienced the same kind of grief and shock as we do when losing a loved one.
  - a. Think of someone you've lost. How would you describe your feelings as that person died and in the aftermath?
  - b. Jesus' loved ones not only saw him die, they saw him die of torture, which surely magnified their grief. What feelings do you suppose Jesus' mother experienced?
  - c. What feelings would you guess Jesus' brothers and sisters (Mark 3:32) experienced? Or his good friends like Martha, Mary, and Lazarus?
3. Besides losing their beloved Jesus, his followers also lost their dream of what God was going to do through Jesus and his movement. Once when Jesus asked his disciples who they thought he was, Peter answered, saying, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Matthew 16:16. In other words, Jesus' followers fully expected him to usher in the Messianic Age in their time. To remind ourselves what that meant, let's read a classic Messianic prophecy, Isaiah 9:1-7, as printed on p. 3.
  - a. Look back carefully through Isaiah's prophecy to see how many different characteristics of the Messianic Age you can identify.
  - b. How do you suppose Jesus' followers anticipated he would get from the ministry work he was doing in the Gospels to become King of the Jews and Messianic ruler? What progression of events might the disciples have envisioned? What role do you think they expected to play in the Messianic kingdom?
  - c. Read Luke 23:44-55, as printed on p. 3. When Jesus breathed his last on the cross, then was buried, what did that mean for the Messianic hopes of his followers? How do you think they felt about that?
4. If we were to assess the meaning of the cross at this point in the story (right after Jesus' death), we'd have to say something like, "The cross teaches us that death always gets the last word." But that's not where the story ends! On the morning of the third day, as dawn broke on the devastation of the disciples, the earth shook, the stone rolled away, and a radiant presence emerged from the tomb. The soldiers keeping guard fell to the ground paralyzed by fear and amazement. He walked off.

They fled in terror. Soon thereafter Mary Magdalene was the first to see him, then gradually all the others. Jesus was alive! Actually better than alive. His resurrection body had capacities his earthly body never did, able to travel through time and matter. Not only was Jesus back better than ever, so was the Messianic dream. Previously, the disciples had envisioned a localized earthly Israelite kingdom with borders and limited territory. Now they realized Jesus was creating a spiritual kingdom – a new Israel – that would reach across the borders of earthly nations and into eternity. This spiritual kingdom would not only address earthly injustices, it would destroy sin and death itself. So that by the time we get to the end of the story of the cross, we realize that the message of the cross is not that death always gets the last word, but rather: **For all who believe, death is never the end; it simply marks our next new beginning. As followers of Jesus, we are called to internalize and live this same pattern in our lives.**

- a. Victor Frankl wrote a manuscript for a book that he hoped would have a huge impact on the world. But when he was interned at Auschwitz, the Nazis seized and destroyed his manuscript. After Auschwitz, Frankl wrote a second manuscript that became one of the 20<sup>th</sup> century's most inspiring books, "Man's Search for Meaning." What thoughts and feelings did Frankl likely experience when his original manuscript was seized? What thoughts and feelings did he likely experience when his new manuscript profoundly impacted the world?
  - b. In your own life, when have you had a Victor Frankl cross-like experience, *i.e.*, a dream died only to be resurrected in glorious fashion?
  - c. Why is it so important – and powerful – to internalize the belief that death – both literal and metaphorical – is never the end. How does that conviction change us?
  - d. What's the most challenging interruption you're facing in your life right now? Attitudinally, how are you responding to that interruption? Are you seeing it through the lens of the cross or the lens of despair?
5. One day we'll all face the ultimate interruption – our own physical death.
- a. Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die." John 11:25. What does that mean?
  - b. Jesus also said, "If we have been united with Christ in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his." Romans 6:5. What does that mean?
  - c. In his book "90 Minutes in Heaven," John Piper describes his experience of the afterlife during his near-death experience. How do you picture heaven? How does a belief in heaven affect your present earthly life?

## **Isaiah 9:1-7**

But there will be no gloom for those who were in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he will make glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations. <sup>2</sup> The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness—on them light has shined.

<sup>3</sup> You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exult when dividing plunder.

<sup>4</sup> For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. <sup>5</sup> For all the boots of the tramping warriors and all the garments rolled in blood shall be burned as fuel for the fire.

<sup>6</sup> For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. <sup>7</sup> His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onwards and for evermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

## **Luke 23:44-55**

<sup>44</sup> It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, <sup>45</sup> while the sun's light failed; and the curtain of the temple was torn in two. <sup>46</sup> Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." Having said this, he breathed his last. <sup>47</sup> When the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God and said, "Certainly this man was innocent." <sup>48</sup> And when all the crowds who had gathered there for this spectacle saw what had taken place, they returned home, beating their breasts. <sup>49</sup> But all his acquaintances, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.

<sup>50</sup> Now there was a good and righteous man named Joseph, who, though a member of the council, <sup>51</sup> had not agreed to their plan and action. He came from the Jewish town of Arimathea, and he was waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God. <sup>52</sup> This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. <sup>53</sup> Then he took it down, wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid it in a rock-hewn tomb where no one had ever been laid. <sup>54</sup> It was the day of Preparation, and the Sabbath was beginning. <sup>55</sup> The women who had come with him from Galilee followed, and they saw the tomb and how his body was laid.