

Faith in the Marketplace

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[0 : 00] The Gospel according to St. Luke has been called, and I guess literary people tend to do things like this, it's been called probably the most beautiful book that has ever been written.

And I just want to remind you of that today, not because, I mean, it's one of those sort of statements that people make, and nobody's ever read all the books that have ever been written, or nobody could compile a statistic like that very easily, but it is a magnificent book, and it's beautifully woven together.

And we, by dissecting the 23rd chapter of Luke, may miss something of the blending and the matching and the flow and this brilliantly told story, which begins with Christ being betrayed and turned over to the chief priests, and the chief priests turning him over to the Sanhedrin, and the Sanhedrin turning him over to Pilate, and Pilate sending him back to Herod, and Herod sending him back to Pilate, and Pilate saying, will you have Barabbas, Jesus Barabbas, or Jesus Christ, who will you have released you?

And they said, and they said, and they said, crucify him, and he handed him over to be crucified. And this handed him over is a word that occurs again and again and again through the story. He was handed over, handed over, handed over, and at this point he is now, in verse 25, handed over to be crucified.

[1 : 44] And they led him away, the passage begins. One of the magnificent things about the gospel, according to St. Luke, is the place of women.

You will remember Elizabeth and the announcement that she would bear a child, Mary and the announcement that she would bear a child, the conference between Mary and Elizabeth, the magnificent Magnificat, My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior, which was the song of Mary, which she had sung at the time that it was announced to her that she should be the mother of the Christ child.

And you go on to the woman who came into the Pharisee's house and washed Christ's feet with her tears and dried them with her hair and poured the ointment on them.

And you will remember the old woman in the synagogue who was bent over almost double with the spinal condition whom Christ healed and the woman who came to him with an issue of blood and the girl who lay dying or dead in her parents' home.

And on and on the story goes, and reference after reference to the place of women in the gospel of Christ. And this is predominantly pictured in the gospel according to St. Luke.

[3 : 21] And if there is anything that needs to be said about feminism, then I think that the gospel according to St. Luke is probably the most brilliant and beautiful feminist projection that you could ever encounter.

And it would be well worth all of us becoming aware of it. I want you to become aware of it today in the light of this story when the women meet Christ on the way to the cross and he turns and speaks to them.

First, I want to tell you about the Globe and Mail this morning. And it's not that I have anything against the Globe and Mail. It's just that I think the Globe and Mail for us mirrors who we are. If you want to see who we take ourselves to be, then read the Globe and Mail. Magnificent, full page on the back of the first section of the Globe and Mail says, as it pictures Mr. Mulroney and Mr. Bush, it says, ultimately, all news is business news.

Now, I don't know exactly what that means. I know that it means you should buy the Globe and Mail. But whether it has wisdom beyond that, or whether that's the ultimate reality of our world is the economic process, and whether everything ultimately gets measured in dollars is why it says, all news is business news.

[5 : 08] It was very interesting that that was on the back page of the Globe. On the front page was the story of the funeral of Hirohito.

And it said of it that it was a visceral demonstration of Japan's emergence as the world's paramount economy.

So that you could sort of say that in our world, where all news is ultimately business news, in our world, that if that's true, now, I don't want you to take my word for this, but I would like you to meditate on it.

Does that mean that man shall live by bread alone? Doesn't it say that? Maybe it does.

All news is ultimately business news. Japan is the paramount economy, so that it means you are being asked to consider today Tokyo and Jerusalem, and which one represents the capital of the world in terms of the ultimate meaning of human existence.

[6 : 37] The Globe and Mail has taken its stand. Tokyo is where it's at. And the New Testament still sticks by Jerusalem. And so you turn to Jerusalem, and you see what happens there.

Jesus is led away by the Roman soldiers, a detachment of Roman soldiers, take Jesus and two others to a hill shaped like a skull outside of Jerusalem where they are to crucify him.

It's reckoned in that sort of Roman Catholic designed meditation on the way of the cross and the 14 stations of the cross that Christ had stumbled, and therefore they had conscripted, as soldiers could do, someone to carry the cross for him.

This is behind that thing from the Sermon on the Mount where Christ says, if someone compels you to go one mile, go with him too.

The soldiers compelled Simon of Cyrene to carry the cross. Cyrene was the capital Roman city in what is now Libya, on the coast of the Mediterranean, the north coast of Africa.

[8 : 03] It's likely that this was a black man, but then you can't get historic proof of that. But if it's even possible, what a poignant picture it is for the 20th century, perhaps for every other century, that this man was conscripted to carry the cross.

Not only did that happen to him, but if you trace the names in the New Testament, most scholars, I think, are convinced that this man became a Christian and a leader in the Christian community, having been the first one who in a very practical way took up the cross of Christ and carried it, and thereby represented for us what the picture of Christian discipleship is all about.

Not only did this happen, Christ stumbles, the cross is picked up by another man, he moves on, a great multitude of people continue to follow him, some perhaps moved by the pathos of the situation, some of them being perhaps the very ones who before Pontius Pilate said, crucify him, they continue to follow him.

And you get the picture of this mob coming after morbid curiosity, perhaps, a man walking the last quarter mile to his death through the city streets, out through the city wall, to a hill shaped like a skull, and in this procession, the great crowd moves with him, and in the crowd are the women who bewailed and lamented him.

Globe tells us today, too, that women have just been given the right to fight in the armed forces of this country. I don't know what that means.

[10 : 16] I'm sure that it's a great milestone in terms of human rights, but I'm not sure to what extent it's a milestone in human understanding.

But these women are there, and they're crying out and bewailing the impending death of Christ.

They are beating themselves and bewailing the event that they see. I sit through committee meeting after committee meeting, and I sit there, and I argue with intelligent businessmen, and I argue this point, and I argue that point, and I try and see this point of view, and I try and understand this, and I try and put forward this, and the meeting goes on and on, hour by hour, to try and make some decision with business heads banging together, trying to figure out what to do, and some gentle lady sitting among us sees through the whole thing in the first five minutes and knows exactly what needs to be done and doesn't need to involve herself in that long, agonizing, male decision-making process.

They seem to be able to get hold of what the issue is and to say so. Now, I don't know why that is. I was very struck in preparing this series to come across again something I've heard all my life, but it never took hold of me the way it did in this time when I was considering the person of Pontius Pilate and that his wife had a dream and sent word to Pontius Pilate who was sitting in judgment on Christ, and she said to him, have nothing to do with that just man.

I have suffered many things this night in a dream because of him. That she somehow discerned that reality. And I think that in the whole, if, you know, if, and I take it to be, that the New Testament is the testimony to the truth of God revealed in the person of Jesus Christ.

[12 : 35] And if you take that to be the situation, and you've seen, in a sense, a great deal of male scholarship arguing back and forth about that and being unable to do it, there is some way in which I think men need to understand Jesus Christ as women understood Jesus Christ.

I think they moved in and understood more quickly. Now, I'm not trying to be flattering to women, but there is something different about this.

That they did this. In fact, it's reported apparently in the Talmud, according to one commentary, that it was often the function of the aristocratic women of Jerusalem that when the Roman soldiers took men out to put them to death in a politically very volatile situation, it was they that moved out there and brought the bitter wine and the vinegar and whatever they could do to anesthetize the man who was about to be executed.

That they were able to identify with him in a way that men couldn't do and to, in a sense, reach out. And so whether they understood what they were doing or not, these women reached out to the person of Jesus Christ and lamented and bewailed what was happening to him.

But Jesus turned to them and said, Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me.

[14 : 23] In other words, even though he might have had reason to be entirely concerned and absorbed with his own situation, his heart moved out to these women and he said that the tragedy that you are observing is a tragedy which involves you in a far worse way than it involves me.

And so he said to them, Weep for yourselves and for your children. Remember that this was the city of Jerusalem.

Outside it was the hill shaped like a skull. Before that day closed, there were three crosses on that hill where three men had died.

Before the lifetime of these women would be over, Jerusalem would be surrounded by more than a thousand crucified men all at one time.

The hills all around Jerusalem would be marked by crosses where men were being crucified. The city would be destroyed. The Jews would be defeated.

[15 : 42] By whom? By that same piece of military machinery which they were now using to crucify Christ.

That's why Jesus says to them, Days are coming when they will say, Blessed are the barren and the womb that never bore and the breasts that never gave suck.

And, you know, I mean, he's saying that century after century and generation after generation, that blessing by which mankind is blessed is the fruitful womb and the nourishing breast and that that has been the fulfillment of life for lots of people and that that is going to be turned upside down.

The beatitude is going to be not blessed is the womb that bore child and the breast that gave suck, but blessed is the barren womb and the breast that never gave suck.

The whole thing is going to be the whole thing is going to be turned entirely upside down. And then he goes on to say to them, You're going to want to cry out and say, To the mountains, fall on us and to the hills, cover us.

[17 : 05] You won't be looking for anything more than the opportunity to die quickly and to escape in the only way that you can escape and that's through death.

And that's the same military machine that I am now imprisoned by and being led to a cross by. Exactly the same.

And so humanity creates the monster that ultimately destroys it. And when the Jews said, We have no king but Caesar, this was a premonition of what was going to happen.

And Christ warns the women whom he suspects will understand what the men don't understand as they lead him out to be crucified.

If you can persuade the Roman authority, Jesus says, to cut down the green tree, what will happen when it is dry?

[18 : 07] Well, if you can, you know, the whole image of Israel was a tree. It was a tree that God had nourished, that God had manured, that God had dug up, that God had pruned, that God had prepared, that God had wanted would one day bear fruit this nation of Israel.

And He wanted this to happen. And now, the green tree has come. The fruit-bearing tree has come. The one who said, I am the vine and you are the branches, it has come.

What do they do? They cut it down. That's why Christ says, if they do this to the green tree, what about the trees that have never borne any fruit?

The dry tree that has no sap flowing in it, that bears no fruit. You think what's happening to me is bad. But the judgment of God must fall on the tree that is dry and has never borne any fruit.

And so Christ says this to the women, thinking that they might understand. And as He says it, the procession continues to wind its way out of Jerusalem from the praetorium, which was in the shadow of the temple.

[19 : 54] And it had to be in the shadow of the temple because the Jews wouldn't have tolerated anything else, which always makes me think that downtown Vancouver is interesting because of the office towers that surround this building and diminish it almost into nothing.

There was a time in history when cathedrals were the great landmark on the skyline, but they're not anymore. And I don't know what that means, but it's certainly very suggestive symbolism for contemplation as you walk home, as you walk out of this building today and look around you.

That this procession winds itself from the praetorium through the city outside the gate towards the hill shaped like a skull.

and next week we will draw nearer to that door. The story will bring us closer and closer to that hill as we contemplate who is this person, Jesus Christ, and what does this mean?

I was asked this morning, I mean, this, I was asked this morning, why can't Christians do something as significant as what the Ayatollah Khomeini is doing?

[21 : 26] The answer is that Christians have done something infinitely more significant, and that's this event. This event is the event as far as Christians are concerned.

and it is the picture of the powerlessness of God and the great machinery of evil.

And that you see them come together and what happens? And you see Christ, in a sense, being crushed by this machine and warning us that this machine which we have set in motion will destroy will destroy the people who set it in motion.

And it's very sobering, I think. But somehow it's the way in which God has chosen to reveal himself to us.

It's the way through, by which we come to know who God is. let's pray for one minute. Our God, as we trace the steps that led Jesus Christ from the praetorium to the hill called Golgotha, we ask that you will help that you by your Holy Spirit and through your word will grip our hearts with the tremendous drama of the situation.

[23 : 06] And in that we might see something of your purpose and your love and your great plan of redemption for a world that has defied you.

We ask this in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.