

The Ugliest Scene of Holy Week

Palm Sunday

March 16, 2008
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Big Idea: Jesus came to our world in order to change one very ugly scene.

INTRODUCTION

It had the appearance of a joyous and memorable celebration. One person would stand front and center to receive the acclaim of the crowd gathered to watch. Anticipation ran high in all who participated. Somebody was going to be crowned... queen! That's right! It was the 2002 Belle of the Blue Beauty pageant at Georgetown College in Kentucky, and everybody was anticipating one young woman being named Belle of the Blue and winning a \$1000 scholarship. Freshman Keaton Lynch Brown was hoping to be the winner. Earlier that day she'd been crowned 'Miss Congeniality' by her fellow contestants. Of course, that was before the assault charges were filed. It seems Miss Brown and one of the college officials, a woman named Kathy Wallace, had a disagreement about Miss Brown's talent act. Brown loved horses, so she was planning to do a dance that included a lasso routine in which she would rope a stuffed pig. Another contestant explained the problem. Quote: "*There was some controversy over whether her talent was ladylike. It had never really been done before!*" End quote. Apparently, Miss Brown and Ms. Wallace got into something of a squabble over Brown's act, and it culminated in Ms. Wallace grabbing the young coed by the arm, dragging her down some stairs and causing her to hit a door – or so the charges claim. Ms. Wallace was suspended, Keaton Lynch Brown failed to make the finals, but the Belle of the Blue celebration went on – doing their best to cover up at least one ugly reality.

That story is not unlike the story Luke tells in Luke 19 – the story of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem at the opening of that infamous week when Jesus would be crucified. You've read the opening scene where Jesus is proclaimed "King." Let me read Luke 19:37-38.

³⁷ When they reached the place where the road started down the Mount of Olives, all of [Jesus'] followers began to shout and sing as they walked along, praising God for all the wonderful miracles they had seen. ³⁸ "Blessings on the King who comes in the name of the LORD! Peace in heaven, and glory in highest heaven!" [NLT]

It was an appropriate celebration. Jesus put His own blessing on it. Look at verses 39 and 40.

³⁹ But some of the Pharisees among the crowd said, "Teacher, rebuke your followers for saying things like that!" ⁴⁰ He replied, "If they kept quiet, the stones along the road would burst into cheers!" [NLT]

It was an appropriate celebration! But like the finals of the 2002 Belle of the Blue Beauty pageant, it was glossing over some rather ugly realities, and before that week was over, the people in this crowd would see them. Think with me for a minute. What is the ugliest scene of Holy Week as we commemorate it today?

- Is it Jesus weeping in sorrow over Jerusalem in the verses immediately following the passage I just read?
- Is it Jesus condemning the religious leaders, overturning their money tables, and disrupting their merchandizing in the temple?
- Is it Judas leaving the Last Supper to go out and betray Jesus for a mere 30 pieces of silver?
- Is it Peter and James and John falling asleep as Jesus pours out His heart to God concerning the events soon to come?
- Is it the crowd, shouting for Jesus to be crucified?
- Is it the soldiers mocking Jesus as He's beaten before His crucifixion?
- Is it Jesus Himself, hanging dead on a cross?
- Is it Jesus laying dead in a tomb?

What is the ugliest scene of Holy Week? I'd like to suggest that the ugliest scene of Holy Week is the scene that inspired it. I invite you to examine the scene that exists inside a human heart under the control of sin. Do you know what a sinful heart looks like to God? God has described it to us, and He uses some really disgusting images to portray a sinful heart. It's not a pleasant picture! But we have to look at this scene because this is the scene that inspired the events of Holy Week. Holy Week is God's response to man's sin, and on this opening day of Holy Week 2008, I want to take a long, hard look at this ugly scene.

WHAT IS SIN? A FOUR-PART DEFINITION

Let's do this by means of a simple word study on sin. Here is a four-part definition of sin. Feel free to tweak this definition a bit to suit your own understanding of Scripture. Make it as biblical as it can be, but here's a definition to start with. A four-part working definition of sin.

PART 1: SIN IS A SPIRITUAL INFECTION...

Part 1: Sin is a spiritual infection... Most of us think of sin as an action – something we do – a mean-spirited word, a cruel act, an immoral deed. These kinds of things. But that's not a good place to start if we want to understand sin as God sees it. It's better to think of sin as an infection – a living entity that has invaded your body. Call it a spiritual virus. This idea can be seen in Romans 7:20 where Paul says...

20 ...if I am doing what I don't want to do (that's the mean-spirited word or the cruel act or the immoral action), I am not really the one doing it; the sin within me is doing it. [NLT]

Paul is talking here about a living power that takes over our bodies. I'm calling it an infection. It's alive. It's powerful. And it's in us – forcing us to say things we don't want to say, to do things we don't want to do!

20 ...I am doing what I don't want to do, [Paul says.] [NLT]

Sin is a spiritual sickness which is trying to control you. God warned us a long time ago that this is the nature of sin. The New American Standard Version of Genesis 4:7 says...

7 "... sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you..."

Sin wants to own you, control you, dictate what you will and will not say or do. Sin is an infection that tries to change your life for the worse.

Twenty five years ago, my wife came down with some sort of powerful infection that put her in the hospital. She was a sick girl as this infection took control of her body. Now, Karen is a disciplined woman – she reads her Bible, she prays, she does those bodily disciplines that help us maintain our awareness of God's presence with us. But this infection really threw her off. It took control of her. One night Dr. Phil came to visit in the hospital – not as Karen's doctor but just as a friend, and during their conversation, Karen expressed sorrow that she'd been laying there all day and hadn't spent any time reading her Bible. She was doing what she did not want to do – ignoring her Bible. Dr. Phil made an observation that day that – for me – sums up the effect of a sickness – whether physical or spiritual. *"It's hard to be spiritual when you're throwing up,"* he said.

That's so true! When you're infected with sin, it's hard to do what's right. It's hard to do what's good. In fact, when you're infected with sin, it's not merely hard to be spiritual, it's impossible. In a spiritual sense, when sin is in us, we're throwing up too much to accomplish anything good. It would be biblically correct to say that – in our sin – everything we do has the look and the smell of vomit. Now, before you accuse me of getting too graphic, I want you to know that I didn't invent that image. I take it from the Bible. In Isaiah 28:8, God describes what He sees when people live their lives under the control of sin.

8 Their tables are covered with vomit; filth is everywhere. [NLT]

Would you like to understand what God sees when He looks at the activities of men and women infected by sin? Go and study some vomit. That's what God sees in the deeds of people controlled by sin. Sin is a spiritual infection polluting everything you do.

PART 2: SIN IS A SPIRITUAL INFECTION (IN ALL PEOPLE)...

And this infection is not limited to a few exceptionally pathetic people. This is the

second part of my definition. Sin is a spiritual infection, in all people... The Bible makes this point clearly enough in both the Old and New Testaments. Psalm 14:3 says...

3 ...all have turned away from God; all have become corrupt. No one does good, not even one! [NLT]

Sin is not limited to a few exceptionally pathetic people. Romans 3:9 echoes that thought.

9 ...all people, whether Jews or Gentiles, are under the power of sin. [NLT]

When it comes to the infection of sin, you've got it! The Bible says you inherited it from your parents. They got it from their parents. It's been passed down to every generation since Adam and Eve sinned and then began bearing children. You're infected. So are your children. But I don't need to tell you that. You already know it. There are things in your life – words and deeds and thoughts and actions – that you don't want anyone to ever find out about. Messy little pieces of vomit that you hope to keep secret forever.

- You allow yourself to entertain spiteful thoughts about certain people. You know it's wrong, but you do it anyway. That's the sin within you doing its work.
- You grumble and complain about your work and about your neighbors and about your church and about your government, and you know it's wrong. "In everything you do, stay away from complaining," Philippians 2:14 says. But you do it anyway. It's that sin within you doing its work.
- You gleefully pass on the latest rumor about so-and-so, though you haven't bothered to find out if it's really true. You know it's wrong, but you do it anyway. That's the sin within you doing its work.

It's in all of us, and in the eyes of God it gives everything we do the look and smell of vomit. That's the fruit of this spiritual infection that's in all people, and it leads right into the 3rd part of our definition.

PART 3: SIN IS A SPIRITUAL INFECTION (IN ALL PEOPLE) CAUSING ACTIONS....

Sin is a spiritual infection (in all people) causing actions.... thoughts and words and deeds that you don't want anybody to find out about. ... I said earlier that we ought not first to think of sin as an action. But sin always finds a way to come out in the form of an action – the mean-spirited word, the complaint voiced to the wrong person, the cruel or immoral deed. This infection which we try so hard to hide, always finds a way to come out. 1 John 3:4 says,

4 "...all sin opposes the law of God."

Sin urges you to do what you want to do! Sin says, "*Right or wrong, I'm going to do*

what I feel like doing!” Kris Kristofferson put this kind of thinking into poetic form in a song he wrote in the early 1970’s. Sammi Smith made the song famous as she sang these lyrics: *“I don’t care what’s right or wrong, and I don’t try to understand. Let the devil take tomorrow, for tonight, I need a friend.”* That line is an invitation into a sinful deed. That’s what sin does. Sin leads us into actions... which defy God.

**PART 4: SIN IS A SPIRITUAL INFECTION (IN ALL PEOPLE)
CAUSING ACTIONS WHICH DEFY GOD.**

That’s the last part of my definition. Sin is a spiritual infection, in all people, causing actions which defy God. To defy God is to stand against Him, to challenge Him, to hold up your fist and say, *“I dare you, God, to make me act any differently!”*

King David understood what his sin was saying to God. At least he came to understand it. He committed adultery with Bathsheba – the wife of Uriah, one of David’s soldiers. Bathsheba became pregnant by David and wanting to cover his sinful deed, David had Uriah murdered. He thought he was getting rid of the only person who could defy his authority and question his behavior. But through a prophet, God tapped David on the shoulder and said, *“David, you didn’t get rid of the only person who can challenge you. In your sinful behavior, you defied Me! No I stand against you!”* That’s when David wrote Psalm 51, which includes verse four, in which David says to God, *“Against You, and You alone, have I sinned. I have done what is evil in Your sight.”* In our sinful behavior, we defy God! Sin puts us in face-to-face opposition with Almighty God, and that’s a battle we will lose every time!

- God created the heavens and the earth by a mere word. He can certainly crush you – in your sin.
- God has raised up into power the greatest leaders this world has ever known. He can just as easily bring your plans and even your life to nothing – if you continue to defy Him.
- And even beyond that, God has the authority and the power to consign you to an eternity in hell, and He would be justified in doing it if you refuse to deal with the sin that causes you to defy Him.

Being in direct, face-to-face opposition to God is an appalling place to be. But that is where sin puts you. Sin prompts you to stand before God, covered in vomit, while challenging God to a battle that you will surely lose. Sin is a spiritual infection, in all people, causing actions, which defy God.

Conclusion

That’s the ugliest scene of the Easter story. Men and women, created by God, but immersed in a sin that causes them to war against God. That’s the scene that inspired the events of Holy Week.

- When we sit at the communion table Thursday night and eat the symbol of Jesus' broken body and drink the symbol of His shed blood, we'll be thinking about our sin and we'll be remembering God's response to it. He could have condemned us for daring to bring our filth into His holy presence. Instead, He sent His son to become one of us. To live in a filthy world and to fight the same sins that we fight. God knew that our tables were covered with vomit, yet He came to dine with us. We're going to remember that Thursday night. God has responded to our sin.
- When we gather here Friday night and focus on the cross, we'll be thinking about God's response to our sin. Our sins made us subject to death. "The wages of sin is death," Romans 6:23 says. God could have let death have us, and it would have owned us forever. Instead, He sent Jesus to die in our place. As we stood before God covered in the filth of our sin, God substituted Jesus for us. "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us," Romans 5:8 says. Jesus knew that we were covered in filth, but He reached out to us anyway. We're going to commemorate that Friday night. God has responded to our sin.
- When we gather here next Sunday morning for breakfast – and then for our Easter celebration, we'll be celebrating God's response to our sin. Having sent Jesus to become one of us... having sent Jesus to His death to pay the penalty for our sin, God then raised Jesus to life again as a testimony that there is life even after death. The filth of our sin brought the death of Jesus, but there is life after death – not just for Jesus, but for any man, any woman who will come to Jesus, filthy as you are, and receive Him as your Savior. We'll celebrate that good news next Easter morning. God has responded to our sin.

As you walk through the Easter story this week, come out of your sin!

- You children who are just beginning to understand who Jesus is – receive Jesus as your Savior and Lord. Come out of your sin and let your faith shine before the adults of this church.
- You teens who come to church because your parents make you – come out of your sin by confessing it to God and by asking Jesus Christ to forgive you for your quiet rebellion.
- You adults who come to church just because it's what you've always done – come out of your sin and enter into a living relationship with Christ – one that fills you with a love and a passion for your Savior – a passion that makes you yearn to worship Him with your fellow believers. Call out to Christ that you want to come out of your sin.

Then, rearrange your schedule this week and enter whole-heartedly into the commemoration of God's response to your sin.

- God has come to you in the stench of your sin,
- He has loved you and forgiven you,
- He has begun to clean up the filth that covers your life,
- and He has promised both to make you holy and to open the doors of heaven – for

you – a sinner cleansed by God.

Now that's a beautiful picture – one worth celebrating. True life begins when you receive Jesus Christ as your King, knowing that he has changed the ugliness of your sin into something beautiful through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Now that is something worth celebrating. Come to Jesus if you have not already done so, and then, come and celebrate Jesus – crucified and risen again.

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The Biblical Context for Today's Message Luke 19:35-40

³⁵ [The disciples] brought [the colt] to Jesus, and they threw their coats on the colt and put Jesus on it. ³⁶ As He was going, they were spreading their coats on the road. ³⁷ As soon as He was approaching, near the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the miracles which they had seen, ³⁸ shouting: "BLESSED IS THE KING WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD; Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" ³⁹ Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Him, "Teacher, rebuke Your disciples." ⁴⁰ But Jesus answered, "I tell you, if these become silent, the stones will cry out!" [NASB]

A Question for Those Who Know the Rest of the Story

What was the ugliest scene of Holy Week? Check one.

- Jesus weeping in sorrow over Jerusalem
- Jesus condemning the religious leaders, overturning their money tables, disrupting their merchandizing in the temple
- Judas leaving the Last Supper to go out and betray Jesus
- Peter, James, and John falling asleep as Jesus pours out His heart to God concerning the events soon to come
- The crowd shouting for Jesus to be crucified
- Soldiers mocking Jesus as He's beaten prior to crucifixion
- Jesus Himself, hanging on a cross
- Jesus laying dead in a tomb
- _____

(fill in your own suggestion)

A Word Study: to Help Us Understand the Ugliest Scene

A Four-part Definition of _____

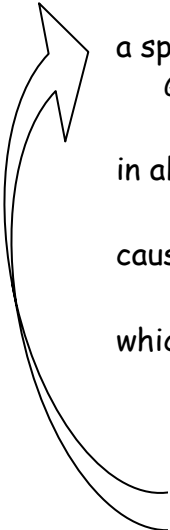
_____ is...

a spiritual _____ (Romans 7:20;
Genesis 4:7; Isaiah 28:8)

in all _____ (Psalm 14:3; Romans 3:9),

causing _____ (1 John 3:4),

which _____ God (Psalm 51:4)



Jesus came to address this scene and both our life and our genuine (non-superficial) celebrations begin when we recognize our need for His help with this scene.