

“A SYMBOL OF TRAGEDY INTO A SYMBOL OF TRIUMPH”

Romans 8:28; John 19:38-40; 20:2-9

Life is full of symbols. Easter is the day that Jesus Christ conquered death, hell, and the grave. We read in Romans 8:28 “That all things, *everything*, work together for the good for those who love God.” The symbol I would like to lift up this morning is the graveclothes of Jesus. No one discusses graveclothes. No one likes graveclothes.

My research has shown me that the apostle John came to see burial garments as a symbol of triumph. He did not always see them that way. A tangible reminder of the death of his best friend, Jesus, they seemed like a symbol of tragedy. But on Easter Sunday, God took the clothing of death and made them a symbol of life. We all face tragedy. What is more, we have all experienced symbols of tragedy. We do not like, nor do we want, these symbols. They are like wrecked cars in a junkyard. They clutter up our hearts with memories of bad days.

Could God use such symbols for something good? How far can we go with verses like this one, “In everything God works for the good of those who love Him.” Does “everything” include tumors, and tests, and tempers, and terminations? “GOD CAN TURN ANY TRAGEDY INTO A TRIUMPH IF ONLY YOU WILL WAIT AND WATCH.”

We read in John 19:38-40 that Joseph from Arimathea and Nicodemus came and took Jesus’ body down from the cross and prepared it for burial. Jesus’ death was a personal tragedy for John, because they were so close. Jesus called him His beloved disciple. When John buried Jesus, although he had heard Jesus proclaim that He would rise again, John felt that Jesus was dead and gone. There was no greater tragedy.

John did not know on that Friday what you and I now know. He did not know that Friday’s tragedy would be Sunday’s triumph. John would later confess that he “did not yet understand from the Scriptures that Jesus must rise from the dead.” (John 20:9). What John did on Saturday was very important. We do not know anything about this day. We have no passage to read, no knowledge to share. All we know is this: When Sunday came, John was present. John did not leave his friend’s side. John was close to Jesus in life and stood by Him in death.

What about you? When you are in John’s position, what do you do? When it is Saturday in your life, how do you react? When you are somewhere between yesterday’s tragedy and tomorrow’s triumph, what do you do? Do you leave God or do you linger near Him? And because John lingered on Saturday, he was around on Sunday to see the miracle.

What did he see? Strips of linen cloth. “He saw” the cloth that had been around Jesus’ head (i.e. graveclothes)... folded up and laid in a different place from the strips of linen. The graveclothes were still rolled and folded. When John saw this he believed Jesus had risen. (John 20:8).

God took wrappings of death and made them the picture of life. God can take what today is a symbol of tragedy in your life and turn it into a symbol of triumph.

The Bible says that “in everything God works for the good of those who love Him.” I want you to do this simple exercise. Remove the “everything” and replace it with the symbol of your tragedy (whatever you perceive as tragic in your life). For the apostle John, the verse would read: “In burial clothing God works for the good of those who love Him.”

If God can change John’s life through tragedy, could it be that He will use a tragedy to change yours? As hard as it may be to believe, you could be only hours from that precious prayer of a changed heart, “God, did you do this for me?”

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