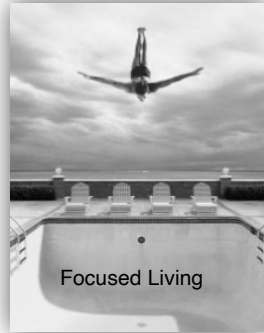


THE MAKING OF A MAN #18

Men Responding To The Cross

In 1967 Charles Murray was training for the summer Olympics as a high diver. One night his best friend, Mike, asked if he had ever recognized his need for a relationship with God through Christ. He responded with a resounding *"no!"* Because of his training he had special night privileges at the university pool so that night Charles decided to practice a few dives in order to forget Mike's challenge. All alone in the darkness, Charles climbed the 30 foot platform and inched his heels out over the edge to practice his first back dive. As he stood on the platform with his arms spread for balance he saw his shadow on the wall as the moonlight shined through the glass ceiling casting a silhouette of a cross! At that moment God softened his heart and flooded his mind with His truth convicting him of sin and convincing him of his need to become a new man. He could no longer bear the burden of separation from Christ Who loved him. He knelt down pleading for forgiveness and received God's grace. Suddenly, the lights in the pool area flashed on as the security guard entered to check on the commotion. Charles looked down from his platform in horror to see an empty pool which had been drained for cleaning. His _____ to the cross saved his life giving him purpose, and peace instead. (True story MW Riggs) **Perhaps not as dramatic, but in what ways have you seen other men respond to Christ at the cross? What will be your response to the Cross during Easter season?**



Together, let's see how the following responses of different men to the death and resurrection of Christ can chisel your heart to draw closer to Jesus.

PILATE (John 19:1-21) I am _____ of my own life. The words *"king, kingdom, crown, robe, authority"* are used 22 times during Pilate's short conversation with Jesus the morning before he sent Him to the Cross for our sin and set free instead the convicted murderer, Barabbas. Like us, Pilate was blinded to the grace and forgiveness that Christ offered by choosing instead to run and control his own life as 'king'. Rather than surrender to Christ's truth and authority as the true King of kings, Pilate decided to build his own kingdom so he could call the shots. **How does God use His authority as King to chisel and make you more like Jesus? How did Jesus model a life surrendered to the authority of His Father (John 8:28-29; Phil 2:5-10)? In what ways have you responded as 'king' by rejecting the authority and Lordship of Christ over various areas of your life? What area(s) of your life need to come under His authority? How does surrender to God's authority actually free us and living for self actually enslaves (John 8:31-36)?**

SOLDIERS (John 19:23-24) _____ at the foot of the Cross. The sad irony was that the soldiers never realized that the only One who could meet their deepest needs (peace, purpose, hope, grace, forgiveness) was a mere 3 feet above their heads and their hearts were a 1000 miles away. They were far more preoccupied with getting ahead in life instead of seeing Christ as the one thing who could truly complete their lives. They trusted in luck, making Jesus a superstitious, good luck charm rather than honoring Him as the Savior He is. (Phil 4:19; I Pt 5:7; Mk 15:39; Matt 27:54). **Are you betting (playing games) that you can do a better job running your life than Christ? Has Christ become a superstitious safety net in times of crisis or a religious add-on to ensure smooth sailing rather than your true foundation?**



RELIGIOUS LEADERS (19:31-34) _____ as usual. The religious folks totally missed the point of the Cross (Passover) where God extended His grace to forgive their sin by crushing Jesus in their place (Isaiah 53:5, 10). They were so inconvenienced by the cross and so intent on checking their religious boxes of celebrating Passover they wanted to break His legs to speed things up so that Jesus could not breathe. Rather than deeply considering what was really taking place on their behalf by their Creator, they wanted to rush it and 'play church' instead. After all, going through the motions is so much easier and less costly than humbly putting their heart into a real relationship with the Father. They wanted God's blessings, but they didn't really want Him. They desired His *presents* rather than His *presence*. They were content to keep the Law rather than learning to love and enjoy the Law-Giver Who created them. **Are you more committed to the rules of religion or enjoying a relationship with living God? Have you missed the whole point of Easter because you want to get back to the business of life (vacations, yard work, entertainment, etc)?**



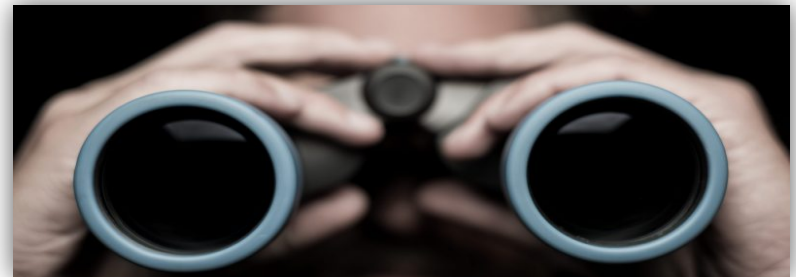
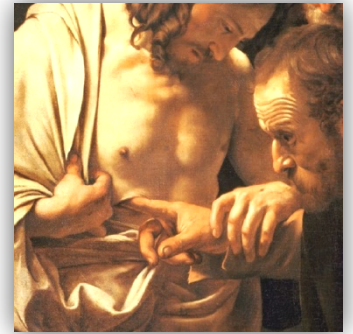
JOSEPH & NICODEMUS (19:38-40) From fearful _____ to fearless _____. Two years earlier ol' Nic the Pharisee fearfully came to Jesus one night so that his buddies in the temple would not discover his hunger to seek truth from Jesus about eternal life (John 3:1-10). There was a hole in his soul. Something or Someone was missing in his life. But at the time the cost for him to follow Christ was just too high. As a high ranking religious leader he might be ostracized, lose his status in the community or kicked out of the temple 'club'. But after seeing Jesus die on the cross in his place, he now finally understood what had taken place and his heart changed. Now, along with Joseph of Arimathea, he longed to be fully identified with Christ (Mk 15:43; Phil 1:23) no matter the cost. After two years he finally left the sidelines and got in the game growing from a **fickle fan** to a **faithful follower**. Which are you? Using football as an illustration, how would you describe your current spiritual life?



PETER (20:1-10; 21:1-23) Understood and received God's _____. Although considered His closest follower, Peter bailed on Jesus as He went to the Cross by denying Him 3 times (John 18:25-27; Mark 14:50, 54, 66-71). But the resurrection of Christ gripped his heart and drove the gracious message of the Cross deep into his soul because it was proof positive that he would experience the grace of God for eternity (1 Peter 1:1-12). Christ's death and resurrection so overwhelmed Peter's life that his last recorded words were *"now grow in the **grace** and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ! To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity"* (2 Peter 3:18). And the eyewitness reality (Acts 2:32-33; 2 Pet 1:16; 1 Cor 15:3-5) that Jesus is **RISEN** (1 Pet 1:3), **REIGNING** (Acts 2:36) and **RETURNING** (1 Pet 5:4; 2 Pet 3:13-17) gave him the courage to speak (Acts 2:14-40; 3:13-29) and live (2 Pet 1:2-11) for Christ until he was crucified upside down in Rome (Foxe's Book of Martyrs). How has the resurrection of Christ helped you to understand God's grace to you as a forgiven sinner? How has the resurrection given you confidence to speak of and live for Christ (1 Cor 15:1-1-5,14, 17, 58) while offering hope in this broken world?



THOMAS (20:19-31) _____ to the point of _____. For centuries Thomas has been thrown under the bus as *'doubting Thomas.'* But is this really what the scriptures teach? Like the other disciples, Thomas was afraid to follow Jesus to Jerusalem lest he be crucified along with Him. But he was the one boldly leading the way to (John 11:16) follow Jesus no matter the cost! Thomas was a man who needed to be reassured in what he **believed** (pistos = convinced to the point of action) so that he could live it out. He understood that borrowed beliefs have no power! So, he asked Jesus for reassurance the night before He was crucified (John 14:1-6)? After Jesus was raised from the dead, Thomas again needed reassurance before he could follow Him fully (John 20:19-31) lest he become discouraged or disillusioned when adversity and persecution came. Why is it important that *"believe"* or its equivalent is mentioned so often in this passage? How did Jesus assure Thomas in order to grow his faith? Where do you need God's reassurance to grow in your faith? How can knowing the absolute facts of the resurrection help you to grow through your fears in order to walk by faith (2 Cor 5:7; Gal 2:20)?



YOU (Acts 17:16-34 especially 30-34) After studying 6 different heart responses to the death and resurrection of Christ, what is your response? What are you going to do with this Jesus? How will the sure reality and fact of His death and resurrection chisel and transform your life making you more like Jesus? Which response most describes your life? Why?

FILL IN THE BLANKS

Men Responding To The Cross

His **RESPONSE** to the cross saved his life giving him purpose....

PILATE (John 19:1-21) I am **KING** of my own life.

SOLDIERS (John 19:23-24) **PLAYING GAMES** at the foot of the Cross.

RELIGIOUS LEADERS (19:31-34) **BUSINESS** as usual.

JOSEPH & NICODEMUS (19:38-40) From fearful **SPECTATORS** to fearless **PARTICIPANTS**.

PETER (20:1-10; 21:1-23) Understood and received God's **GRACE**.

THOMAS (20:19-31) **CONVINCED** to the point of **ACTION**.