

FOCUS ON FAITH

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THE GREATEST STORY

It's been called the "*greatest story ever told*" – a reality to millions of people all over the world but considered either a fantasy or an irrelevancy by many others. But whether you believe the story or not it's impossible to ignore the claims and the life of the person who is still the world's most influential leader – Jesus Christ.

I find it amazing that the adopted son of an ordinary Jewish carpenter who spent 30 or so years of his life in obscurity and only 3 years in the spotlight of public life should have such an influence. He has motivated countless people to metaphorically, and others to literally, give their lives in His service. His teachings have inspired the creation of charitable and philanthropic organisations that work tirelessly to improve the living conditions of millions. He is a dominant force in culture, literature, broadcasting, art and even fashion. His impact has a near global reach.

As we approach the celebration of the culmination of those 3 years in public view I'd like us to briefly reflect on a couple of events that happened in His last week. You see I believe that what took place 2,000 years ago in that setting have implications for us in our present situation today.

Jesus proved on the Cross the extent of His love for us – it cost Him everything.

Last Sunday was the day we now refer to as Palm Sunday – the day that Jesus arrives in Jerusalem, his country's capital city. Unlike President Obama arriving for the G20 Summit Jesus didn't come with a huge army of Secret Service bodyguards or in Air Force One. He was accompanied by a small band of devoted friends (who would later go AWOL) yet as He rode on a donkey into the city, crowds of people thronged the roads to welcome Him. Unfortunately they had the wrong idea of His mission. He wasn't seeking earthly recognition – prestige, position and power weren't on His agenda.

Yet He knew what He had to do and He knew the likely consequences of His actions. So when the adulating crowds found out He was not intending to overthrow the Roman authorities that had cruelly ruled their country, they quickly turned on Him. Within the space of a few days He went from 'hero to zero'.

It seems to be a national sport in our celebrity culture for us to put people on a pedestal and then take great delight in knocking them off. As soon as someone's reputation or character shows any kind of flaw they are

hounded relentlessly. **It happened then to Jesus – it happens now!**

And then there is the betrayal and subsequent arrest, trial and crucifixion of Jesus.

One of His closest friends is disloyal and sells Him out to the authorities. Was Judas ideologically disillusioned, politically compromised or financially motivated? We'll probably never know. But doesn't that kind of thing still happen today?

One of the most illusive qualities in our day and age is faithfulness. We see it in politics, the business and sporting arenas and in family life. If it's expedient or if there is an advantage that can be gained, the temptation is there for duplicity or infidelity. **It happened then to Jesus – it happens now!**

But the way of Jesus is different. The Bible says:

- **Jesus came to serve and give His life as a ransom** to bring release and liberty to others rather than save Himself
- **Jesus demonstrated that forgiveness is an option in every situation** even telling us that when we ask for forgiveness we have to forgive those who have hurt us. In spite of everything Jesus asked for forgiveness for those who crucified Him
- **That we are all valuable to God.** Jesus proved on the Cross the extent of His love for us – it cost Him everything. That's what makes the Christian faith unique. God, in the form of Jesus, took the initiative and paid the price.

But thankfully the greatest story doesn't end with a death and a burial – Easter Sunday follows Good Friday. After the Crucifixion there is a Resurrection and with it comes a hope for the future – eternal life.

The Bible says, "***The free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord***".

It happened then to Jesus – it happens now for those who believe!

If you'd like to find out more information on local Churches together with contact details, plus information on activities and other Christian resources, please log on to www.lifting-jesus-higher.org.uk.