

# The Crucified Christ

Six Hours That Changed the World

*(A Lenten Devotional)*

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## Introduction

It takes six hours to drive from Glasgow, Kentucky to Chicago, Illinois. Assuming that the average person can read forty pages an hour with approximately 250 words per page, within that same six-hour span, they could conceivably complete *The Scarlett Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne or Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* each with less than 70,000 words. From the time it takes to watch two professional football games on a lazy Sunday afternoon or binge on six episodes of your favorite 60-minute television show, one fourth of the day is gone.

In one way, six hours can seem like a long time, especially when you first arrive at school or work and fifteen minutes feels like an hour. But as you busy yourself with the assignments and activities of the day, you glance at the clock only to wonder, where did the time go?

Without question, the most significant event in both history and eternity happened within the time span of six hours. From the time Jesus was nailed to the cross to the moment He bowed His head in death only lasted six hours. I use the word *only* with reservation since time may have moved more quickly for those who watched what happened, while for the One on the cross, time may have seemed to stand still. Intense suffering has a way of making every second more painful than the last.

There is a general familiarity among believers concerning the crucifixion. Countless sermons and songs have been preached and sung, rightly pointing to Jesus as the only hope and source of salvation (Acts 4:12). Physicians have tried to address the question of what happened to Jesus on the cross from a medical standpoint, while theologians explain why it happened from the biblical record and historical orthodoxy. Yet it is easy to miss significant details that provide a clearer understanding of what Jesus endured for our sake from 9:00 in the morning to 3:00 in the afternoon.

I want to invite you to camp out at the cross. With fresh eyes, I want you to see the expression on each of the faces of those who are present. From the furrowed brows of the Pharisees, to the grimace on the countenances of the deserving thieves, to the bewildered looks of the Roman soldiers, to the discouraged and dazed thoughts of His disciples, to the grieving and inconsolable heart of His mother, to the beaten, bruised, and bloody face of the Savior who is resolute to accomplish the Father's will.

Hear anew the curses that drip like poison from the lips of the condemned to the sewage of words that spill from the foul heart of religious leaders who pretend to seek to defend the honor of God. There is the sound of soldiers laughing and women weeping followed

by a period of eerie silence as the sun refuses to shine at the midday hour until a cry from the cross declares, "It is finished!"

If it is possible through the printed page, I pray that you will feel the sting of words intended to humiliate the so-called Christ. That you will experience the sharp sword that pierced the soul of Mary and the thorny crown that pierced the head of Jesus. Handle the hammer that drove spike nails into His flesh and win the seamless garment in a game of chance as predicted by the prophet (Psalm 22:18). These words are not intended to evoke emotion but provoke faith. To look at the cross with deeper intensity and intentionality will enable you to grasp more fully the price of redemption and the security of salvation.

*The Crucified Christ* can be read in a single setting, but is purposely designed to be digested over a period of forty days allowing the reader to consider more deeply the events of Golgotha. The brevity of these pages is reflective of the scant record of the details contained in the Gospels concerning the historical crucifixion of Jesus. It attempts to provide a chronological timeline of the suffering Savior from the moment the nails pierce His flesh to when He bows His head in silent death. While these pages will reference His arrest in Gethsemane, the trials before the Sanhedrin, and the preliminary brutality of the Roman soldiers at the Praetorium, its focus will center on the literal six hours Jesus hung on the cross. A person can read this work in less time than the actual events described.

On the other hand, a meditative contemplation of the crucifixion would prove profitable as certain details are examined and long assumptions challenged. A person may appreciate the beauty of nature as they stroll leisurely through a park but gain a deeper sense of awe when time is taken to smell the flowers. It is impossible to drink in the grandeur of the Grand Canyon at a single glance. The touristy view from the south rim is much different than the perspective from the Colorado River that winds along the canyon floor. The roar of the falls at Niagara can be felt as the waters powerfully rush over the limestone rock, but it is an altered experience when viewed from the bow of the Maiden of the Mist.

Look at the cross again. Let your eyes adjust to the light as if you were emerging from Mammoth Cave into the glorious rays of the noon day sun. The dark shadows of the caverns give way to the wonder of a world saturated with vibrant colors and indescribable beauty. Such is the case for those who once sat in spiritual darkness but now have been permitted to see the light of truth (Matt 4:16). It is a light beckoning the weary traveler to find rest from their long journey, a comfort to the child frightened by the dark, and a hope to the heart longing for peace. Jesus is the Light who shows the way (Ps 119:105) and who is the Way (John 14:6). It is at the cross where the Light shines and rebels find redemption. It is more than a story; it is salvation for those who anchor their faith in the crucified Christ.

# **In the Beginning**

# Day One

## The Crucified Christ

*And when they had come to the place called Calvary,  
there they crucified Him. **Luke 23:33** (NKJV)*

Throughout history there have been significant events that have literally changed the world. The invention of the Gutenberg printing press in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the assassination of Ferdinand in 1913 that sparked WWI, the invasion of Poland by Adolph Hitler (1939), and the introduction of the internet to name a few. Each of these pales in comparison to that single event of the crucifixion of Christ. The story of the death of Jesus is told by all four gospel writers. He is the center of the modern calendar (Before Christ/Anno Domini) and central to the faith of all who identify as Christians.

## The Place

Luke provides a cursory account of the death of Jesus that gives context to the crucifixion (Luke 23:33). Without fanfare or exaggerated description, he tells the story as it has been reported to him both simply and straightforward with three brief observations. First, there is the place of crucifixion. The word *Calvary* is derived from the Latin *calva*, meaning bald head or scalp. The Aramaic term is Golgotha when translated means *skull*. There are two traditional sites that have been purported by Christians over the centuries. The Roman Catholic Church enshrined what they believe to be the location of the crucifixion within the Church of the Holy Sepulcher located in the Christian Quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem. Protestants tend to favor what is known as Gordon's Calvary, named after Charles George Gordon, who observed in 1882 two sunken holes beneath a cliff resembling a skull. Skull Hill, as it is known today, seems like a favorable location since the site is a short distance from the gates of Jerusalem and rises above the assumed location of the empty tomb. Despite the ascetic appeal of Gordon's Calvary, neither history or archeology has yet been able to definitively declare the precise location of the three crosses.<sup>1</sup> Tradition favors the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, but more important than where Jesus was crucified, is the question, "Why was Jesus crucified?"

## The Pain

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<sup>1</sup> Biblical Archeology Society Staff, "Where is Golgotha, Where Jesus was Crucified?", [www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/biblical-sites-places/jerusalem/where-is-golgotha-where-jesus-was-crucified/](http://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/biblical-sites-places/jerusalem/where-is-golgotha-where-jesus-was-crucified/), May 17, 2022.

Secondly, Luke introduces us to the pain of crucifixion. Crucifixion was a form of capital punishment. The Romans did not invent crucifixion but perfected it into an art form designed to maximize pain and humiliation of its victims. The word excruciating comes from crucifixion. The event of the death of Jesus has been referred to as The Passion of the Christ since passion is derived from the Latin word *passio* meaning suffering. Most of us can still recall the vivid portrayal of the Mel Gibson movie that showcased the sadistic brutality that accompanied crucifixion. The actor-director makes a cameo appearance in his own film. The audience sees only the hand of Gibson holding the nail being driven in the hands of Jesus as an expression of his own culpability.<sup>2</sup> While the film graphically captured the physical suffering of the Savior, it could not communicate the true horror of the cross.

Governor Pilate was the official responsible for maintaining order within the Israelite territory of the Roman Empire. The Jewish leaders were able to pressure Pilate into issuing the death sentence on the basis that Jesus was a rival king who posed a threat to Caesar's rule. Jesus had already been betrayed in the garden by Judas and paraded before the kangaroo court of the Sanhedrin. Jesus is condemned by 6:00 a.m., He is crucified by 9:00 a.m., and He is dead by 3:00 p.m. that same afternoon. Crucifixion was designed to be a slow death, sometimes lasting a few days. Instead, all three of the crucified victims died that day before the Sabbath officially began at sundown.

### The People

The evangelist makes note that the two other men crucified with Jesus were criminals, robbers to be exact. They will have a primary role in revealing the heart of the Savior whose main mission was to seek and save those who are lost (Luke 19:10). For now, they suffer alongside of the Messiah. Caiaphas, the High Priest, and his cohorts see only a blasphemer flanked by wretched sinners who all deserve death. Luke, however, includes this observation in his record to highlight the One who was truly innocent was numbered with those who were truly guilty (Isa 53:2; 1 Pet 3:18).

Other than being innocent, what makes the crucifixion of Jesus different from the crucifixion experienced by the two other thieves or the thousands of other criminals and martyrs impaled upon stakes or fastened to wooden crosses by the Roman Empire? There is much more happening at the cross than the death of an innocent man. Within the next six hours the righteous wrath of God toward the sin of humanity will be satisfied, the propitiation

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<sup>2</sup> Jeannette Walls and Ashely Pearson, "Gibson Makes Act of Contrition in 'Passion'", [www.today.com/popculture/gibson-makes-act-contrition-passion-wbna3881874](http://www.today.com/popculture/gibson-makes-act-contrition-passion-wbna3881874), Jan 6, 2004.



of sin will be fulfilled by the sacrifice of God's perfect Lamb, and the stain of Eden will not only be covered, but taken away.

What makes the crucifixion of Jesus so significant? We will never understand the cross apart from its Old Testament moorings. Although the crucifixion of Jesus Christ is found in the pages of the New Testament, the background story is rooted in the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. By the time we arrive at Calvary many of the details of what happened there have already been told.

*Give us fresh eyes, Lord, to see the wonder and the beauty of the cross. May the well of salvation swell within our soul so that rivers of living water will once again flow from our lives and manifest your glory to the nations. Amen.*

## Day Two

### The Seed of the Woman

*And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel. **Genesis 3:15** (NKJV)*

#### Prophesied in the Scriptures

4,000 years before Christ the prophecy was given to Adam

Historically the death of Jesus occurred when He was 33 years old. The best chronological marker places the date at approximately AD 29. While the events of that day unfolded in real time, the Bible prophetically pointed to the cross throughout the pages of the Old Testament. Even from the book of beginnings, Genesis provides the first glimpse of God's redemptive plan in what evangelical theologians identify as the *protoevangelium* (compound of two Greek words meaning the first good news).<sup>3</sup>

God had crowned His act of creation by making man in His image and placing him in the Garden of Eden, a perfect paradise where man was in fellowship with God, unity with one another, and harmony with creation. Adam and Eve had full access to all that God had planted with the exception of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This prohibition came with the warning that death would be the result of a violation of that command. Satan, however, successfully convinced the original pair that they could be masters of their own fate and by eating the forbidden fruit their eyes would be opened (Gen 3:5). They believed the lie and did what God told them not to do.

Immediately they experienced shame for the very first time as they tried to cover their nakedness. Fear flooded their hearts as they attempted to hide from God amongst the trees in the garden. True to His very nature, it was not man who looked for God, but rather it was God who went looking for man. God asked a question to which He already knew the answer, "Where are you?" This is still the pertinent question for today. Where are you in your relationship with God? Have you believed the lie that you don't need to do all that God commands? Are you trying to cover your sin and avoid being in the presence of the holy God?

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<sup>3</sup> "The Proto-Evangelium," [www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/proto-evangelium](http://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/proto-evangelium); accessed October 4, 2022; Ray Prichard, "What is the Protoevangelium?", [www.christianity.com/jesus/is-jesus-god/old-testament-prophecies/what-is-the-protoevangelium-protoevangelion.html](http://www.christianity.com/jesus/is-jesus-god/old-testament-prophecies/what-is-the-protoevangelium-protoevangelion.html), March 10, 2011.

In those moments of judgment, because they had trespassed against God, the promise of death began to settle in. Accusation and blame replaced the unity between the man and the woman. The peaceful and productive order of creation would be violently fractured and chaos and corruption would characterize the natural world. Adam's body made from the dirt of the ground and infused with the breath of God began the slow process that would eventually reduce him back to dust.

Adam and Eve would be excluded from Eden and from the very presence of the Lord. Access to God and the Tree of Life would be cut off as the cherub's sword flashed at the eastern entrance of the garden. Man was on the outside looking in. He longed for home but was now powerless because of his sinfulness. The sin nature that bends toward rebellion and independence from God now saturated the conscience of Adam as he became a man of the flesh and not of the spirit.

The compounded tragedy of Eden is that Adam's sin affected him and infected all who would come after him (Rom 5:12). At our birth we have an inherited nature that seeks to satisfy and gratify our natural desires. Our default is to live life centered on ourselves rather than for the glory of God. The result of our sinful condition and our sinful choices is that we have found ourselves in the very same place as Adam. Shame, blame, fear, chaos, confusion, and separation is now part of the human experiment. We have experienced firsthand that the way of the transgressor is hard (Prov 13:15) and that we are incapable of finding our way back to God through our own efforts.

Ironically, it is in the midst of judgment that the grace of God is revealed. A promise is made to the guilty couple giving hope for the restoration of fellowship and opening the door to resumed access to God for all who will believe. Genesis 3:15 is the first good news for fallen man. Sin had caused a perpetual hostility to exist between God and man, between the righteous and the unrighteous, and the only remedy was to kill sin at the root. In the fullness of time God would send One who would be born of the seed of a woman. While the serpent (Satan) would succeed in bruising His heel, the future Messiah would succeed in crushing his head. Sin and death would not have the last word. The God who gave Adam physical life had now promised to restore what sin had taken through the act of obedience of One still to come. Adam did not fully understand the scope of the prophecy, but it was at this moment man began to anticipate the arrival of a Savior.

*Oh God, even from the beginning You had a plan to redeem and reclaim fallen man from the bondage of sin. We are grateful that you searched for Adam and You searched for us as the Good Shepherd seeking his lost lamb. Truly, all that you declare will come to pass. Amen.*

## Day Three

### The Promise of Abraham

*Now the LORD had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; And you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."*

**Genesis 12:1-3** (NKJV)

2000 years before Christ the prophecy was given to Abraham

If you were to hold between your forefinger and thumb the pages in the Bible from Genesis 1 through Genesis 12 those few sheets would represent at least 2,000 years of recorded history. A day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as a day to the Lord (2 Peter 3:8), from the perspective of eternity, only a brief time has passed but the promise of God remains. Much has happened on earth during these two millennium. Cain killed Abel, Seth and his progeny of Enoch, Methuselah and Noah were born, the world-wide deluge wiped out the wicked, and the nations were formed from the confusion of tongues at the Tower of Babel.

By His sovereign grace God called to Himself a man who lived in Ur of the Chaldees from the banks of the Euphrates River in what is now southern Iraq. Abram along with his family, friends, and neighbors paid homage to a variety of deities, but especially to a moon-god named Nanna whose temple sat upon the ziggurat that rose prominently above the city.<sup>4</sup> In the midst of this spiritually dark place, the light of God's truth broke upon the heart and mind of pagan Abram as Yahweh commissioned the future patriarch to leave country and kin to a land that He would soon show him (Gen 12:1-3).

Contained in the call was a four-fold blessing that he would become the father of a great nation, his name would be great, he would be blessed by God to be a blessing to the nations, and all the families of the earth (both Jews and Gentiles) would be blessed. Abram began his journey of faith following God and he would soon be known as the Father of the Hebrew nation despite the fact he and his wife Sarai had no immediate heir.

As Abram aged, God reiterated the promise of descendants with the illustration of countless sparking stars and innumerable grains of sand. Abram (exalted father) received a name change to Abraham (father of a multitude). Still childless, Abraham believed God and it was counted to him for righteousness (Gen 15:6). Now seventy-five years old the faith of the

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<sup>4</sup> Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, "Nanna," [www.britannica.com/topic/Sin-Mesopotamian-god](http://www.britannica.com/topic/Sin-Mesopotamian-god), accessed August 3, 2022.

Father of Faith wavered. Knowing the biological clock was ticking he wanted to help God fulfill His promise by impregnating Hagar, the handmaid of Sarah. Ishmael is born yet he is not whom God ordained as the fulfillment of the lineage from the which the prophetic promise would come. Thirteen years pass as does the ability to bear children from the barren womb of ninety-year-old Sarai. It is precisely at this place of human inability God does the impossible and causes Isaac to be born. Sarah is filled with laughter and Abraham is filled with joy.

God is not yet done with Abraham. There is still one lesson of faith to learn as the testing of his faith in God is put on display. The Lord commands Abraham to take Isaac to one of the mountains in the land of Moriah and offer him as a human sacrifice as a testimony of his trust. Without hesitation Abraham and his uninformed son begin the three-day journey early the next morning. Those traveling with the father and son are instructed to wait at the base of the mount until they return. As they are ascending, Isaac makes a keen observation and asks, "My father, look, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering (Gen 22:7)?" The response of Abraham is both prophetic and profound, "God will provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering."

You know the story. Isaac, perhaps around the age of 15-17 years old, is bound and placed on the altar of sacrifice. As Abraham raises the dagger with every intention of plunging it into the chest of his promised son, his hand is stayed and his eyes see a ram caught in the thicket. In the place of Isaac, the lamb is laid and slain. It is tempting to allegorize Isaac as a type of Christ who was prepared to die, yet the illustration breaks down at the very point when he is untied and set free without shedding one drop of blood. It is the ram that should be our focus. The faith of Abraham is vindicated and Isaac is spared because God had provided a substitute in the form of an innocent animal.

God revealed to Adam He would one day send a Savior who would reverse the curse through One who would be born of human lineage. Two thousand years later God established the geological branch from which the Hebrew nation and the Messiah would be birthed. It would be the gospel writer Matthew who would connect the dots from the time of Abraham to the time of Jesus (Matt 1:1-17) demonstrating the fulfillment of God's promise. It has been said the acorn doesn't fall far from the tree. And so, it is in this case, from the Father of Faith will come the One who is Faithful and True (Rev 19:11).

*You called Abram out of a pagan culture to follow you by faith and through him, you brought forth the Seed that would be the Savior of the world. Grant us the grace to hear your voice and to respond with obedient faith so that our friends and family will see Jesus. Amen.*

## Day Four

### The Descent of David

*When your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.*

**2 Samuel 7:12-13** (NIV)

1,000 years before Christ the prophecy was given to David

David was the youngest son of the eight sons of Jesse and he was anointed as the unlikely successor to King Saul by the prophet and judge Samuel. This ruddy and handsome teenager would become a man after God's own heart, the apple of God's eye, and the standard of faithfulness from which all the other future kings of Israel would be measured. This is the same David who watched the sheep, played the harp, slayed the giant, defeated the Philistines, occupied the throne, violated the woman, repented the sin, and loved the Lord.

Because of his bloody background, David is prohibited from building a house for God, yet the prophet Nathan reveals the Lord intended to build David a house (dynasty) from which Israel's greatest King would forever rule and reign (Psalm 2; Psalm 45:6-7; Psalm 110; 2 Sam 7:4-16). God would entrust to David as psalter, prophetic truths concerning the character and identity of the coming King. The Psalms are replete with dozens of references to the ministry and the mission of the Messiah. Israel would celebrate His arrival (Ps 118:26; Mark 11:9), He would have unquenchable zeal for the house of the Lord (Ps 69:9; John 2:13-17); He would teach in parables (Ps 78:2; Matt 13:35); He would be hated without a cause (Ps 69:4; John 15:25); and He would be rejected by men (Ps 118:22-23; Luke 20:17).

Without question, Psalm 22 provides the most vivid and comprehensive description of the suffering of the Christ in its portrayal of the experience of crucifixion. The language and imagery are an unmistakable parallel to the actual experience of Jesus on the cross. We will return often to these passages for further examination as the horrible hours of the death of the King slowly pass. Suffice for now we need to be content with a cursory review of what David wrote in that psalm a thousand years earlier than the actual event.

*My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? **V. 1***

*All those who see Me ridicule Me; They shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, "He trusted in the LORD, let Him rescue Him; Let Him deliver Him, since He delights in Him!" **vv. 7-8***

*I am poured out like water, and all My bones are out of joint; My heart is like wax; It has melted within Me. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and My tongue clings to My jaws; You have brought Me to the dust of death. **Vv. 14-15***

*They divide My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots. **V. 18***

The Deliverer would be born of a woman (Gen 3:15), a descendent of Abraham (Gen 12:1-3), from the tribe of Judah (Gen 49:8-12), and the line of David. His ministry would be marked by holiness and truth (Psalm 118:26). He would be a Prophet greater than Moses (Deut 18:15-18), a Priest greater than Melchizedek (Ps 110:4), and a King greater than David (Ps 110:1).

*You, Lord, are faithful to Your covenant. It is at your Word the heavens were created and your will be accomplished. What you say will surely come to pass and not one word will fail to be fulfilled. Our hope and faith are in you. Amen.*

## Day Five

### The Sacrifice of Isaiah

*He is despised and rejected by men, A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely, He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, Smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed. **Isaiah 53:3-5** (NKJV)*

700 years before Christ the prophecy was given to Isaiah

Of all the Old Testament prophets, Isaiah forcefully presents the Messiah as a Suffering Servant (Isa 42, 49, 50, 53). Israel anticipated the arrival of the King who would subdue their enemies and reign victoriously returning the people of God to the place of prominence they once enjoyed as citizens of David's empire. Isaiah certainly affirmed the sovereignty of the Savior (Isa 9:6-7) but presents the theme that our victory comes as a result of His suffering. Such a thought cut across the intellectual and theological grain of the common Jew who considered suffering, especially severe suffering, the direct result of God's wrath poured out on a deserving sinner.

Job's friends were convinced the oozing sores and scabbed skin of their contemporary was the clear demonstration of God's judgment against his sin that was either concealed, unconfessed, or committed in ignorance. The Pharisees were quick to observe the text that plainly declared, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree" (Deut 21:23). Their theology was right but their application was wrong. God had indeed determined to punish sin (Ezek 18:20), but what they did not realize is the sinless Savior would be our substitute and become sin for us (2 Cor 5:21), and in so doing, He would experience the full wrath of God toward sin on our behalf.

It is these theological treaties Isaiah introduces in his prophetic pages. The most powerful among the Suffering Servant passages is Isaiah 53. The news that victory would come from suffering would cause startled kings to shut their mouths (Isa 52:14-15). The prophet knew the report would be difficult to believe since the griefs, wounds, bruises, and sorrows were bore by One who was innocent on behalf of those who were guilty. Jewish scholarship has long considered this passage as a depiction of the nation of Israel and its injustices that it has had to endure since the time of 586 BC once the Babylonians destroyed the Temple.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Tovia Singer, "Who is God's Suffering Servant? The Rabbinic Interpretation of Isaiah 53," <https://outreachjudaism.org/gods-suffering-servant-isaiah-53/>, Accessed August 8, 2022.



However, the problem of suffering in the passage seems to point to a single individual rather than a large nation collectively. Incidentally, there has never been any nation that has been able to claim innocence. Righteousness does exalt a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people (Prov 14:34). Every nation, whether Jewish or Gentile, has a tainted history of rebellion to the Word of God and resistance to the will of God. Isaiah declares that the Servant in this chapter suffers in silence and His pain was within the scope of God's divine plan.

The would-be Messiah knew the agony that awaited Him as a result of His obedience to the Father. Seven centuries before Calvary Isaiah wrote:

*I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting. **Isa 50:6** (NIV)*

*But many were amazed when they saw him. His face was so disfigured he seemed hardly human, and from his appearance, one would scarcely know he was a man. **Isa 52:14** (NLT)*

The eighth century contemporary of Isaiah was the prophet Micah who identified Bethlehem as the birth place of the Messiah (Micah 5:2). Another prophet, Hosea, declared the promised deliverer would come out of Egypt (Hosea 11:1). In the New Testament, Matthew cites the prophets who identified the Savior as a Nazarene (Matt 2:23). Scholars debate the meaning of Matthews comments since no apparent Old Testament passage can be located as a point of reference. Did Matthew mean to write the Hebrew word *nester* pointing to the sprout or branch of David? Maybe the Old Testament citation has been lost to antiquity or the derogatory slang referring to deplorables as Nazarenes from Nazareth is intended (John 1:46)?

Those familiar with the gospel narrative see no contradiction in these passages as to the geographical origin of the Messiah. Jesus was indeed born in Bethlehem, carried to Egypt by his parents until the threat of Herod had passed, and returned to Israel to be reared in the obscurity of His mother's hometown in the despised hamlet located in the lower region of Galilee. The time has not yet come for the arrival of the Messiah, but the stage is being set.

*Father, your mercies never fail and they are new every morning. The sending of Your Son for our salvation was the highest demonstration of Your love for us. Gratitude fills our hearts as we humble ourselves before you and daily seek your favor. Amen.*

## Day Six

### The Preaching of the Prophets

*And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son. **Zechariah 12:10** (NIV)*

500 years before Christ the prophecy was given to Zechariah

In the section of the Old Testament called the Minor Prophets is the voice of Zechariah who echoes what God said to Adam from the beginning. Just as the nation of Israel rejected the preaching of the prophets in the past, so they would reject the Messiah once He arrived on the scene (John 1:11). The Jewish leaders demanded the execution of the One who claimed to be the Son of God. Despite Pilate's attempt to appease the mob by scourging, Jesus is chosen for crucifixion over the surprised Barabbas. Jesus and the other thieves are paraded through the narrow streets and led to the place of the Skull to be literally nailed to the crosses they carried.

Zechariah catches a glimpse of God's glory when he prophetically sees the crucified Christ alive and returning triumphantly to claim what is rightfully His. He sees beyond the cross, beyond the resurrection and ascension, beyond the birth of the Church on Pentecost, beyond the days of the ingathering of Gentile believers from every nation, to the time when Jesus fulfills what was spoken by the angels (Acts 1:9-11) and preached by John on Patmos (Rev 1:7). Every eye will see the return of the King, including those who pierced Him during the days of His earthly pilgrimage.

In that day, the nation of Israel will not only recognize the One they have pierced, but many Jewish people will embrace the gospel of grace and place their faith in Jesus the Messiah. Before the Second Coming of Christ there must be His first coming. This was the promise God spoke in the Garden of Eden and to father Abraham. It was pictured in the sacrificial lamb of the Exodus and the sacrificial system of Leviticus. It was preached by the prophets until the closing of the Old Testament as Malachai reminded his readers of sins curse (Mal 4:6).

The time period between the Testaments has been called the silent years since no prophetic voice was recorded in the pages of the inspired canon. This does not mean that nothing of significance was taking place or that God was not active in His world. To the contrary, the time of the Gentiles and their subjugation of Israel was being fulfilled as preached

by Daniel (Dan 2) in preparation for the arrival of the Messiah. Golden Babylon was followed by the Medes and Persian Empires, followed by Phillip of Macedon and Alexander the Great and their Greek war machine, and finally followed by the 400-year Roman Empire with their universal language, unifying road system, and Pax Romana (Dan 2).

After 400 years of silence, the fulness of time had arrived (Gal 4:4) as eternity stepped into time and deity became dust. The cry of the Messiah could be heard in a manger in sleepy Bethlehem. Angels celebrated while shepherds stared in amazement at the fulfillment of prophecy before their very eyes. Still the full announcement of the arrival of the Messiah would have to wait for thirty more years until the final Old Testament prophet, clothed with camels' hair and girded with a leather belt, fearlessly proclaimed, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29)."

As Jesus stepped out of the muddy Jordan, He began His journey to the cross. It would take a little more than three years before He would arrive at Golgotha, not because of the great distance, but because of the necessity of fulfilling all the Father had sent Him to do and speak. From the moment God said, "He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel," it is as though the train of redemption departed from the depot of Eden. Like a high-speed bullet it raced across 4,000 years of the tracks of history, but with every passing year, the train decelerated more and more allowing the details and destination to be determined. Until finally the locomotive came to a complete stop outside the city of Jerusalem *to the place called Calvary* (Luke 23:33). During the next six hours heaven would meet hell, light and darkness would collide, and justice and grace would be reconciled (Ps 85:10-11).

For over 4,000 years of recorded human history from Genesis to Malachi, the road of redemption had been paved by the preaching of the prophets. God provided additional confirmation to His salvation plan with the illustration of the sacrificial system. The innocent blood of bulls, goats, and lambs would be considered suitable substitutes as atonement for the sins of man until the perfect sacrifice could be offered. The slaughter of an animal provided propitiation (1 John 2:2) or covering for the sinful nakedness of Adam and Eve (Gen 3:21) and introduced a foundational principle for the hope of sinners. The God who had promised to send a Savior wanted the world, particularly His people, to recognize Him when He came.

*Mighty God, you sent the prophets and filled their mouths with your truth calling nations to repentance and pointing to the coming Messiah. May you continue to call and commission your servants to declare both the gospel and the hope that Messiah is coming again! Amen.*

## Day Seven

### The Lamb of the Passover

*On that night I will pass through the land of Egypt and strike down every firstborn son and firstborn male animal in the land of Egypt. I will execute judgment against all the gods of Egypt, for I am the LORD! But the blood on your doorposts will serve as a sign, marking the houses where you are staying. When I see the blood, I will pass over you. This plague of death will not touch you when I strike the land of Egypt. **Exodus 12:12-13** (NLT)*

Pictured in the Passover

The festival of Passover commemorated the deliverance of Israel from the bondage of Egypt (Exo 12:1-7). Faithful Jews would take the annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem to share a special meal with family and friends as a reminder of the miraculous intervention by God on behalf of the Hebrew people. Lambs would be brought to the Temple or bought at the market place for the express purpose of offering an acceptable sacrifice. The Jewish historian, Josephus, estimated that 250,000 lambs would be presented and slaughtered on the altar during the festival.<sup>6</sup> The eight-day celebration would be punctuated with Israel's highest and holiest of days, the Day of Atonement, where the High Priest would follow a precise script (Lev 16) to secure the national covering of sin for another year.

As Moses received the initial primer for the Passover celebration in Exodus 12, significant similarities between the sacrificial lamb of Passover and the sacrificial lamb of Calvary are undeniably remarkable. First, the lamb would be a male of the first year and without blemish (Exo 12:5). The fully-grown sacrifice would be purchased prior to Passover and examined by the priests for any external or internal defects which if detected, would render the animal unacceptable.

The gospel writers tell us when Jesus rode into Jerusalem, the next few days were marked by intense questioning and cross-examination by the priests, scribes, and Pharisees concerning His character and the content of His teaching. Despite their best efforts to ensnare Jesus in their verbal exchanges, each challenge was masterfully met until they were shamed into silence (Luke 20:40). The lamb of the Exodus was an acceptable and perfect sacrifice and so was the sinless Lamb of Calvary (1 Pet 1:19).

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<sup>6</sup> David C. Grabbe, "What the Bible Says About the Passover Kept at the Temple," [www.bibletools.org/index.cfm/fuseaction/Topical.show/RTD/cgg/ID/19883/Passover-Kept-at-Temple.htm](http://www.bibletools.org/index.cfm/fuseaction/Topical.show/RTD/cgg/ID/19883/Passover-Kept-at-Temple.htm), Accessed August 10, 2022.

Secondly, the Exodus narrative tells us the timing of the sacrifice was to be at twilight (Exo 12:6). Twilight is that period of the day where the sun is slightly below the horizon of the earth. The faint appearance of the stars indicates there are only a few moments remaining before the night replaces the day. Like a runner sprinting to the finish line, the late afternoon sun races to the horizon to return to its evening chamber (Ps. 19:5).

Alex Tennent submits a compelling argument from the Torah and other extra-biblical sources showing the Passover sacrifices were slaughtered between 3:00 p.m. and sundown.<sup>7</sup> It is no insignificant detail that Jesus intentionally gave up the ghost at the ninth hour (Matt 27:46). Following the Jewish reckoning of time, the counting of the hours of the day begins with the rising of the sun which would be 6:00 a.m. The ninth hour would be nine hours after the sun rises making the time of death for Jesus at 3:00 p.m. in the afternoon. As Passover lambs were beginning to be slain in the Temple, so the Lamb of God was being slain outside of Jerusalem.

One other Exodus observation is necessary. Once the sacrificial animal was slain, its blood would be gathered then smeared on the doorpost and lintel of those homes (Exo 12:7) where trusting Hebrews would await the arrival of the angel of death. The promise of deliverance from the tenth plague rested solely on the application of the blood coated on the entrance way (Exo 12:23). When the divine messenger saw the blood, it passed over the home and the firstborn was spared. The security and assurance of their salvation was entirely dependent on the blood of an innocent lamb.

The parallel is plain, just as the Jews, who applied the blood of the sacrificial lamb on their homes were delivered from death, so those who apply the blood of Jesus to their heart share in that hope of deliverance (Col 1:20; Heb 2:15, 9:14; 1 John 1:7). If a picture is worth 10,000 words, then the Passover observance is a portrait of Calvary. The Exodus story is the foreshadowing of the cross. We do not see every detail, but we can see in the twilight the intended imagery pointing to a greater sacrifice and a greater hope.

*Lord Jesus, thank you for making provision for the forgiveness of sin through your shed blood. Thank you for the grace that applied your pure blood to our wicked and sinful hearts and for making us righteous in the sight of the Father. We find our only salvation and strength in you. Amen.*

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<sup>7</sup> T. Alex Tennent, "Between the Evenings-The Legal Time to Slay the Passover," [https://themessianicfeast.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/TMF\\_Between-the-Evenings.pdf](https://themessianicfeast.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/TMF_Between-the-Evenings.pdf), Accessed October 4, 2022.

## Day Eight

From the Foundation

*And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. **Revelation 13:8** (KJV)*

Planned by the Father

I don't know exactly when the thought of death crossed the minds of jealous Pharisees, but that hour of suffering and sacrifice was constantly before Jesus (Luke 2:49; John 2:4, 7:6, 30). As its divine Author, Jesus knew what the Scriptures said, and as the divine Son, Jesus knew the will of the Father. He subjected Himself to the authority of His parents as a child (Luke 2:51), but His primary desire was to do the will of His heavenly Father (Luke 2:49; John 8:29). The Bible is clear that it was God who sent the Son into the world (John 3:16; 17:18; 20:21), but does that mean that God knowingly sent His Son to this earth to die?

Who was ultimately responsible for the death of Jesus? Was it Judas who had witnessed firsthand the miracles, heard the messages, and who sat next to the Master at the Passover? Was it his kiss of betrayal in the early hours of Gethsemane that tipped off the cohort who had come to arrest Him? Perhaps bearing greater responsibility were the Jewish leaders who packed the Sanhedrin court with false witnesses until the verdict of blasphemer sealed His fate. Pilate could have released his innocent prisoner but was fearful Caesar would catch wind of his administrative weakness in eliminating a potential rival. Did the washing of his hands in the basin cleanse the bloody stains when he gave the order to have Jesus crucified? Maybe it was the majority of the mob who assembled outside the praetorium (John 18:28) who when given the choice of Barabas or Jesus chanted with increasing verbosity, "Crucify Him, crucify Him, crucify Him." Or was the death of Jesus literally at the rugged hands of Roman soldiers who sadistically delighted in their torturous games? There is no hint of hesitation in the preliminary beating they administered as they scourged His back, pummeled His face, crowned His head with thorns, and drove nails into His hands and feet.

If we were to accuse the Accuser for the death of Jesus, we would be closer to the truth. It was the Devil who put into the heart of the deceptive disciple the thought to betray his Lord for thirty silver coins (Matt 26:15; Luke 22:3). The Father of Lies filled the mouths of the witnesses at His religious trial with testimonies that contradicted one another as well as what Jesus actually meant. Satan was a murderer from the beginning (John 8:44). He incited Cain to kill Abel (Gen 4:8), Absalom to kill Amnon (2 Sam 13:28), and Joab to kill Abner (2 Sam 3:27) and Amasa (2 Sam 20:10). He knew what Genesis 3:15 prophesied but did he know what it

meant? Did the Devil seek to circumvent the fulfilment of a perfect sacrifice as he called for Jesus to abandon the Father's plan through the wilderness temptations (Matt 4:1-11)?

Did the Devil realize the cross would mean his defeat and thereby attempt to preempt Calvary with a premature death when he moved Herod to order the execution of the Bethlehem babies or ignite the wrath of His Nazareth neighbors who wanted to throw Jesus off a cliff (Luke 4:28-29)? We may never know the extent of his ignorance but we can be sure just as the Old Serpent (Rev 12:9) slithered his way into the garden, so he moved stealthily among the principal players who wanted Jesus dead. You can hear him whisper in the willing ear of a self-righteous scribe, "He violates the law of Moses and deserves to die." He murmurs among the multitude sowing disillusionment and doubt as to His claims of Messiahship. He instigates the gossip in the soldier's barracks fueling the confusion as to the true identity of the man they are about to crucify. Until finally his roar of condemnation blends with the blood thirsty mob and all the demons of hell demanding the death of the Son of God.

Still there is another culprit who must be considered as we seek to assign the blame for Calvary. An African spiritual predating the Civil War asks a question within its lyrics that demonstrates a deeper understanding as to the possible root cause of the cross.

Were you there when they crucified my Lord?  
Were you there when they crucified my Lord?  
Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.  
Were you there when they crucified my Lord?<sup>8</sup>

It wasn't only the actions of Judas, Caiaphas, Pilate, Roman soldiers, or the Jewish mob who were responsible, but the sin of Adam who disobeyed, Noah who got drunk, Abraham who lied, Jacob who deceived, Moses who became ill tempered, Samson who lusted, and David who murdered, their sin was there as well. We too were there. Our iniquity, our immorality, our idolatry, our insolence, our indulgence, rendered us as condemned criminals in God's court of righteousness. The sentence of death was pronounced as the penalty of sin (Rom 6:23). It is sin, and more precisely, our sin, that brought Jesus to the place of execution.

He who knew no sin, became sin on our behalf (2 Cor 5:21); the just for the unjust (1 Pet 3:18); He died our death that we might live His life (1 Pet 2:4). His blood was shed that we might be forgiven (Heb 9:22); He canceled our debt by nailing it to His cross (Col 2:14); He redeemed us from the curse by becoming a curse (Gal 3:13); He gave Himself for our sins that we would be rescued from the fall (Gal 1:4); He endured the cross that we might experience victory in the race (Heb 12:2).

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<sup>8</sup> [https://hymnary.org/text/were\\_you\\_there\\_when\\_they\\_crucified\\_my\\_lo](https://hymnary.org/text/were_you_there_when_they_crucified_my_lo), Accessed August, 13, 2022.

As a doctor seeks to locate the source of our ailment by applying gentle pressure on potential trouble spots of the patient, so we become increasingly uncomfortable as the two-edged sword of Scripture begins to lay bare the truth behind the cross. The body stiffens in response as the pain is narrowed and revelation discloses it is God the Father who is ultimately responsible for the death of His only begotten Son.

Omniscience is a divine attribute. It is not a word found in the Bible but its truth is constantly confirmed from Genesis to Revelation. Theologians define omniscience as “the state of having total knowledge, the quality of knowing everything.”<sup>9</sup> God knows fully the past, the present, and the future. As Sovereign of His universe, God is all-knowing (1 John 3:20). He is infinite in His knowledge knowing all things “immediately, simultaneously, exhaustively, and truly.”<sup>10</sup> His plan of redemption was not in response to the satanic deception and sinful decision of His creation in Eden, but predetermined from the foundation of the world (Rev 13:8) that Jesus would be slain.

The cross was not an afterthought but a forethought. As God spoke creation into existence on the third day, He landscaped the garden with grasses and trees (Gen 1:11-13). He already knew one day wicked men would form a cross from one of those trees on which His Son would hang. When God cursed the ground with thorns (Gen 3:17-18) He was divinely aware they would be used to adorn the head of Jesus.

There is a divine mystery of this design to rescue fallen man. How can we fathom God’s plan of providing a sacrifice before the sin was ever perpetrated? The fullest answer can only be found in the mind of God, yet the Scriptures reveal all things are done for His glory (Rom 11:36). It is precisely this decision of the Creator to die for His creation that puts on display His infinite wisdom and indescribable grace.<sup>11</sup> Holy God would have been entirely just in sending judgment upon condemned creation, instead He sent His only begotten Son to reveal the Father’s heart and His love for His world (John 3:16).

Amazing love! How can it be,  
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> [www.gotquestions.org/God-omniscient.html](http://www.gotquestions.org/God-omniscient.html), Accessed August 13, 2022.

<sup>10</sup> Henry C. Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, Revised by Vernon D. Doerksen, (Eerdmans Publishing Company: Grand Rapids, 1979), page 81.

<sup>11</sup> God does not and cannot die being eternally existent. As God came to earth in the human form of Jesus (Phil 2:5-8), it is the death of His humanity that is defined as tasting death for every man (Heb 2:9). Jesus never ceased being God from the cradle to the cross.

<sup>12</sup> Charles Wesley hymn published in 1738 entitled *And Can it Be?* [www.hymnary.org](http://www.hymnary.org). Accessed August 13, 2022.



*Today, we acknowledge our sinfulness and our great need for a Savior. We confess that we have been in rebellion to your will and your Word. Our sins are many, yet we look to you for forgiveness and deliverance. Praise God, your grace is greater than all our sin. Amen.*

## Day Nine

Jesus of Nazareth

*“Fellow Israelites, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. This man was handed over to you by God’s deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. **Acts 2:22-23** (NIV)*

Preached by the Apostles

A final consideration of the cross from the perspective of eyewitnesses, who were either at the cross that day or had been given direct insight (1 Cor 15:8), crystallizes the eternal significance of the six-hour ordeal. The apostles were faithful messengers of the gospel heralding the hope of the cross and empty tomb. Every New Testament writer emphasized the crucifixion as the critical component of our salvation.

Peter preached the crucifixion.

*For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. **1 Pet 1:18-19** (NIV)*

Paul preached the crucifixion.

*For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. **Col 1:19-20** (NIV)*

John preached the crucifixion.

*Then I looked again, and I heard the voices of thousands and millions of angels around the throne and of the living beings and the elders. And they sang in a mighty chorus: “Worthy is the Lamb who was slaughtered— to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing.” **Rev 5:11-12** (NLT)*

The anonymous writer of Hebrews draws from the sacrificial imagery of the Old Testament and writes there is no remission of sin apart from shedding of blood (Heb 9:22). He records how much better is the blood of the Savior than that of sheep and goats (Heb 10:4-6).

When the resurrected Jesus walked with the blinded and bewildered disciples who were returning to Emmaus, He referred to all that the prophets had spoken concerning His death and His glory (Luke 24:25-26). As He opened the Scriptures, He opened their eyes.

Paul pens in his epistle to the believers at Corinth that Jesus died according to the Scriptures (1 Cor 15:3). Without question, the event of Calvary is the theme of the Bible and the very heart beat of God. Here we are, camped out at the cross, looking into the face of the carpenter from Nazareth whose chief crime was healing the sick, casting out devils, raising the dead, and telling the truth. If this is all we see then we would rightfully shake our heads in disbelief and wonder to ourselves, "What a waste!" However, it is not a martyr who is dying on the cross but the very Son of God who is fulfilling the prophecy of Genesis 3:15. He is defeating death and the Devil at their own game by providing atonement for the sin of mankind and opening the gates of glory. What is happening in those six hours is not a tragedy but a triumph!

It is this incredible and incredulous doctrine that captured the soul of William Cowper. William was born in 1731 of an English clergyman and educated at Westminster in the field of law. Throughout his life he battled panic attacks and great depression, but by God's grace came to faith at the age of 33 while a patient in an asylum. He was later befriended and mentored by John Newton, the converted slave ship owner who wrote the hymn *Amazing Grace*. While still dealing with periodic seasons of depression and doubt, Cowper wrote the lyrics to one of the most well-known and loved hymns in 1771.<sup>13</sup>

There is a fountain filled with blood  
drawn from Immanuel's veins  
And sinners plunged beneath that flood  
Lose all their guilty stains.

The dying thief rejoiced to see  
That fountain in his day;  
And there may I, though vile as he  
Wash all my sins away.

Dear dying Lamb, Thy precious blood  
Shall never lose its power,  
Till all the ransomed ones of God  
Be saved to sin no more.

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<sup>13</sup> John Piper, *Insanity and Spiritual Songs in the Soul of a Saint: Reflections on the Life of William Cowper*, Message preached at the Bethlehem Conference for Pastors, [www.desiringgod.org/messages/insanity-and-spiritual-songs-in-the-soul-of-a-saint](http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/insanity-and-spiritual-songs-in-the-soul-of-a-saint). January 29, 1992.

E'er since by faith I saw the stream,  
Thy flowing wounds supply,  
Redeeming love has been my theme,  
And shall be till I die.

When this poor lisping, stammering tongue  
Lies silent in the grave,  
Then in a nobler, sweeter song,  
I'll sing Thy power to save.

Can I invite you to step up a little closer the cross? Can I persuade you to ponder more deeply what you already know? As you hear the sarcasm of sinners and study the scars of the Savior there will be a fresh reminder of redemption's price and we will love Him more because He first loved us.

*Lord Jesus, it is true that your grace is amazing. We have tasted and found that the Lord is good and he is good to all who call upon him in repentance and faith. Our hearts swell with gratitude and we cannot help but to join our voices with all creation to the glory of our Creator and King. Amen.*

## Day Ten

### Guilty As Charged

*And when they had come to the place called Calvary, there they crucified Him, and the criminals, one on the right hand and the other on the left. **Luke 23:33** (NKJV)*

In 1971 Richard Phillips was 26 years old when he was arrested, convicted, and imprisoned for the fatal shooting of Gregory Harris. Forty-five years later evidence surfaced that exonerated Phillips making his incarceration the longest wrongful prison sentence in United States history.<sup>14</sup> There are 2 million people in our nation's prisons and jails. It is estimated from 2% to 10% of inmates are innocent of the crime of which they have been accused.<sup>15</sup>

The Roman Governor, Pontius Pilate, was forced to make a ruling on charges brought against Jesus by the Jewish leaders. To his credit Pilate did attempt to ascertain the exact nature of His crime and to see if it merited capital punishment. He cross-examined Jesus twice (John 19:1-22) and came to the conclusion, "I find no fault in him." As Pilate sat at the judgment seat pondering his decision, he received word from his wife to recuse himself from passing sentence on a righteous man as confirmed to her through a divine dream (Matt 27:19). The Governor knew jealousy motivated the Jews who demanded the death of Jesus (Matt 27:18) and subsequently sought to release this Just Man.

Scribal lawyers justified their claims before Pilate by accusing Jesus of blasphemy and sedition. The first charge violated Jewish law (Lev 24:16) while the second accusation was a threat to Roman rule, both deserved the penalty of death. Pilate knew he was in a no-win situation. Finally, fear of Caesar (John 19:12), fear of the people (Mark 15:15-17), and fear of Jesus (John 19:7-8) caused Pilate to unjustly order Jesus to be crucified.

In addition to being slanderously called a blasphemer and a seditionist, the religious crowd labelled Jesus a law breaker, a glutton, a winebibber<sup>16</sup>, insane (John 10:20) and

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<sup>14</sup> <https://expressdigest.com/wrongly-convicted-richard-phillips-spent-45-years-in-prison/>, Accessed August 14, 2022. Thomas Lake, "An innocent man spent 46 years in prison. And made a plan to kill the man who framed him," [www.cnn.com/interactive/2020/04/us/longest-wrongful-prison-sentence/](http://www.cnn.com/interactive/2020/04/us/longest-wrongful-prison-sentence/), 2016 Cable News Network.

<sup>15</sup> Andriana Moskovska, "33 Startling Wrongful Convictions Statistics [2021 Update]," <https://thehighcourt.co/wrongful-convictions-statistics/#:~:text=1.,in%20US%20prisons%20are%20innocent.&text=According%20to%20the%202019%20annual,between%20%25%20and%2010%25>, October 13, 2021.

<sup>16</sup> W. E. Vines, Merrill F. Unger, and William White, *An Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*, (Thomas Nelson: Nashville, 1984), page 1232. A winebibber (Luke 7:34) is someone who is given to drinking wine.

possessed by the demon Beelzebub (Mark 3:22). Of all the intended insults, there was one name given to Jesus that was absolutely true. The Pharisees sarcastically accused Jesus of being a friend of sinners (Matt 11:19). He frequented the home of tax collectors (Matt 9:10; Luke 19:1-10), He allowed a known prostitute to wash His feet with her tears and dry them with her hair (Luke 7:36-50), and surrounded Himself with ignorant fishermen and the common dregs of society. Only Judas would have been barely acceptable at the local country club in Jerusalem. It is at the cross, however, where the title *friend of sinners* is most obvious.

*The just for the unjust. This phrase, Father, moves us to bow before your throne to acknowledge the innocence of Jesus, your spotless lamb, and to confess our guilt as wretched sinners. Thank you, Jesus, for being our sacrifice and our substitute. Praise your name, for the divine rescue. Amen.*

## Day Eleven

### Away in a Manger

*But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. **Romans 5:8** (NKJV)*

#### Jesus is Crucified with Sinners

Isaiah wrote that Messiah would be numbered with the transgressors (Isa 53:12). It is at the cross where Jesus is the fulfillment of that prophecy identifying as a condemned criminal being crucified between with two thieves. He is considered an enemy of the Empire and counted among those who are deserving of death. Although Jesus became one of us (John 1:14), He remained untouched and untainted by sin (Heb 4:15). He was the friend of sinners who never sinned. As God, He could never die, but as a man, He would weep, hunger, sleep, and bleed.

The glory of God would be condensed into the tiny body of a baby born in Bethlehem. While His conception was miraculous, His birth was ordinary. Mary struggled with labor pains (Gen 3:16) as Joseph nervously tried to comfort his betrothed as they both anticipated the birth of the promise. Evening blanketed the countryside and within a dirty manger, Jesus was born. There is no glowing halo encircling His head as His mother wraps Him in strips of cloth and lays Him in a feeding trough.

The sanctified imagination of the song writer pens as the cattle are lowing the little Lord Jesus no crying He makes.<sup>17</sup> Like all babies, certainly there would have been times in His helplessness where He would demand attention and nourishment. His fragile frame would reach out for the protection of His father and the comfort of His mother. The divine Creator identified with His creation and became a human baby.

The Bible describes the childhood of Jesus in quiet and uneventful terms. He is slowly growing as a tender plant and a root out of dry ground (Isa 53:2). He has no unique physical features that differentiate Him from the rest of the population. His average build and dark eyes compliment His olive toned skin and collectively identified Jesus as a boy of Jewish descent. There is a single episode recorded in the Scriptures concerning the adolescent days of Jesus. Joseph leads his family on the 85-mile pilgrimage from Nazareth to Jerusalem to commemorate

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<sup>17</sup> Bereket Kelile, *The Story Behind Away in the Manger*, "<https://bereketkelile.medium.com/the-story-behind-away-in-a-manger-dd459c0f05d3>", November 30, 2015. The lyrics to *Away in a Manger* are spuriously attributed to Martin Luther.

the annual Passover (Luke 2:41-50). They are joined on their journey by dozens of families and friends, as well as hundreds of other Jews on their way to the national celebration.

Mary and Joseph lose track of the 12-year-old Jesus, and after a three-day search, they find Him dialoging with the elders at the Temple. We can only imagine what Jesus said that caused the teachers of Israel to be astonished and amazed, but even more remarkable is what Luke writes at the close of chapter two in his gospel:

*And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them: but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man. **Luke 2:51-52** (KJV)*

Can we fathom that the perfect Sovereign God of the universe willingly submitted Himself to the rule and authority of His flawed earthly parents? Jesus is desiring to be about His Father's business, but knows that He must physically grow in stature and mentally mature in wisdom in His identification with mankind. Jesus is Immanuel (Isa 7:14; Matt 1:23). He is God with us and God in the flesh (John 1:1, 14), yet He was born like all babies are born and grew from infancy to adulthood through the normal and natural course of human development.

When Jesus was 30 years old, He was baptized in the Jordan River by His cousin John. His baptism was not one of repentance since He had no sin to confess, but is described as the fulfillment of all righteousness (Matt 3:15). Jesus identified with sinners by allowing John the Baptist to baptize Him in the Jordan. He emerged from the river to hear the approving voice of the Father and see the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove settle on his shoulder.

Over the next three years Jesus would engage in public ministry as a man fully yielded to the will of God and empowered by the Spirit of God. As a testimony to His humanity Jesus would experience hunger, thirst, weariness, ridicule, slander, and rejection. The devil would challenge Him in the wilderness after forty days of fasting (Matt 4:1-11). He would be tested in all points as we are, yet without sin (Heb 4:15) so that He might prove to be a qualified High Priest who sympathizes with our weaknesses and is able to deliver us in our time of trouble. Honest Pharisees recognized the divine origin of the works of Jesus (John 3:1-2), but sinful pride and spiritual blindness kept the majority from believing that this Man was the Christ. Despite His words of wisdom, acts of mercy, and demonstration of power, the Sanhedrin convinced themselves they were condemning a clever and dangerous charlatan; a mere man who pretended to be God. Unlike Pilate who could never completely wash the blood stains from his hands, the white-washed hypocrites (Matt 23:27) smiled with a smug satisfaction as Jesus was nailed to the cross besides two other convicted criminals. In His birth, His childhood, His life, and now in His death, Jesus is identified and numbered with the transgressors.



*Oh God, it is incomprehensible how your glory was condensed into the frame of a helpless baby. Yet, the sacred text declares that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. Thank you for becoming one of us. Thank you for dwelling among us. Thank you for dying for us. Thank you for making your home in us. Thank you for living through us. Thank you for the promise that one day you are coming for us. Amen.*

## Day Twelve

### The Preaching of the Cross

*Christ suffered for our sins once for all time. He never sinned, but he died for sinners to bring you safely home to God. He suffered physical death, but he was raised to life in the Spirit. **1 Peter 3:18** (NLT)*

#### Jesus is Crucified for Sinners

Jesus did more than become one of us, He also became sin for us (2 Cor 5:21). This profound and mysterious statement does not mean Jesus participated in sinful behavior but He became our substitute incurring God's wrath against sin. He drank deeply, willingly, obediently, and completely from the cup of Gethsemane that initiated His separation from the Father (Ps 22:1).

Paul wrote Christ died for our sins (1 Cor 15:3). Peter echoed the same truth in his epistle declaring that Jesus suffered for our sins; the Just for the unjust (1 Pet 3:18). None of the gospels give the gory particulars of the crucifixion. They do not delve into detailed description but simply state His death as a matter of historical record. Perhaps the omission of the details of his physical suffering is partly due to the familiarity of this form of execution? It would not be necessary to explain what crucifixion was like to a first century audience that witnessed these gruesome deaths on a frequent basis. Could it be that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John exercised literary restraint recognizing the sensitivity of the subject matter?

While the physical suffering of crucifixion was horrific, it is not the bodily pain that the evangelists were trying to over emphasize. The day Jesus died, thousands of people witnessed His death, but only a few experienced the transforming power of the cross. We stare at the cross as one who drives by a wreckage on the interstate. As we pass the scene of the car accident, we slow down and wince with genuine sympathy for those whose lives have been forever impacted by the misfortune, but soon resume our journey with excessive speed. We have been emotionally touched but not eternally changed.

This is why it is important to look beyond the travesty of injustice and the tragedy of crucifixion from only the viewpoint of a spectator. Something of incalculable significance is transpiring before our very eyes and if we only see His physical suffering, we will miss the day of

our visitation (Luke 19:40-44).<sup>18</sup> Certainly, Jesus endured the cross and despised its shame (Heb 12:2), but He knew that He was not only dying with sinners, but dying for them. Jesus is not at the mercy of men, but fulfilling the will of the Father. Sin's price is being paid (Rom 6:23), divine wrath is being satisfied (1 John 2:1-2), Satan is being exposed (Col 2:15), the wall of distinction that divides Jew from Gentile is being destroyed (Eph 2:14), and heaven's gates are being opened for those who believe (Rom 10:13).

During the trial of Jesus, Peter kept his distance (Matt 26:58). His devotion to the Master brought him close enough to witness the unfolding events of the morning while his fear of the crowd forced him into the shadows of obscurity. If the cross is to have its intended impact on our lives, then we must draw near. We must be close enough to see the soldiers assembled beneath the cross, read the inscription above the cross, and hear the Savior from the cross. We will encounter the heart of God if we ask him to open the eyes of our understanding (Eph 1:18) and to give us ears to hear what the Spirit is saying (Rev 2:29).

*Lord, we see your cross and we try to sympathize with your suffering. Yet we recognize there is so much more happening on that hill than the death of an innocent man. Suffering in our stead is God himself. It is not the death of God, for you can never die, but the mysterious death of God in the flesh. You tasted death for that we would be able to drink from the well of salvation that never runs dry. Hallelujah, what a Savior! Amen.*

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<sup>18</sup> Jesus uses this language of missing the day of visitation as He wept over Jerusalem because they did not recognize the arrival of their Messiah. They had eyes but could not see (Mark 8:18) that God had come to them, and they received Him not (John 1:11).

## **The First Three Hours**

## Day Thirteen

### They Divided His Clothes

*When they had crucified him, they divided up his clothes by casting lots. And sitting down, they kept watch over him there. **Matthew 27:35-36** (NIV)*

#### See the Soldiers Beneath the Cross

A centurion was a mid-range ranking officer within the Roman army commanding a century of soldiers.<sup>19</sup> The responsibility of carrying out Pilates's order of execution was given to an unnamed Roman Centurion and to the soldiers under his charge. It is not hard to imagine the need for the entire platoon to escort three condemned criminals from the praetorium, through the narrow and crowded streets of Jerusalem, to the site of Golgotha. The sheer size of the number of soldiers was a show of force designed to discourage any attempt to disrupt their task.

A smaller detail would be given the assignment of the actual crucifixion. They would strip each man naked to maximize humiliation. The Renaissance masters from the 14<sup>th</sup> century and beyond were careful to maintain the modesty of Jesus with the inclusion of appropriate covering in their works of art. Roman soldiers were not so kind. They stretched the arms of each victim until nails could be driven into their hands fastening them to the crossbeam that they had been carrying.<sup>20</sup> They would repeat the process with the legs and then lift their crosses before the gawking crowd as a fearful reminder of Roman rule.

Their final task was to maintain the civility of the crowd and remain at their post while waiting for death to arrive. To these soldiers, Jesus was just another Jew and this was just another crucifixion. One of the perks associated with crucifixion was the division of the victims' personal possessions among the guards. The head covering, sash, sandals, and outer cloak were quickly claimed. However, the seamless hand-woven inner garment carried greater value

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<sup>19</sup> [www.gotquestions.org/Roman-Centurion.html](http://www.gotquestions.org/Roman-Centurion.html); <https://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/cohort/>, Accessed July 20, 2022. Century is derived from the Latin *centuria* meaning one hundred. However, the number is more of an approximation since the number of troops under the Roman Centurion in the first century would be around 80-90 soldiers. A Roman legion numbered 5,000 men. A cohort is 600 soldiers. Within the cohort would be at least six centurions. Cornelius was a centurion of the Italian cohort (Acts 10:1).

<sup>20</sup> Bible Ask Editors, "Was Jesus attached to the cross by nails or rope?" <https://bibleask.org/was-jesus-attached-to-the-cross-by-nails-or-ropes/>, May 31, 2016. There is an argument that victims were not nailed but tied to their crosses to support their weight during the ordeal. While this may be the case among the thousands who were crucified, Jesus was certainly nailed as attested by David (Ps 22:16) and Jesus (John 20:25-27). There is nothing in the biblical account that would dismiss the possibility that both nails and rope would be used in the crucifixion procedure other than an argument from silence.

and there was obvious dissention as to who would be the new owner. The soldiers decided they would gamble for the garment by the casting of lots (Luke 23:34). The specific character or shape of the objects used in the game are not clear from the biblical account. Some scholars believe that smooth pebbles or colored sticks were used as a type of dice in determining an impartial decision.<sup>21</sup>

It would appear the materially minded sentinels were merely taking advantage of the miserable misfortune of those on the crosses. In reality, however, a one-thousand-year-old prophecy was being fulfilled. David did not fully understand the prophetic extent of what he wrote in the Psalms, but the primary Author who prompted him to write the passage was fully aware (2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:20-21). The Holy Spirit omnisciently knew Roman guards would gamble for the clothes of Jesus.

*They divide my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment. **Psalm 22:18** (NIV)*

The soldiers were obviously more interested in clothes than in Christ. They were preoccupied with stuff while the shadow of the cross was cast across their game of chance. Is this not a microcosm of men in our day? The message of the cross means little to them as they hurry to accumulate more and more possessions without giving thought to eternity (Luke 12:16-21), never realizing that life does not consist in the abundance of things. It is tempting to criticize the cold and calloused objectivity of the Roman guards but when we ignore the cross in favor for the goods of this world, we too, are guilty of gambling with our souls.

*Father, there are times where we have been too critical of those who were callous towards the death of your Son, yet we too, have walked past the cross unmoved. Preoccupied with getting more stuff, we ignore the Savior and his suffering. Grant that we will have a greater love for you, more than our love for the things of this world. Amen.*

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<sup>21</sup> Sandra Sweeny Silver, <https://earlychurchhistory.org/beliefs-2/casting-lots-in-the-bible/>, Accessed June, 4, 2022.

## Day Fourteen

### King of the Jews

*And they put up over His head the accusation written against Him: THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS. **Matthew 27:37** (NKJV)*

#### Read the Sign Above the Cross

It was often the custom of Rome to have written on a small sign the name of the individual and their crime to be hung around their neck or posted above their head. The Romans utilized a variety of methods as they crucified their captors as attested by the first century philosopher Seneca the Younger in his Moral Essays:

*“I see before me crosses not all alike, but differently made by different peoples: some hang a man head downwards, some force a stick upwards through his groin, some stretch out his arms on a forked gibbet” (Seneca the Younger, “To Marcia on Consolation”, in Moral Essays, 6.20).<sup>22</sup>*

Warner Wallace acknowledges that the Greek word *cross* (*stauros*) means an upright pole or stake but argues that the New Testament usage is broadened and not intended to be specific about its shape.<sup>23</sup> Both Luke and Matthew record the sign was placed above the head of Jesus (Luke 23:38; Matt 27:37) eliminating the possibility of Jesus being crucified on a cross shaped in the form of an “X” or a “T”. The shape of the cross, as Wallace states, *is not critical to our theology*, but it does bring into focus with more clarity the scene before us.

Three crosses on a hill silhouetted against the evening sky has long been imprinted on our imagination due largely to the assumed location of Gordon’s Calvary and the majestic hymns of the faith. This may very well be the case but the Gospels say nothing of a hill far away. This at least opens the possibility that the crucifixion may have been along a roadside where onlookers could read the sign and see the suffering of this human object lesson. The cross and its sign would have been placed in a location highly traveled so passersby could read what was written and learn the lesson, “This is what happens to those who rebel against Rome.”

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<sup>22</sup>J. Warner Wallace, “What was the shape of Jesus’ Cross?” <https://coldcasechristianity.com/writings/what-was-the-shape-of-jesus-cross/>, January 8, 2018.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. Wallace engages in a thoughtful discussion about four possible shapes formed for their intended victims. He identifies a single pole, a “T” shaped cross, a cross fashioned in the form of an “X”, or the traditional *Crux Immissa* which is the most common depiction.

Luke abbreviates the notice on the placard, "This is the King of the Jews," while John, who is an eyewitness, provides the complete message, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews (John 19:19-20)." There is so much meaning in such a simple statement. It is not Barabbas, Judas, or one who resembled the Prophet<sup>24</sup>, but Jesus who is being executed. The Romans knew He was Jesus. The Jewish Council knew He was Jesus. The disciple John and the weeping women knew He was Jesus. His own mother knew He was her eldest son.

The insertion of Nazareth was more than a mere marker of identification. The small town located off the beaten path in the region of Galilee had the reputation of being populated by nobodies. Nathanael recoiled at the invitation of his brother Philip to see Jesus of Nazareth and sarcastically remarked, "Can anything good come from Nazareth (John 1:46)?" Philip's response, "Come and see," is a reminder that each individual needs to personally investigate the Messianic claims of Christ. Adrian Rodgers smartly comments, "Some people cannot find God for the same reason a thief cannot find a policeman." The words on the sign were intended to deflate the arrogant and pompous pride of the Jewish leaders who considered themselves spiritually superior to their Gentile counterpart. The irony that the great Jewish king hailed from the backwoods village of Nazareth was not lost on those who passed by.

The Pharisees recognized the slander of the sign and appealed to Pilate to change the wording to read, "He said I am the king of the Jews (John 19:21)." Earlier that day, Pilate presented Jesus to the mob as their king, they screamed in open defiance, "We have no king but Caesar (John 19:15)." Their unmasked hatred towards Jesus was undeniable as they prodded and pushed Pilate into a proverbial corner forcing him to pass an unwarranted sentence. They continued their demands before the Governor insisting the verbiage on the sign be reworded. Tired of being pushed, Pilate pushed back and barked, "I have written what I have written (John 19:22)," causing the Pharisees to be unhappily content with its message.

Thirty-three years earlier wise men from the east traveled 700 miles from the region of Persia to Jerusalem to worship Israel's new born king (Matt 2:2). Fearing the threat to his throne, King Herod verified the prophecy that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). He sent the astrologers to the city of David feigning to join them in honoring the king once they found him. With so little gospel light, these Gentiles continued searching until they found the child. Conversely, those who should have known him best, would not walk the short five miles from Jerusalem to Bethlehem. They did not claim Jesus as their king at His birth and they adamantly would not claim Him as their king at His death.

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<sup>24</sup> Quran 4:156-159; Islam recognizes Jesus as born of a virgin and considers him to be one of God's prophets but summarily dismiss the theology that he was crucified.



John noted the phrase on the placard was written in the cosmopolitan language of the culture (John 19:20). It was written in Hebrew, the language of the Jews, in Latin, the language of Rome, and in Greek, the language of the Hellenized world. Pilate wanted everyone to understand the power of the Empire. What he didn't realize was that he was publishing the truthful identity of the Nazarene for all to read. Jesus was and is the King of the Jews. Warren Wiersbe called this sign "the first gospel tract" pointing to Jesus as the hope of Israel and the hope of the world.<sup>25</sup>

*You are the King and you are our King! May the reality of your majesty obviously adorn our lives so that all who pass by us will know that you are the Sovereign and Savior of our souls. Amen.*

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<sup>25</sup> Warren Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, Vol. 1, (Victor Books, 1989), page 382.

## Day Fifteen

### Father, Forgive Them

*Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. **Luke 24:34** (KJV)*

Hear the Savior from the Cross

It would have taken tremendous effort to draw a breath while on the cross, let alone speak or carry on a conversation. The crucified would gasp for air as they pushed upward against the nails in their feet only to experience the sharp pain in their nail-driven hands as they exhaled. Only death could provide sweet relief from this constant agony. If words were spoken then they would have been words of great importance. Shakespeare captured this verbal challenge in the words spoken by the John of Gaunt to the Duke of York:

“O, but they say the tongues of dying men  
Enforce attention like deep harmony:  
Where words are scarce, they are seldom spent in vain,  
For they breathe truth that breathe their words in pain.”<sup>26</sup>

It is not surprising the first sentence spoken by the Friend of Sinners from the cross is, “Father, forgive them (Luke 23:34).” The word *said* is in the imperfect tense indicating that Jesus repeated the phrase more than once. We do not know how many times Jesus said, “Father, forgive,” but we do know His desire to extend forgiveness was a major theme during His three-year ministry (Matt 18:21-22; Luke 5:20, 6:37; John 8:3-11).

As Jesus speaks, His words are no louder than a whisper. He is not talking to men but addressing the Father. This is a holy moment as we eaves drop on a private and intimate conversation between a Son and His Father. We discover two eternal truths concerning the heart of Jesus towards sinners in this prayer. First, this is a prayer of compassion. The Roman philosopher, Cicero, is cited to say that there were times where soldiers would cut off the tongue of the victims so as not to hear their vulgar insults.<sup>27</sup> Jesus had been led like a lamb to the slaughter without opening his mouth (Isa 53:7). He struggles to gain enough air in His lungs

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<sup>26</sup> Folger Shakespeare Library, <https://shakespeare.folger.edu/shakespeares-works/richard-ii/act-2-scene-1/>, The Life and Death of Richard II, Act 2, Scene 1. Accessed August 11, 2022.

<sup>27</sup> Laura Geggel, “Jesus wasn’t the only man to be crucified. Here’s the history behind this brutal practice,” [www.livescience.com/65283-crucifixion-history.html](http://www.livescience.com/65283-crucifixion-history.html) April 19, 2019. Soldiers cutting off body parts during the crucifixion, such as the tongue, was a sadistic practice designed to intensify pain of the victims. The origin of the Cicero statement has not been verified.

so He may bless His enemies (Matt 5:44). Jesus does not hate the Romans for their cruelty nor does He despise the Jews for their hostility. He does not call fire down in the spirit of Elijah (Luke 9:54) or pray an imprecatory psalm (Ps 5, 17, 35, 79, 137) desiring to see the destruction of his adversaries.<sup>28</sup> With incredible and indescribable compassion, Jesus asks the Father to forgive their ignorance.

Secondly, this is a prayer of intercession. The act of interceding is the pleading on behalf of another person. It means to serve as mediator and entreat the favor of another. As Jesus hung on the cross, He was suspended between heaven and earth, and as the only person who was completely God and completely man, He assumed His role as High Priest making intercession for the transgressors (Isa 53:12). Jesus petitions the Father to forgive when no one is asking to be forgiven. Biblical forgiveness means to release the offender from their debt, to dismiss the sin and not count it against them. Did this mean the ignorant sinners at the cross no longer bore the responsibility of what happened there? A. W. Pink brings theological clarity to this question.

“Sin is always sin in the sight of God—whether we are conscious of it or not. Sins of ignorance need atonement just as truly as do conscious sins. God is holy, and He will not lower His standard of righteousness to the level of our ignorance. Ignorance is not innocence. As a matter of fact, ignorance is more culpable now than it was in the days of Moses. We have no excuse for our ignorance. God has clearly and fully revealed His will. The Bible is in our hands, and we cannot plead ignorance of its contents except to condemn our laziness. God has spoken, and by His Word we shall be judged.”<sup>29</sup>

C. S. Lewis reminds us, “But forgiveness needs to be accepted as well as offered if it is to be complete; and a man who admits no guilt can accept no forgiveness.”<sup>30</sup> Peter acknowledged that the crime of Calvary was committed in ignorance and called his audience to repentance so their sins would be forgiven (Acts 3:17-19). He proclaimed these events were the fulfillment of all that the prophets had foretold about the Messiah.

Jesus was not only pleading on behalf of those gathered around His cross, but is interceding for us as well. It is not His will that any should perish (2 Pet 3:9). He demonstrated His love towards us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Rom 5:8). Our sin is great, but His grace is greater (Rom 5:20).

The story is told of a little boy who became lost on the streets of London. Although he found a policeman, he could not remember the address of his home. While sitting in the police station he overheard an officer mention the large cross prominently placed on the northside of

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<sup>28</sup> Imprecatory psalms seem hard and harsh but need to be viewed as the expression of the psalmist to see justice prevail and the name of God vindicated.

<sup>29</sup> Arthur Pink, *The Seven Sayings of the Savior on the Cross*, (Baker Books: Ada, Michigan, 2005.)

<sup>30</sup> Zach Kincaid, <https://www.cslewis.com/heaven-and-hell/> February 7, 2020.

the city. The little boy's eyes widened as he said, "Sir, if you can get me to the cross, I can make it home from there!"<sup>31</sup> The cross was the place where man was at his worst but God was at his best. Truly the heart of the Savior is to seek and save the lost.

*Hallelujah, there is no more condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. Your forgiveness of our sin is not predicated on our sorrow but on your suffering. Redemptions price required a perfect sacrifice. Thank you, Lord Jesus, for securing our salvation and granting unto us the gift of eternal life. Amen.*

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<sup>31</sup> This story was shared in a sermon by Rev. Richard Staples whose life-long ministry centered on bringing people to the foot of the cross.

## Day Sixteen

The Sinful Savior

*And those who passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads and saying, "Aha! You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save Yourself, and come down from the cross!" Likewise, the chief priests also, mocking among themselves with the scribes, said, "He saved others; Himself He cannot save. Let the Christ, the King of Israel, descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe." Even those who were crucified with Him reviled Him.*

**Mark 15:29-32** (NKJV)

The Friday before Easter has long been observed within the Christian tradition as the day Jesus suffered on the cross. Some churches call that day Great Friday or Holy Friday.<sup>32</sup> While the origin of the term is debated, it is best known as Good Friday. It is a sanctified and celebrated day among believers so they may reflect, remember, and rejoice in the hope of their salvation. Perhaps no one has taken the significance of that day more seriously than Ruben Enaje. In 1985, the Filipino carpenter reenacted the actual crucifixion of Christ by voluntarily and literally being nailed to a cross. It would be an expression of his faith and devotion that he would repeat annually for the next 33 years.<sup>33</sup>

There are three major differences between the crucifixions of Ruben and Jesus. Ruben endured his cross for five minutes. Jesus hung on his cross for six hours. Ruben's experience was non-fatal. Jesus actually died. The suffering of Ruben changed no one. The sacrifice of Jesus changed the world. Why would anyone allow themselves to be crucified? The answer can only be attributed to either irrational thinking or insanity, unless there is a divine reason that lays beyond human understanding.

God created humankind with the ability to reason (Isa 1:18) but both sin and Satan muddles the thought processes and limits human logic. Paul describes this finite thinking as the natural man who relies on human experiences and intellectual prowess in his effort to determine what is right or true. The natural man has a mind that looks at life through the lens of personal observation and his pride convinces him that he has all the information necessary to form an opinion. If life only consisted of the natural order within the physical universe, then what he sees with his eyes and processes with his mind would provide sufficient data as he

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<sup>32</sup> Dhruti Bhagat, "The Origin and Practice of Holidays: Good Friday," [www.bpl.org/blogs/post/the-origins-and-practices-of-holidays-good-friday/](http://www.bpl.org/blogs/post/the-origins-and-practices-of-holidays-good-friday/), April 18, 2019. Heather Riggleman, "Why is it Called Good Friday," [www.crosswalk.com/special-coverage/easter/why-is-it-called-good-friday.html](http://www.crosswalk.com/special-coverage/easter/why-is-it-called-good-friday.html), March 30, 2021.

<sup>33</sup> Amtul Razzaq Carmical, "Surviving Crucifixion: An Interview with Ruben Enaje," [www.reviewofreligions.org/29953/surviving-crucifixion-an-interview-with-ruben-enaje/](http://www.reviewofreligions.org/29953/surviving-crucifixion-an-interview-with-ruben-enaje/), April 2, 2021.

determines the meaning of his existence. This is what makes understanding the cross so difficult for the natural man. The cross only makes sense as God reveals (1 Cor 2:14) the divine motive that prompted Him to give His only begotten Son.

When the Jews saw a person in misery, the natural assumption was that personal sin warranted God's judgment. We tend to default to that same mindset when we respond to our own tragedy by wondering, "What did I do to deserve this!" For seven days the friends of Job sat in silence as they shared in his grief, but they soon became miserable comforters (Job 16:2) as they attributed his suffering to secret sin. The first two chapters of the book of Job reveal just the opposite was true. We are permitted to overhear the heavenly conversation between God and the Adversary and we discover Job is not suffering because of his sinfulness, but because of his righteousness (Job 1:8).

This type of thinking is a shock to our intellectual system, especially as we look at the cross. The Torah plainly says anyone who hangs on a tree is cursed of God. If Jesus were truly innocent, then God would have intervened keeping him from being condemned and crucified.

*If someone guilty of a capital offense is put to death and their body is exposed on a pole, you must not leave the body hanging on the pole overnight. Be sure to bury it that same day, because anyone who is hung on a pole is under God's curse. You must not desecrate the land the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance. **Deut 21:22-23** (NLT)*

Other Old Testament texts confirm that death is the just punishment for everyone who sins against God and his law.

*But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die. **Gen 2:17** (KJV)*

*The LORD preserves all who love Him, but all the wicked He will destroy. **Psalm 145:20** (NKJV)*

*For everyone belongs to me, the parent as well as the child—both alike belong to me. The one who sins is the one who will die. **Ezek 18:4** (NIV)*

The crowd with their crass comments were convinced Jesus must be a sinner because He is dying a sinner's death. It is not human reasoning but divine revelation that provides an explanation to the suffering of Jesus on the cross. His death is not the result of His sin but the demonstration of God's love for sinners as the Savior takes our place and our punishment.

*But Christ has rescued us from the curse pronounced by the law. When he was hung on the cross, he took upon himself the curse for our wrongdoing. For it is written in the Scriptures, "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree." Gal 3:13 (NLT)*

It is fashionable to wear a cross around our neck as jewelry, or tattoo our arm with the symbol of His suffering, or display the image of three crosses on a T-shirt or the bumper of our car. Each of these could provide a positive platform whereby we share our faith and our hope. But if while we show our faith publicly, we live in such a way that contradicts the message of the cross, then we prove that we, like those individuals who congregated at Calvary, do not understand the cross.

The death of Jesus on the cross was the means God had ordained whereby He would save sinners from their sin. If there is a mystery to this plan, it is found in the heart of God as we wonder why He would love rebels and seek to redeem us?

George Bernard understood people would react differently as they considered the cross. In 1913 he wrote the lyrics to one of the churches most beloved hymns.

O that old rugged cross, so despised by the world,  
Has a wonderous attraction for me;  
For the dear Lamb of God left his glory above  
To bear it to dark Calvary.

So I'll cherish the old rugged cross,  
Till my trophies at last I lay down;  
I will cling to the old rugged cross,  
And exchange it some day for a crown.<sup>34</sup>

Apart from His mother, a disciple, and a handful of followers, the majority of spectators at the cross that day did not see a Savior but a sinner. They hurled accusations and slurs as additional salt in His wounds. They hoped their ugly words would serve as sharp daggers revealing their hateful heart and obvious disdain. What did they say? Why did they say it? More importantly, would Jesus respond with the same vitriol or would His words exhibit the very heart of God?

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<sup>34</sup> "The Old Rugged Cross," <https://hymnary.org/>, "The joy that is found in contemplating the cross is not found in the shame, but in the promise that someday the saints will exchange the labor of sanctification for the crown of life (James 1:12; Rev 2:10)." Accessed September 1, 2022.

*Help me today, Lord, to use my words to bless your name and to bless those who are around me. If our words contain the power to build up or tear down, how much more is your perfect Word able to give life to those who hear and receive it. Cleanse our hearts that our words would reflect and reveal the glory of our God. Amen.*

Mocking the Messiah



## Day Seventeen

*Well then, if you are the Son of God, save yourself  
and come down from the cross!" **Matthew 27:40** (NLT)*

### The Condemnation of the Crowd

"Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me," so goes the ditty most of us heard as children. No matter how often we repeated the phrase, we knew it was not true. Hateful words do hurt, especially if they come from the lips of people you love. A hundred people may complement you on a song or sermon shared on Sunday morning, but one critical remark is what you remember long into the afternoon.

The enemies of Jesus were not content with crucifixion, they remained at the foot of the cross to compound the suffering of Christ by adding their insults and verbal abuse. They made no attempt to conceal their contempt as they slandered the Savior and mockingly taunted him. Thomas Carlyle referred to ridicule as the language of the devil.<sup>35</sup> To be sure the Accuser of the brethren (Rev 12:10) mingled among the multitude pouring the fuel of bitterness into hearts enflamed with hate. The rotten fruit of rotten words can only come from a rotten heart (Matt 12:33-34).

David poetically portrayed the crowd as wild animals stalking and encircling their prey, looking for every opportunity to inflict more pain and to maximize the misery.

*Many bulls have surrounded Me; Strong bulls of Bashan have encircled Me. They gape at Me with their mouths, Like a raging and roaring lion. For dogs have surrounded Me; The congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me. **Psalms 22:12-13, 16** (NKJV)*

Like the bulls of Bashan, the people bellowed their blasphemies. Bashan was located east of the Sea of Galilee in the region of modern-day Syria. It was characterized by rich pasture land and its importance was acknowledged with nearly sixty biblical citations. The bulls, sometimes translated oxen (Exo 24:5), were noted for their strength and stubbornness. They would band together as to overwhelm and overcome their mark. There are some Bible students who consider the bulls of Psalm 22 a reference to unseen demonic beings who were

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<sup>35</sup> Quotes and Sayings, [www.inspirationalstories.com/quotes/thomas-carlyle-ridicule-is-the-language-of-the-devil/](http://www.inspirationalstories.com/quotes/thomas-carlyle-ridicule-is-the-language-of-the-devil/), Accessed September 2, 2022.

present during the crucifixion.<sup>36</sup> While this may be so, the united effort of the political authorities and religious leaders in mortal form seems to present a more plausible image.

The Apostle John gives the account of Jesus cleansing the Temple of greedy merchants who were taking financial advantage of pilgrims needing to exchange currency or purchase a sacrifice during the Passover festival. He turned over their tables and sent them scurrying out of the complex with a handmade whip constructed of cords. The passionate response of the gentle Jesus reminded the disciples of the words of the Psalmist, “The zeal for your house consumes me (Psalm 69:9).” This prompted some of the Jews to inquire of Jesus by whose authority did He purge the Temple courtyard? “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up,” was his reply (John 2:19).

Their incredulous response demonstrated they did not understand the statement of Jesus or make the right application. Jesus is now suspended on His cross and one of Bashan bulls reminds the herd of the ludicrous claim of Jesus concerning the destruction and rebuilding of the Temple in three days (Mark 15:29). Someone from the crowd screamed, “If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross (Matt 27:40).” They railed and reviled Him. The verb tense in the passage is imperfect, indicating their charges were repeated. The challenge to prove His deity is reminiscent of the barrage of attacks Jesus encountered in the wilderness by the devil (Matt 4:1-10).

Like hungry lions, the priests roared with ridicule. Scribes and elders mockingly questioned whether He still considered Himself the King of the Jews and the Son of God. Scoff is a term meaning to laugh with contempt. It is what Noah heard from his detractors as he built the ark on dry ground; it is what Nehemiah heard from Sanballat and Tobiah as he rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem from the rubble of rebellion (Neh 2:19); it is what Jesus heard as He declared the dead girl was only sleeping (Matt 9:24). In each of these cases, faith was mocked, but soon their laughter would be turned in to mourning (James 4:9) and faith would prove to be the victory that overcomes the world (1 John 5:4).

The spiritual shepherds of Israel scoffed at the idea that this condemned criminal could possibly be the Anointed One. During His ministry, Jesus delivered a multitude of people from diseases and demons, but now the Pharisees considered him Helpless to deliver himself. Where was the Roman Centurion whose servant Jesus healed (Luke 7:1-10)? What about the Galilean Jews who celebrated the arrival of Jesus into Jerusalem with shouts of Hosanna, where are they? Has anyone seen bold Peter who promised that he would go to the death for his Lord (Luke 22:33)? There would be no last-minute heroic rescue; no one would ride in to save the

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<sup>36</sup> David VanAtter, “What are the Bulls of Bashan-4 Views Explained,” <https://davidvanatter.com/what-are-the-bulls-of-bashan-4-views-explained/>; Accessed September 2, 2022. Shawn Brasseaux, “Who Were the Bulls of Bashan Standing Before Christ’s Cross,” <https://forwhatsaiththescriptures.org/2019/05/16/strong-bulls-of-bashan/>, May 16, 2019.

Savior. Ironically, had Jesus summoned the 72,000 angels (Matt 26:53) whose hands were on their sheath ready to respond to the command of their Captain (Josh 5:13-15), then no one else would have been saved.

These words of ridicule were not original with the Pharisees. Whether they intentionally plagiarized the psalm of David, or in their blind rage unconsciously recalled lessons of their youth, they were repeating what had already been written.

*But I am a worm, and no man; A reproach of men, and despised by the people. All those who see Me ridicule Me; They shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, "He trusted in the LORD, let Him rescue Him; Let Him deliver Him, since He delights in Him!"* **Psalm 22:6-8** (NKJV)

Like wild dogs, the prisoners snarled their sarcasm. Dogs were not generally considered ideal family pets, but scavengers whose bite could be worse than their bark (Phil 3:2). Lazarus may have appreciated the relief the dogs provided as they licked his sores (Luke 16:21), but their act of kindness was more selfish instinct than human compassion. Matthew and Mark record both thieves added their voices to the humiliation of Jesus. One of the fellow convicts would soon be converted, but initially he mustards the strength to side with his peer in the derision of the Messiah.

As the sounds of the jungle intensify when evening arrives so do the voices of the human animals circling the cross in anticipation of the death of their prey. There is no distinction of social standing or nationality among the mockers. Everyday people, prideful priests, sanctimonious Jews, arrogant Gentiles, rugged soldiers, and hardened criminals, were united in their criticisms. Like Pilate and Herod, enemies became friends (Luke 23:12) sharing a common cause to kill the Christ.

The cries of humanities hatred of the Creator echo throughout history. In protest, they deny their acrimony. It is not God they hate, but His right to rule their lives. They tasted the forbidden fruit of Eden and their eyes opened to what life without divine interference could be like (Gen 3:5). They wanted to enjoy His blessings but not follow His bidding. They reimagined the identity of the Author believing the lie that they could write a better story (Rom 1:18-32). Attempts to impose, or even suggest, the authority of the Scriptures and of its Christ, is met with distorted disdain and dismissive skepticism even to this present hour.

What of our words and our thoughts? Has the spirit of rebellion ever manifested in the things we say or do that clearly demonstrate our desire for independence? Stuart Townsend captures our mutual guilt when he pens the lyrical verse:

“Behold the man upon a cross, my sin upon His shoulders;

Ashamed, I hear my mocking voice call out among the scoffers.”<sup>37</sup>

*Lord, there is a wounding in our soul when we hear others ridicule and mock your name. They take your name in vain and count the cross as nothing. What of our hearts, Lord? Have we taken the cross too lightly? Have we allowed the price for our salvation to become common and cheap? Have mercy upon us, oh God, and fill us once again with awe and wonder. Amen.*

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<sup>37</sup> *How Deep the Father's Love for Us* lyrics © Capitol Christian Music Group, Capitol CMG Publishing, 1990.

## Day Eighteen

### The Heart of a Mother

*Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, "Woman, here is your son," and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home. **John 19:25-27** (NIV)*

#### The Compassion of the Christ

In stark contrast to the vicious words spoken by the crowd are the compassionate statements Jesus uttered from the cross. Jesus was not the only one suffering that day. Near the cross were family and friends. Mary, His mother, was there. After the time when the 12-year-old Jesus had been located in the Temple (Luke 2:41-52), there is no mention of Joseph in the Bible. His obvious absence during the ministry of Jesus (Matt 12:47) and at the crucifixion scene, suggests that he may have died a few years earlier.<sup>38</sup> The sister of Mary, Salome, is present as well, not to be confused with the daughter of Herodias who seduced Herod in giving her the severed head of John the Baptist (Mark 6:22). Aunt Salome was the wife of Zebedee and the mother of James and John (Matt 20:20-22). She followed Jesus during His ministry, witnessed His death, and would be among the women who would arrive early on Sunday morning at the garden tomb (Mark 16:1-8).

Another Mary is mentioned.<sup>39</sup> She is wedded to Cleopas who was identified as one of the two men the unrecognized Jesus joined on the road to Emmaus after His resurrection (Luke 24:18).<sup>40</sup> Still another Mary looms beneath the shadow of the cross. The first time we meet this Mary in the Bible is when Jesus is casting out of her seven demons (Luke 8:1-2). Mary is from the fishing village of Magdala and becomes a devoted believer.<sup>41</sup> The beloved disciple

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<sup>38</sup> Christianity FAQ, "How Old was Joseph When He Married Mary," <https://christianityfaq.com/how-old-was-joseph-when-he-married-mary/>, Accessed June 5, 2022. Joseph may have been considerably older than Mary and died prior to the beginning of the ministry of Jesus.

<sup>39</sup> The Bible Answer, "How Many Women Named Mary are in the Bible," <https://thebibleanswer.org/how-many-named-mary-in-bible/>, No less than six different women are called Mary in the New Testament. The moniker was popular as daughters were named after Miriam, the famed sister of Moses.

<sup>40</sup> Taylor Marshall, "St Cleopas: Christ's Uncle and Also Father and Grandfather of 4 Apostles," Accessed September 3, 2022. Some scholars suppose Cleopas was the brother of Joseph and that he and his wife were the parents of James the Less and Jude (two of the twelve Apostles). That would make Cleopas the uncle of Jesus and brother-in-law to Mary, Jesus' mother. The Scriptures, however, do not make these familial connections for the reader and should not be pressed as historically accurate since many people shared the same names in biblical times as is the case today.

<sup>41</sup> Got Questions Editors, "Who Was Mary Magdalene," [www.gotquestions.org/Mary-Magdalene.html](http://www.gotquestions.org/Mary-Magdalene.html), Accessed September 4, 2022.

(John 13:23) is the only man, and the only one of the twelve, mentioned among the followers of Jesus who were there that day. His familiarity with the high priest gained him access into the courtroom where he observed the sentencing of Jesus (John 18:15) and now he personally witnesses that sentence fulfilled.

As Jesus concludes His initial prayer to the Father (Luke 23:34), His eyes lower to the huddled handful of believers grieving before Him. His heart is heavy, especially as He searches the weary face of His mother. Her eyes are fixated on her Son in disbelief as her maternal instincts yearn to bring Him comfort. If anyone knew the true identity of Jesus as Messiah, it was Mary. She was perhaps only 12-14 years old<sup>42</sup> when the angelic messenger told the Virgin that she was highly favored and soon to be the mother of Isaiah's prophetic promise (Isa 7:14).

Mary remembered well the day of dedication at the Temple when she and Joseph carried their eight-day old infant to be circumcised as prescribed by the Law (Gen 17:10-14; Lev 12:3). Passing through the open court, they heard Simeon announce their baby was the long-awaited consolation of Israel (Luke 2:25). Devout and righteous Simeon had the promise of God that he would not see death until he had seen the Lord's Christ, and now his eyes beheld Israel's salvation and he was ready to depart. Before he passes from the biblical narrative, Simeon speaks a prophecy that would include both Jesus and Mary. The infant Jesus would grow to be a man facing continual opposition throughout His polarizing ministry while His mother would share in His suffering as if a sword pierced her very soul (Luke 2:34-35).

The humiliation of rumors in Nazareth concerning her unplanned pregnancy and the embarrassing report of the perceived insanity of her Son (Matt 12:47), were but superficial wounds compared to what she was now enduring at the cross. Mary heard the bloodlust cry of the crowd chanting, "Crucify Him, crucify Him." She gasped in horrific disbelief as Pilate presented her mangled Son with the fresh marks of the scourge. Step for step she watched His every move as the Roman soldiers prodded him forward until he buckled beneath the weight of the wooden beam stretched across His shoulders. Her soul jarred with every thud of the heavy mallet that drove spike nails into His tender flesh. Jesus was not the only one suffering that day. Every hurtful wound and every hateful word pierced her heart as Simeon had predicted. Her anguish would be compounded beyond description as she helplessly stood next to her family waiting for her baby boy to die.

Did Mary understand the cross? She certainly knew Jesus was uniquely born to be the Messiah, but could she fathom that His death meant her life? Comedian and song writer, Mark Lowry, commented that 33 years earlier, Mary labored in the stable to give birth to Jesus, and now Jesus is on the cross laboring to give birth to Mary. Prophetically Isaiah wrote the Lord

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<sup>42</sup> Whitney Hopley, "How Old Was Mary When She Had Jesus," [www.crosswalk.com/faith/bible-study/how-old-was-mary-when-she-had-jesus.html](http://www.crosswalk.com/faith/bible-study/how-old-was-mary-when-she-had-jesus.html), December 8, 2021.

would see the travail of his soul and be satisfied (Isa 53:11). The writer of Hebrews repeated the same truth indicating that while Jesus despised the shame of the cross, He endured for the joy that was set before Him (Heb 12:2). A soon-to-be mother does not look forward to the intense pain and hours of labor and delivery, but she looks beyond the ordeal in hopeful anticipation of holding new life in her arms. Jesus knew the result of His suffering would be the spiritual birth of the family of God.

In His final hours, Jesus makes provision for His mother. In the absence of Joseph, the responsibility to care for Mary would fall to the first-born son. It is not surprising that the fourth Gospel alone records the brief and intimate exchange between Jesus, Mary, and John, since they are the only participants privy to the conversation.

Jesus fulfills the demands of the Law as He honors His mother (Exo 20:12) committing her to the care of the beloved disciple. Where was James, Jude, Simon, or Joseph; the other brothers of Jesus (Mark 6:3)? Why charge John with an obligation reserved for family? John was a spiritual son sharing the same bond with Mary that all believers share. It is a connection greater than physical blood lines (Matt 12:48-50; 19:27-29; Luke 14:26) uniting the family of faith. His siblings were not yet believers (John 7:5) but would come to faith after the resurrection and be counted among the 120 faithful followers in the upper room (Acts 1:14).

Jesus addressed the individual who gave Him birth with what seemed to be an improper and impersonal term *woman*. This was the same title Jesus used in reference to Mary when He performed his first miracle (John 2:3-4). His mother is not offended by this word, but she recognizes the demonstration of His deity demands a clear distinction between His role as son of Joseph and Son of God.

*The response of the virgin to the angelic message is both an inspiration and example to all those to whom you, Lord, desire to fill and use for your divine purpose and glory. May Christ be born in us as we yield our will and our very lives to you. To God be the glory! Amen.*

## Day Nineteen

### A Penitent Thief

*Then one of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed Him, saying, "If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us." But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, "Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong." **Luke 23:39-41** (NKJV)*

#### The Conversion of the Criminal

On the morning Jesus was crucified, there were two other men who were suffering the same fate. They were proven thieves. These men did more than pick pockets or snatch purses, they were revolutionaries who utilized terrorist tactics against their Roman oppressors.<sup>43</sup> Their sins against the state justified the sentence of such a horrible death. Mark writes that during the early hours of crucifixion both criminals hurled their abusive and vulgar insults toward Jesus (Mark 15:32). However, within a short time, one of the thieves shifts in his crass opinion of the Man beside him and he begins to move from reviling to believing.

What caused this thief to change his mind and what led him to address Jesus in tender tones? Could it be he heard Jesus whisper the prayer for the forgiveness of His enemies? Who does that? Maybe it was the inscription above the head of Jesus that read, "King of the Jews?" All his life he had heard of a coming deliverer. Was this man the Messiah? Perhaps it was the testimony of the Pharisees who angrily shouted, "He saved others," causing the crook to mentally rehearse the stories of miraculous healings connected with the Christ? Whatever the reason, there was a transformation in his thinking as he turns to Jesus and seeks salvation. In a very real sense, this thief prays the perfect sinner's prayer.

#### Repentance of Sin

First, there is the repentance of sin. The other thief had heard the same words and read the same sign as his counterpart, but he remained unconvinced and unconverted. He continued to pour out his profanities prompting a sharp rebuke from his fellow convict, "Don't you fear God," he cried? Sin had seared his conscience (1 Tim 4:2) and hardened his heart (Heb 3:13) to the point there was no longer any strand of the fear of God within him (Rom 3:18). An

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<sup>43</sup> Tom Hobson, "Thief or Terrorists: What Kind of Criminal Was Jesus Crucified With," March 22, 2018. Hobson argues that the Greek word *lestes* means more than a bandit or burglar but guerilla tactics coupled with violent action.



electrician who ceases to fear electricity may be shocked to learn that the power of current demands his full respect and attention at all times. The Scriptures reveal God as a good and gentle Father (Rom 8:15), but He is also a strong and stern Sovereign in whose presence we bow with reverential fear (Heb 10:31).

There is no excuse, no blame, and no justification for his sinful life. There is raw and honest acknowledgment of his wicked deeds. He was guilty of the charges, condemned, and now reaping the reward of his rebellion. This act of genuine repentance is the place every sinner must come to if they are to receive full forgiveness. Without repentance there is no remission of sin (Acts 2:38; 17:30). Repentance is more than the confession of a sinful act, but a recognition of a sinful heart (Matt 15:19). It is when the soul feels the weight of the burden that sin produces (Luke 18:13) and knows the awful judgment of hell awaits (Matt 13:50).

### Faith in the Savior

It is the goodness of God that leads a person to repent (Rom 2:4). While on the cross, Jesus is not condemning, but loving. His words are hopeful and His hands are stretched out as if he were reaching to rescue the perishing and care for the dying. One thief recoils and responds with rebuke, while the other thief humbly repents and turns to the Lord. These two men are a representation of all humanity. Every human being is either lost or saved; they are either headed to hell or to heaven. The single factor that determines their course in life and eternal destination is what they do with this man called Christ (Acts 4:12).

What did this thief see in Jesus that would cause him to repent and call out to him in faith? He knew Jesus was innocent as he declared, "This man has done nothing wrong (Luke 23:41)." Judas knew Jesus was guiltless. As the traitor tried to return the filthy lucre, he cried, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood (Matt 27:4)." Pilate knew Jesus was faultless (Luke 23:4)." The bloated and boastful Herod found nothing deserving of death in Jesus during his cross examination (Luke 23:15). Pilate's wife knew Jesus was a just man (Matt 27:19) and the Roman Centurion declared at the hour of his death, that Jesus was a righteous man (Luke 23:47). The penitent thief could clearly see his own sinfulness, but when he looked at the man hanging next to him, he knew He was different. Perhaps for the first time in his hard life he saw a glimmer of hope.

His voice quivered with faith and doubt as he addressed Jesus as *Lord*. The word *Lord* is a common expression of respect but here the word means much more. Lord is synonymous with sovereign and master. To declare Jesus is Lord was considered treason to the Romans since only Ceasar was called Lord. To say Jesus is Lord was blasphemy in the ears of the Jews who believed that only the true Messiah was the true Lord. This thief, however, was not concerned about Romans and Jews, but about his own soul. He believed where there is a

kingdom, there must be a king. Faith has taken root in his heart, and with anticipation and expectation, he turns to Jesus the Lord, the Messiah, the Savior, the King!

*Dear God, thank you for convicting us of our sin and showing us our need for a Savior. It has been by your grace that sin became exceedingly sinful within us, yet that same grace revealed the remedy that set us free. Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me. Amen.*

## Day Twenty

### The Promise of Paradise

*Then he said to Jesus, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom." And Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise." **Luke 23:42-43** (NKJV)*

#### Cry for Salvation

In his hour of desperation, the thief on the cross makes a faith-filled request, "Remember me (Luke 23:42)". Faith in God not only pleases Him (Heb 11:6) but sets in motion the very means by which our deliverance is secured (1 John 5:4). Jesus responds to the request with the promise of paradise. Paradise is a Persian word for garden. Whenever a ruler would want to honor one of his subjects, he would invite him to walk with him in his garden. The imagery is strikingly similar to first garden in Genesis. God placed Adam in the paradise called Eden and walked often with him in the cool of the day (Gen 3:8). Jesus knew once the work of Calvary was complete, Eden would be revived. The entrance which had been blocked would be reopened, sinful man would be declared righteous, and fellowship with the Father would be restored.

Jesus did not tell the thief the hope of Eden would be his one day, but that today, you will be with Me in paradise. This is the same promise you and I can claim as we look to Jesus in repentance and faith. The forgiveness and salvation that He provides and promises is more than a future hope, but a present reality for today (2 Cor 6:2). Can a person experience death bed repentance? Are they able with their final breath, to ask God for salvation and be saved? Adrian Rodgers warns that while it is possible it is not probable. He reminds us that the Bible records only one death bed repentance (thief on the cross) and the time to turn to Christ is now. Rodgers said, "Today is God's word...tomorrow is the devil's word." As we trust Christ, our hearts will flood with forgiveness and freedom and we will join in the celebration with all the redeemed saints of God.

The dying thief rejoiced to see  
That fountain in his day;  
And there may I, though vile as he,  
Wash all my sins away:  
Wash all my sins away,  
Wash all my sins away;

And there may I, though vile as he,  
Wash all my sins away.<sup>44</sup>

A farmer who was a Christian rented a room to a young man and often looked for an opportunity to share his faith with him. One morning after breakfast, the farmer told the young man the story of the gospel. The man politely listened but then expressed confusion as to why God would send His Son to die for sinners? The farmer stumbled for an explanation but felt frustrated at his perceived inability to provide an adequate answer. Later that afternoon, the farmer saw the young man crossing the barnyard and asked him to join him in the hen house. On one of the nests sat a hen with a brood of little chicks peeking out from under her wings. "Touch her, young man," said the farmer. As the man put his hand on the hen, he found that she was cold and dead. "Look at that wound on her head," the farmer continued. "A weasel has sucked all the blood from her body, and she never once moved for fear the animal would harm her chicks."<sup>45</sup> It was incredible and indescribable love that moved Jesus to give his life for sinners. He took our death so that we might live his life. Have you turned from your sin and have you called on the name of the Lord in faith to be your Lord and Savior (Rom 10:9-10)? Like the penitent thief, you too can hear Jesus say, "Today, you will be with me in paradise."

*Mighty God, our hope of heaven is more than a wishful anticipation but a confident expectation. Our hope rests upon the price paid and the promise made. We have staked our very lives, and our eternity, on the blood of your only begotten Son. Praise God that paradise is our now and forever. Amen.*

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<sup>44</sup> Discipleship Ministries of the United Methodist Church, "History of Hymns: *There is a Fountain Filled with Blood*," (William Cowper, 1772), [www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/history-of-hymns-there-is-a-fountain-filled-with-blood](http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/history-of-hymns-there-is-a-fountain-filled-with-blood), June 12, 2013. The lyrics are based on Zechariah 13:1 and was written after Cowper's first severe bout with depression.

<sup>45</sup> [www.pastorlife.com/members/sermon.asp?SERMON\\_ID=4453&fm=authorbio&authorid=3381](http://www.pastorlife.com/members/sermon.asp?SERMON_ID=4453&fm=authorbio&authorid=3381), (The illustration is from Alan Steward sermon entitled: The Vital Questions of Life), Accessed September 6, 2022.

## **The Final Three Hours**

## Day Twenty-One

### The Real Suffering Begins

*Now from the sixth hour until the ninth hour there was darkness over all the land.” **Matthew 27:45** (NKJV)*

The first three hours of the crucifixion lasted from nine o'clock in the morning until twelve o'clock noon. Those hours were filled with activity. The crowd was jeering, soldiers were gambling, priests were mocking, women were weeping, demons were dancing, and angels were watching. Although His suffering is immeasurable, Jesus is fully conscious as He speaks from the cross. His focus is clearly on others. He prayed for His enemies by asking the Father to forgive them. He provided for His mother by committing her to the care of the beloved disciple. He promised paradise to the penitent thief.

The scene changes as Jesus internalizes His thoughts. An unexplainable darkness transforms the sky from midday to midnight like a black canvass. The burble chatter tapers off as silence dominates the next three hours. There is no record of any words being spoken, either from the crowd or the Christ, until the very end. The pain of the cross intensified for Jesus with the reality that He was forsaken by both man and God. The hour that Jesus dreaded most had arrived. He had prayed three times in Gethsemane that if it were possible, the cup that contained sin and separation, would be taken from Him (Luke 22:42). The sweat drops of blood that beaded His forehead were a testimony of His mental anguish. Jesus followed each request for the passing of the cup with a yielding to the Father's will. J. C. Ryle summarizes the suffering in the garden and the cross when he writes,

“There is a deep mystery in these words, which no mortal man can fathom. No doubt they were not wrung from our Lord by mere bodily pain. Such an explanation is utterly unsatisfactory, and dishonorable to our blessed Savior. They were meant to express the real pressure on His soul of the enormous burden of a world's sins. They were meant to show how truly and literally He was our substitute, was made sin, and a curse for us, and endured God's righteous anger against a world's sin in His own person. At that awful moment, the iniquity of us all was laid upon Him to the uttermost.”<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup>“Ryle's Expository Thoughts on the Gospels, <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/eng/ryl/matthew-27.html>; Accessed September 7, 2022. John Charles Ryle was an Anglican minister who served as bishop of Liverpool, England (1816-1900).

Ryle is right. If all we see is the physical horror Jesus experienced on the cross, then we miss its meaning and message. We need to look deeper. We need to look beyond the veil of His flesh (Heb 10:20) and see His heartbeat to accomplish His Father's will and redeem the souls of men. We need to consider to what extent was Jesus willing to go to secure our salvation?

*Father, as the sun sets in the west, the shadows lengthen and the darkness prevails over the earth. There are times when spiritual darkness blankets our own souls and fearfulness creeps into our hearts. Forgive us Lord, when we are afraid and faithless. We cry to you, God, and pray the faith you give, will supplant the fears of this present age. Amen.*

## Day Twenty-Two

### The Darkest Hour

*And the LORD said unto Moses, stretch out thine hand toward heaven, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, even darkness which may be felt. **Exodus 10:22** (KJV)*

#### The Depth of Darkness

For people who live in the Northern Hemisphere the winter solstice marks the day when the Earth is tilted at its furthest point away from the sun. December 21<sup>st</sup> or 22<sup>nd</sup> is usually the calendar date and is considered the shortest day of the year because that is the time when the least amount of daylight is available.<sup>47</sup> While the winter solstice is called the darkest day of the year, it is not an exaggeration to describe the final three hours that Jesus hung on the cross as the darkest hours in history.

One of the attributes of God is He is light (1 John 1:5). He is the very source and substance of illumination for the universe. As darkness covered the whole of creation, He spoke physical light into existence (Gen1:1-3). On the fourth day the sun and the moon were strategically placed in our galaxy to govern the day and night as well as determining seasonal changes (Gen 1:14-19). For three days, it was light in the land of Goshen where the Hebrews lived, while the rest of Egypt sat in darkness (Exo 10:23). As Joshua routed the Amorites, he asked God to let the sun stand still (Joshua 10:12-13) until the victory was secured. The sprinting sun paused on its race across the heavens (Psalm 19:5) for a full day. In the time of Hezekiah, the sickly king was given the sign of the sun moving backward ten degrees as confirmation of his healing (2 Kings 20:10). The One who created the sun has absolute authority as to when, where, and how long it is to shine. The Creator has full control over His creation.

It is the sixth hour on a Friday.<sup>48</sup> The sun has reached its apex in the noonday sky. At the time it should be flooding the earth with rays of light, a darkness prevails across the land. Some have tried to explain in scientific terms the heavenly phenomenon as a solar eclipse. The movement of the moon passing between the sun and the earth takes seven minutes and thirty-two seconds which is a far cry from the three hours of the biblical record. In addition, the crucifixion occurred in the middle of the month when the moon would not be full making a total eclipse improbable. The anomaly has been explained as thick cloud cover or as Geologist

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<sup>47</sup> Brian Handwerk, <https://kids.nationalgeographic.com/history/article/winter-solstice>, Accessed July 3, 2022.

<sup>48</sup> The Jews counted the twenty-four hours in a day beginning at sundown, while the Romans began the day count at sunrise (6:00 a.m.).



Jefferson Williams suggests a common sandstorm.<sup>49</sup> The plain reading of the text, however, indicates that this was a literal darkness initiated by divine design.

Throughout the Bible darkness had often been associated with judgment. The ninth plague pronounced against stubborn Pharaoh was a darkness that could be felt, similar to the darkness within the caverns of Mammoth Cave when the lights are turned off. Amos spoke dark words of warning to the sinful nations that surrounded his beloved Israel, but reserved his harshest comments for his own people for their hypocrisy and idolatry.

*“In that day,” declares the Sovereign LORD, “I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight. I will turn your religious festivals into mourning and all your singing into weeping. I will make all of you wear sackcloth and shave your heads. I will make that time like mourning for an only son and the end of it like a bitter day.”*

**Amos 8:9-10** (NIV)

Jesus told of the judgment of darkness that befell the wicked and lazy servant who squandered the opportunity to make full use of his one talent in his day of reckoning.

*Now throw this useless servant into outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. **Matthew 25:30** (NLT)*

Darkness now descends on Golgotha. The physical darkness represents the spiritual blindness that darkens the minds of men and keeps them from seeing truth (Eph 4:18). God’s judgment is symbolized in the somber shades and shadows of His divine wrath against all sin. The Light of the world (John 1:7-8; 8:12; 9:5) had come to deliver men from their spiritual darkness (Isa 9:2; John 12:46), but that light had been extinguished. There is more happening here than the death of an Innocent Jew or the martyrdom of a righteous prophet. Angels lit up the evening sky announcing the good news of his birth (Luke 2:8-20) and now the afternoon sky becomes dark at His death.

*You, oh Lord, are the light of the world who gives light and life to everyman. Yet if that Light were shut off, what hope would there be? Jesus, you endured the cross as the Father hid his face from you. We cannot comprehend the agony of that separation. May this truth bring us before your feet in humble worship. Amen.*

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<sup>49</sup> Jennifer Viegas, *Quake Reveals Day of Jesus’ Crucifixion*, [www.livescience.com/20605-jesus-crucifixion.html](http://www.livescience.com/20605-jesus-crucifixion.html); May 27, 2012; Dave Armstrong, *Darkness at Jesus’ Crucifixion-Solar Eclipse or Sandstorm?* [www.ncregister.com/blog/darkness-at-the-crucifixion-sandstorm](http://www.ncregister.com/blog/darkness-at-the-crucifixion-sandstorm); April 15, 2022. Armstrong argues that the darkness was attributed to a sandstorm.

## Day Twenty-Three

### The Cry of the Christ

*And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" that is, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" **Matthew 27:46** (NKJV)*

#### The Cry of the Christ

It is mid-afternoon and an uncharacteristic cry comes from the cross. Once again Jesus begins to pray to His Father, but this prayer is not a compassionate plea for the forgiveness of His enemies, but desperate and despondent. It is disturbing because we have never seen Jesus in this way. Jesus often retreated before the break of dawn to a solitary place where He and the Father would share uninterrupted fellowship (Mark 1:35). His disciples would see Him ascend a mountain to meet with God and not return until morning (Luke 6:12). They would hear Him offer a prayer of thanks (Matt 11:25-26), intercede for the elect (John 17), and ask the Father for the life of Lazarus (John 11:41-42). So impressed with the prayer life of Jesus, the disciples requested, "Teach us to pray," and the Master replied with the model prayer (Luke 11:1-4).

As Jesus drew closer to the cross, His prayers became heavier and more intense. After the triumphant entry into Jerusalem amidst the shouts of celebration, Jesus confessed to His disciples that His soul was troubled as He thought about that coming hour (John 12:27-28). He turned to the Father in prayer for strength reaffirming His commitment to redemption's plan. In a few short days the disciples would follow Jesus to Gethsemane. The inner circle of Peter, James, and John would be invited deeper into the olive press<sup>50</sup> to join Jesus in prayer (Matt 26:36-46). Despite the obvious burden Jesus bore, the faithful followers found it difficult to stay awake. They could hear Jesus' sob in surrender resigning His will to drink the cup appointed by the Father but their sleepiness prevailed.

The single hour Jesus dreaded most had arrived. The prayer He prays from His cross is not for others but singularly centered on Himself. Every New Testament prayer of Jesus addresses God as Father. The Aramaic word is *abba* which speaks to the relationship that exists between the Father and the Son. It is a term of both one of intimacy and obedience.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Gethsemane literally means olive press. A fitting location to describe not only the crushing of olives but the crushing burden of sin and its payment, causing great sweats drops of blood to drip from the forehead of Jesus.

<sup>51</sup> Chad Harrington, <https://himpublications.com/blog/meaning-abba/>, Accessed August 1, 2022.

Throughout His ministry Jesus declared, “I and the Father are one,” to which listening Jews responded with angry shouts of blasphemy as they attempted to stone Him (John 10:30-33). This prayer, however, is prefaced with the words, “My God, My God” which is a more generic expression of God as Supreme Deity.<sup>52</sup> The words do not suggest affection and familiarity, but the distance between a Sovereign and his subject.

It was King David who first penned this prayer (Psalm 22:1). There are no internal clues within the psalm that highlight the specific circumstances that prompted David to pray with such grief.<sup>53</sup> Perhaps it was the time when Saul pursued him as a flea (1 Sam 24:14) or Absalom sought to usurp the throne (2 Sam 15-18)? David is surrounded by death and he wonders where is his God? This is the same sentiment often expressed by people who face dark and difficult days while the enemy closes in and heaven remains silent. Our reality contradicts our theology. We believe the promises of deliverance (Ps 34:19) yet the intensity of our sorrow suggests either our faith is too small or our God does not care. Abraham readied to sacrifice his son, and at the last moment, God spoke a word of rescue (Gen 22:1-19) and Isaac was freed. This would not be the case in the sacrificial offering of God’s only begotten Son.

The New Testament writers saw the crucifixion of Jesus as literally fulfilling the psalmist’s poetic language (Psalm 22:8, 16, 18). There is a stark contrast, however, between the prayer of David and the prayer of Jesus. David rejoiced in his rescue from the valley of the shadow of death (Psalm 22:21) but for Jesus, no help was coming.

*Jesus, your cry from the cross was the expression of a broken and wounded heart. Not only because of the weight of sin, but your anguish stemmed from your separation from the Father. You tasted true death so that sinners would not be separated forever from the Creator. You are our Advocate, our Propitiation, and our Mediator who causes us to be accepted in the Beloved. It will take an eternity to express our praise and thanksgiving to you. Amen.*

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<sup>52</sup> <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g2316/kjv/tr/0-1/>; Accessed July 5, 2022. The Hebrew translation is *el* and the Greek translation is *theos*. Both words carry the same idea of a powerful and mighty deity with supreme authority. <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h410/kjv/wlc/0-1/>

<sup>53</sup> Allen P. Ross, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*; editors John Walvoord and Roy Zuck, (Victor Books: Wheaton Illinois, 1983), page 89.

## Day Twenty-Four

### Forsaken by the Father

*My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? Why are You so far from helping Me, And from the words of My groaning? **Psalm 22:1** (NKJV)*

There is passion in His repeated plea, “My God, My God.” It is the lament of an animal caught in an inescapable trap. Jesus groaned as He considered Himself forsaken by God. He does not ask, “Why did the people reject Me,” or “Why did Judas betray Me,” or “Why did Peter deny Me?” These are not the primary questions that preoccupy His thoughts. He has been abandoned by His Father and is alone in His suffering. The deserted wife, the disowned child, or the forgotten senior faintly understand this emotional misery.

The cat-of-nine tails<sup>54</sup> used to shred the back of Jesus, the thorny crown pressed on His head, and the spike nails driven into His flesh cannot compare to the real pain of Calvary. Mel Gibson faithfully portrayed the physical horror Jesus endured in *The Passion of the Christ*, but he could not capture the agony of divine separation. From all eternity, God the Father and God the Son were in constant fellowship. Even as Jesus left heaven and came to earth, He remained in continuous communion and communication with the Father. Every time Jesus prayed, He could see His Father’s face and hear His Father’s voice. The echo of divine approval rang in his ears as the Father boasted, “This is My beloved Son,” first at His baptism (Mark 1:11), and again at the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt 17:5).

And now, in His greatest hour of need, Jesus turns to see the face of His Father only to view a darkened sky void of the presence of God. His heavy heart is completely crushed as the full weight of sin unrelentingly bears down upon Him.

Several years ago, my son and his family returned from a three-year mission stint around the Amazon Basin. He witnessed the lostness of mankind firsthand and grieved over the inaccessibility of the gospel to those who have never heard the good news. When they returned to the United States, a deep depression settled on his soul that caused him to seriously question his theological moorings. Unapologetically he pleaded with fellow believers to pray for him as he spent countless hours receiving counsel from his wife, mother, and trusted friends. During his foggiest days, I vividly remember my son looking at me in desperation searching for any light of truth that would set him free. Even a little nightlight is a

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<sup>54</sup> The cat-of-nine tails was a knotted whip of approximately three feet in length used to inflict pain and punishment on its victims. There is the record among the Jews that criminals would receive forty lashes save one (2 Cor 11:24) lest there be a violation of the Mosaic law (Deut 25:1-3).

comfort to a frightened child. With tears in his eyes and with honest humility he said, “Dad, when I pray, all I see is darkness.”

In that moment I could pray for my son, I could rehearse Bible promises, and even weep with him, but I could not alleviate his suffering. That would be the privilege and responsibility of the Comforter (John 14:15-18) who whispered to his soul, “Trust Me,” and the peace that passes all understanding gave him faith to move forward.

*Father God, we are brought into a right relationship with you and we are able to enter your throne room of glory because of the sacrifice of the Christ on the cross. We praise you today, every day, and for all eternity for the goodness of your grace in rescuing sinners like us and making us righteous in your sight. Amen.*

## Day Twenty-Five

### The Theology of Calvary

*But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear. **Isaiah 59:2** (KJV)*

How can the eternal Godhead be divided? How is it possible that the Trinity could experience estrangement? This is the mystery of the cross. This is the extent to which God was willing to go to rescue sinners. When Jesus drank the contents of the cup in Gethsemane, He anticipated that separation. The very thought caused Him to perspire blood. As He carried His cross to the place of execution, it was not death He dreaded since He knew the last enemy (1 Cor 15:26) would be defeated in three days, but it was the separation from the Father that vexed His soul.

As the darkness began to descend at the noon hour, Jesus braced Himself as the tsunami of God's wrath was poured out upon Him. After three hours of total separation, the harrowing cry from the Christ is heard, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?" Jesus knew the answer to His own question. He is well aware of the reason why the Father had forsaken His Son. While heaven did not respond to His inquiry, the Bible gives a clear explanation. God is a holy God. Holiness refers to His sinless perfection as well as His separateness from his creation.<sup>55</sup> The prophet Isaiah calls Him the Holy One nearly thirty times in his book. God established barriers demonstrating the difference and distance between the Lord of glory and earthly men. A boundary was erected prohibiting Israel from breaking through the clouds as Moses met with God (Exo 19:12). The wilderness Tabernacle was divided into the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place illustrating the unapproachableness of God (Exo 26:33). The Mosaic Law distinguished the disparity between what was deemed clean and unclean (Lev 11:47).

In contrast to God's holiness is man's sinfulness. The fall of man excluded him from Eden (Gen 3:23) and produced within him a heart of rebellion (Rom 5:12-19) deepening the divide between God and man. Man transgressed<sup>56</sup> the laws of God causing his conscience to be seared (1 Tim 4:2) and his heart to be hardened (Rom 2:5). Man missed the mark of God's

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<sup>55</sup> Henry C. Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology*; Revised by Vernon Doerksen, (Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, 1979), p. 84.

<sup>56</sup> Transgression carries the idea of cutting across the boundary line or trespassing on forbidden territory.

standard of righteousness (Rom 3:10-18, 23) and his iniquity<sup>57</sup> affected and infected the intended relationship between the Creator and His creation forming an uncrossable chasm.

The prophets understood the dire consequences of sin.

*The person who sins is the one who will die. The child will not be punished for the parent's sins, and the parent will not be punished for the child's sins. Righteous people will be rewarded for their own righteous behavior, and wicked people will be punished for their own wickedness. **Ezekiel 18:20** (NLT)*

*Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrongdoing. **Habakkuk 1:13** (KJV)*

The ultimate punishment for sin is eternal separation. Condemned men (John 3:18) will stand before the Judge of all the earth to receive final sentencing for a lifetime of rebellion. The justice of God will be vindicated as the record of wrongs prove each man's guilt (Rev 20:12-14) and then he will be cast into the lake of fire.

What does the cross of Christ have to do with the sinful condition of all humanity? How does an event that happened two thousand years ago have any impact on eternity? The picture God provided through the institution of the sacrificial system in the Old Testament is the illustration of atonement and sacrifice. The sins of an individual could be transferred to an innocent lamb symbolized by laying their hands on the head of the animal and confessing their unrighteousness and unfaithfulness (Lev 4:33-34). The spotless animal would incur both the guilt and penalty of sin and be slaughtered as a burnt offering. A similar ritual would be practiced annually on the Day of Atonement. Two goats would be brought before the Lord at the Tent of Meeting (Lev 16). Aaron, the High Priest, would offer a bull as a sacrifice for his own sins and then proceed to cast lots<sup>58</sup> over the goats to determine which goat would be the sin offering and which would be the scapegoat. The sin offering would be brutally slain, while the scapegoat would be released into the wilderness symbolizing the release of the sins of the nation.<sup>59</sup> The parallel to Calvary is unmistakable.

Sin is the curse of humanity and death is its reward. The testimony of Scripture is that Jesus was completely sinless (Heb 4:15; 1 Pet 2:22; 1 John 3:5) from the womb to the tomb in word, thought, and actions, and yet He is dying on a cross. The spotless Lamb became the burnt offering while we have been set free. He was slaughtered as a sacrifice in our stead so

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<sup>57</sup> Iniquity carries the idea of twisting or distorting. Sin is a distortion of God's Word and His glorious purpose in the lives of His creation (John 10:10).

<sup>58</sup> Similar to casting dice to determine an outcome.

<sup>59</sup> Lisa Loraine Baker, "What is a Scapegoat in the Bible, and Why is Jesus Ours?" [www.biblestudytools.com/bible-study/topical-studies/what-is-a-scapegoat-in-the-bible-and-why-is-jesus-ours.html](http://www.biblestudytools.com/bible-study/topical-studies/what-is-a-scapegoat-in-the-bible-and-why-is-jesus-ours.html), October 4:2021.

that we could be forgiven and our fellowship with the Father be restored. He is our substitute who received in His body the full wrath of God towards sin, and in exchange, gave us His righteousness making us acceptable in the Beloved (Eph 1:6).

*But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. **Isaiah 53:5** (NIV)*

*But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. **Romans 5:8** (NKJV)*

*For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. **2 Corinthians 5:21** (NKJV)*

*For you know that God paid a ransom to save you from the empty life you inherited from your ancestors. And it was not paid with mere gold or silver, which lose their value. It was the precious blood of Christ, the sinless, spotless Lamb of God. **1 Peter 1:18-19** (NLT)*

*Christ suffered for our sins once for all time. He never sinned, but he died for sinners to bring you safely home to God. He suffered physical death, but he was raised to life in the Spirit. **1 Peter 3:18** (NLT)*

*He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world. **1 John 2:2** (NIV)*

Moses wrote that life is in the blood (Lev 17:11). The author of Hebrews said without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sin (Heb 9:22). Jesus was made a little lower than the angels in His humanity so He could experience death for every man (Heb 2:9). The sinless Son of God is dying a sinner's death. The eternal God did not die, but in His flesh as the Son of Mary, He would bleed and soon give up the ghost (Matt 27:50).

In the days of the Exodus, Egypt experienced three days of darkness followed by the death of the first-born securing Israel's deliverance from bondage. The final three hours Jesus hung on the cross was shrouded in darkness, followed by His death, so our salvation would be secured. If Jesus does not die, then we cannot live. It is this truth that reverberates in our soul and causes our spirit to leap like John the Baptist in his mother's womb (Luke 1:41) at the good news of the Savior. The cross is a marvel and a mystery and we are left to wonder and to



worship. Charles Wesley best expresses the awe of Calvary in his hymn *And Can it Be, That I Should Gain?*<sup>60</sup>

He left His Father's throne above,  
So free, so infinite His grace;  
Emptied Himself of all but love,  
And bled for Adam's helpless race;  
'Tis mercy all, immense and free;  
For, O my God, it found out me.

Amazing love! How can it be;  
That thou, my God, should'st die for me?

While we prematurely rejoice and shout the song of victory, we are reminded that there is still the actual death that must take place. It is the final hour and there is yet one more prophecy to be fulfilled. Jesus has run the hardest part of the race, but He has not yet crossed the finish line.

*Lord, we may never fully understand the cross, but we rejoice today in what we do know. We were lost in our sins and helpless to save ourselves. Your great love compelled you to send your only Begotten Son to die in our stead and then raise him from the dead so that all who turn to you in faith and repentance could have life and life abundantly. This is not only our hope, it is our only hope. Amen.*

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<sup>60</sup> <https://hymnary.org/text/and-can-it-be-that-i-should-gain>; This hymn was written in 1738. The copied portion is the third stanza followed by the refrain.

## Day Twenty-Six

### The Taste of Wine

*After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, "I thirst!" Now a vessel full of sour wine was sitting there; and they filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on hyssop, and put it to His mouth. **John 19:28-29** (NKJV)*

"Water, water, everywhere; nor any drop to drink," is a line from the Samuel Taylor Coleridge poem, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. It is a mystical story of a fateful journey of penance and regret. The lack of water in the poem is due to a drought thought to be a curse for the killing of an albatross.<sup>61</sup> The religious leaders were convinced that Jesus was under a divine curse (Deut 21:23) and His need for water was but a byproduct of His suffering. Water is essential to survival. When the body begins to dehydrate the brain sends a message you are thirsty. Two times during the six-hour ordeal of the crucifixion, Jesus was presented with something to drink.

When Jesus first arrived at Golgotha, before they drove the nails into His hands and feet, He was given the opportunity to drink wine mixed with myrrh (Mark 15:22-23). Myrrh is a resin derived from the bark of trees indigenous to Africa and the Middle East. It was one of the gifts presented by the Magi to the new born king (Matt 2:11). Its variety of usages range from perfume, to incense, to food flavoring, but its primary benefit is medicinal. Myrrh acts as a natural pain blocker to the chemicals producing inflammation.<sup>62</sup> The concoction of wine mixed with myrrh was a primitive medication enabling the patient to endure prolonged pain. King Lemuel's mother counseled that strong drink should be given to those who are perishing (Prov 31:6).

People approaching the end of their life, or who have been diagnosed with a terminal illness, often call Hospice to provide support, comfort, and guidance through the difficult days ahead. The medicinal offering was an act of kindness designed to dull the ache and agony of crucifixion. As they pressed the wine to the lips of Jesus, He deliberately turned his head and refused to drink it. Jesus is not a masochist<sup>63</sup> who finds pleasure in pain and humiliation. In fact, just the opposite was true. He despised the shame of the cross (Heb 12:2) and expressed His desire for another path of redemption (Matt 26:39-45). His rejection may have stemmed

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<sup>61</sup> Poetry Foundation, [www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43997/the-rime-of-the-ancient-mariner-text-of-1834](http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43997/the-rime-of-the-ancient-mariner-text-of-1834), Accessed July7, 2022.

<sup>62</sup> Marsha McCulloch, [www.healthline.com/nutrition/myrrh-oil#TOC\\_TITLE\\_HDR\\_5](http://www.healthline.com/nutrition/myrrh-oil#TOC_TITLE_HDR_5), January 4, 2019.

<sup>63</sup> [www.vocabulary.com/dictionary/masochist](http://www.vocabulary.com/dictionary/masochist), Accessed July11, 2022. A sadist is a person who enjoys inflicting pain on others; a masochist is a person who finds gratification in their own humiliation and suffering.

from His desire to remain conscious and clear headed as He experienced the full wrath of God against sin.

It is near the end of the crucifixion story where the second occurrence of Jesus being given something to drink is presented. The request for relief comes from Jesus personally. He struggles for His next breath, then from His parched lips He said, "I thirst." Some bystanders thought Jesus was calling for the aid of Elijah and mocking said, "Wait, let's see if Elijah comes (Mark 15:35)." Hearing the request, a Roman soldier soaks a sponge in sour vinegar wine, puts it on the end of a two-to-three-foot hyssop branch<sup>64</sup>, and places it on the mouth of the Messiah. The wine in the sponge was a common and inexpensive beverage enjoyed by laborers and soldiers alike (Ruth 2:14). William Lane argues that this wine was not a bitter taste intended to repulse and ridicule the person who drank it. Rather, its design was to keep victims conscious as long as possible.<sup>65</sup> David Mathis provides an insightful comparison between the two different types of responses by Jesus and the other thieves to the wine choices.

"Other condemned criminals would have taken the first (to ease their torment) and passed on the second (so as not to prolong their horrific pain). But Jesus would take no shortcuts on the way to our redemption."<sup>66</sup>

Once Jesus sipped the wine from the sponge, with settled resolve, He announced, "It is finished." *Telelestai* is a Greek word meaning complete or fully finished. When a servant reported to their master concerning an assigned task, they would declare the job was *telelestai*.<sup>67</sup> As far as that particular task there was nothing more to be accomplished, and with bold decisiveness declare, "It is done!" After hearing a case, the judge will bang her gavel and pronounce definitively the accused as "Not guilty." When the fastball whizzes over home plate for the third time, the umpire barks with authority, "Strike three." The stuttering auctioneer runs up the bids until a final price is reached with the words, "Going once, going twice, sold!" Once those words are spoken, there is no going back.

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<sup>64</sup> Got Questions Editors, [www.gotquestions.org/hyssop-Bible.html](http://www.gotquestions.org/hyssop-Bible.html), Accessed July 14, 2022. The hyssop plant is actually a bush whose woody stems grow 12-24 inches in height. Placing a sponge on the end of the short branch and extending it the lips of Jesus may suggest that the cross itself was not very tall. There have been several attempts to spiritualize or assign symbolism to the use of the hyssop branch since the herb surfaces several times in Scripture (Exodus 12:22; Psalm 51:7). While there may be some merit to the discussion, the present text makes a passing reference to the branch without cross references. It may have simply been what was at hand.

<sup>65</sup> David Mathis (Executive Editor of [desiringGod.org](http://desiringGod.org)); "The Wine Jesus Drank," [www.desiringgod.org/articles/the-wine-jesus-drank](http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/the-wine-jesus-drank), May 27, 2020. Mathis quotes William Lane in the article.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Gary Manning Jr, "Paid in Full? The Meaning of Tetelestai in Jesus' Final Words," [www.biola.edu/blogs/good-book-blog/2022/paid-in-full-the-meaning-of-tetelestai-in-jesus-final-words](http://www.biola.edu/blogs/good-book-blog/2022/paid-in-full-the-meaning-of-tetelestai-in-jesus-final-words), April 20, 2022. Manning argues the popular explanation of *telestai* written as a receipt on the bottom of a tax bill was first introduced in 1896 and published in 1915 in Moulton and Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament*. The actual word is *telel* written as an abbreviation making *telestai* one of several possible translations. Nonetheless, even the word *telel* carries the idea of something that is finished.

When Elijah bravely confronted and executed the 450 false prophets of Baal on Carmel (1 Kings 18:40) he heard Queen Jezebel's threat of retaliation and her promise to kill him. Fearfully he ran and hid in the wilderness of Beersheba believing his life and ministry was over. "It is enough," was his despondent cry (1 Kings 19:4). It was not a declaration of victory or accomplishment but one of resignation and defeat. The mysterious handwriting on the palace wall sobered the arrogant Belshazzar telling him his Babylonian kingdom was finished (Dan 5:26-28). It was a message of hopelessness and finality. In contrast, faithful Paul faces the executioner's axe, with a calm and confident demeanor, he tells Timothy he has fought a good fight, finished the course, and kept the faith (2 Tim 4:7). The end of his race is not marred with regret and remorse but with thankful rejoicing.

As Jesus drew His final breaths, He does not say, "I am finished" but, "It is finished." It took Jesus six days to finish the work of creation (Gen 2:1; John 1:1-3; Col 1:16) and then He rested. It would take him six hours to finish the work of salvation before He could find rest from his labors (Rev 14:13). In what way was the work of salvation finished? If we could grasp by faith what was done on our behalf at Calvary that day, then we too, could rest in the salvation that was being secured and settled.

*Lord, the final payment of an outstanding debt brings both relief and rejoicing. Our sin debt was more than we could bear or pay. To know we are forgiven and free brings to us a joy unspeakable and full of glory. While the work of salvation is finished, may we be pliable in the hand of the divine Potter in your continuing work of sanctification. We love you, Lord. Amen.*

## Day Twenty-Seven

### The Taste of Death

*So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "It is finished!" And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit. **John 19:30** (NKJV)*

#### The Personal Suffering was Over

The flogging, the crown of thorns, the spike nails, the humiliation, and the separation was unimaginably horrible, yet there remained one more drop of God's wrath in the cup of sin. Jesus states simply from the cross, "I thirst." The night before His crucifixion, Jesus gathered around the Passover table with His disciples breaking bread and drinking from the cups, knowing this would be His last supper. Satan had already entered the covetous heart of Judas (Luke 22:3) and the treacherous plan was set in motion as the betrayer left the room and went out into the darkness (John 13:30). Jesus announces the new covenant is being established and will soon be sealed with His own blood (Exo 24:3-11; Matt 26:28). He sips from the cup and shares with His disciples, "I tell you; I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom (Matt 26:29)."

After the sleepless hours of intercession in the garden, interrogation by the authorities, and the crucifixion of Calvary, physical dehydration takes its toll and Jesus acknowledges His thirst.<sup>68</sup> It was the same thirst the rich man experienced when he died and lifted up his eyes in hell (Luke 16:23). Poor Lazarus was safe in the arms of Abraham, while Dives<sup>69</sup> desperately desired one drop of water to cool his burning tongue. The similarity of thirst shared by the rich man and Jesus is found in the chasm of separation. The great gulf prohibited father Abraham from satisfying the request of the rich man (Luke 16:26) is the same canyon that separates every sinner from God. "I thirst" was more than an appeal of the body's need for water. Jesus is identifying with sinners in His humanity and in His separation from the Father.

We are surprised at His request for water, especially when we consider who it is making the appeal. The One who covered 71% of the surface of the earth with water is thirsty. He caused it to rain forty days and nights in the time of Noah (Gen 7:12). He transformed a cloud

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<sup>68</sup> Editors Verse by Verse Ministry International, [www.versebyverseministry.org/bible-answers/did-jesus-break-his-promise-to-abstain-from-wine](http://www.versebyverseministry.org/bible-answers/did-jesus-break-his-promise-to-abstain-from-wine), May 15, 2015.

<sup>69</sup> Michael De Groote, "Mystery of 'Dives' in Parable of Rich Poor," [www.deseret.com/2009/7/31/20376397/mystery-of-dives-in-parable-of-rich-poor](http://www.deseret.com/2009/7/31/20376397/mystery-of-dives-in-parable-of-rich-poor), July 31, 2013. During the Middle Ages, Dives was the name given to the anonymous rich man in Luke 16. It is not a proper name but descriptive of his wealth. The Latin word for rich, opulent, and wealthy is dives.

the size of a man's hand into a mighty torrent that nearly kept wicked Ahab from returning to Jezreel (1 Kings 18:44). He sits on a throne from which an uncrossable river flows (Ezek 47:4). The One who controls the spigot of heaven, is asking men to give Him water to drink.

This was not the first time Jesus asked for a drink of water. Returning to Galilee, Jesus was determined not to bypass Samaria. He rested by Jacob's well as the disciples ventured into nearby Sychar to purchase food. At 12:00 noon a woman approached the well to draw water. She was startled when Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink," since their respective nationalities and obvious gender differences prohibited public conversation (John 4:7-9). Disregarding cultural restrictions, Jesus makes a bold and hopeful statement.

*Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water." **John 4:10** (NIV)*

The woman mused how Jesus could draw water from the deep well without a bucket, and in a moment of vulnerability, she verbalized her yearning for the promise of living water. The conversation that ensued would reveal, not only her great need, but the identity of Jesus as the Messiah. The joyous revelation caused her to leave her water pot and declare to all who would listen that she had found the Christ (John 4:29). In actuality, it was Jesus who found her (Luke 15:4; 19:10). As someone noted, Jesus did not come to the well for water, but for her.

Once again, we hear Jesus asking mere men to give Him a drink of water as He struggles on His cross. The primary purpose of the request was not to quench His thirst, but like the woman at the well, He was setting the stage for a greater revelation. When Jesus gave the cup to be shared at the Passover meal to His disciples, He instructed them to *drink ye all of it* (Matt 26:27). Jesus drank deeply from the cup His Father gave to Him, and at the ninth hour, He tilts the cup to His lips so as to taste the last drop of God's wrath. He strains to swallow but then looks into the empty vessel and says, "It is finished."

*Oh Father, death seems so ominous. We look into the grave and its empty darkness shouts with a voice of finality. Yet, Jesus knows that death is not punctuated with a period but a comma. It is a place where all mankind pauses on their way to eternity. Believers have the seal of your Spirit as the earnest of our inheritance and death no longer holds us in its fearful grip. Amen.*

## Day Twenty-Eight

### The Final Prophecy

*But instead, they give me poison for food; they offer me sour wine for my thirst. **Psalm 69:21** (NLT)*

#### The Prophetic Scripture was Fulfilled

On the morning of the resurrection, Jesus joined two bewildered and dejected disciples traveling the seven miles back to Emmaus, but they did not recognize Him. When He asked about the subject of their conversation and reason for their sad countenance, Cleopas recounted to Him the events of the weekend, the testimony of the women, and the news of an empty tomb. The two men had all the right information, but what they lacked was faith. Jesus does not immediately remove His divine disguise and reveal to them He was alive and well. Instead, He turned to the Scriptures, to the Law and the Prophets of the Old Testament, and began to expound on the prophecies that pointed to the Messiah and His ministry (Rom 10:17). The more Jesus taught the more their heart sweltered with joy and the more their soul filled with faith until their spiritual eyes were opened (Luke 24:13-34).

There are hundreds of passages and pictures in the pages of the Old Testament that prophetically describe in remarkable detail the birth, life, death, resurrection, ascension, and return of Jesus the Messiah. J. Barton Payne identified 574 Old Testament verses that are connected to Jesus, while Alfred Edersheim found only 465 verses.<sup>70</sup> A more conservative number of fulfilled prophecies is around 300 verses.<sup>71</sup> The secular mind marvels at the predictions of Nostradamus, a sixteenth century French physician and seer who is credited with forecasting the French Revolution, the rise of Napoleon and Hitler, and even the events of 9/11.<sup>72</sup> However, his repeated lines of cryptic verse in his book (*Centuries*) are often vague and require an active imagination to make historical events fit his prophecies. The prophecies of the Bible concerning the Messiah and Jesus are unmistakably precise.

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<sup>70</sup>Editors of Got Questions, "How Many Prophecies Did Jesus Fulfill?" [www.gotquestions.org/prophecies-of-Jesus.html](http://www.gotquestions.org/prophecies-of-Jesus.html), Accessed July 25, 2022. There is not a consensus among biblical scholarship as to the exact number of verses that directly or indirectly connect the Old Testament Messiah to the New Testament Jesus. The number of verses cited by Payne and Edersheim seem inflated, especially when you consider how tenuous symbolism and allegorical interpretation of Scripture can skew the final tally.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.; Editors New Testament Christians, [www.newtestamentchristians.com/bible-study-resources/351-old-testament-prophecies-fulfilled-in-jesus-christ/](http://www.newtestamentchristians.com/bible-study-resources/351-old-testament-prophecies-fulfilled-in-jesus-christ/), Accessed July 25, 2022.

<sup>72</sup> Amy McKenna, *Nostradamus and His Prophecies*, " [www.britannica.com/story/nostradamus-and-his-prophecies](http://www.britannica.com/story/nostradamus-and-his-prophecies), Accessed July 25, 2022.

Condensing the large volume of Old Testament prophecies to include only those that speak specifically of the events associated with the death of the Messiah would be a fruitful and monumental assignment. The detailed account of the sorrow and suffering of Jesus in Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53 have their initial fulfillment in David and the remnant of Israel.<sup>73</sup> The ultimate fulfillment of these passages is seen in the crucifixion of the Christ. Other texts prophetically declare the Messiah would be betrayed (Ps 41:9; Zech 11:12-13), accused (Ps 35:11), abused (Isa 50:6), beaten (Isa 50:6-7), hated without a cause (Psalm 69:4), ridiculed (Ps 109:25), scourged (Ps 129:3), pierced (Zech 12:10), and cursed of God (Deut 21:23). If we knew something of the historical Jesus but did not have access to the New Testament, we would undoubtedly recognize these verses collectively as pointing to Him.

There is only one more prophecy to be fulfilled before Jesus is finished. The psalmist notes the dire thirst of the dying Messiah.

*My strength has dried up like sunbaked clay. My tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth. You have laid me in the dust and left me for dead. **Psalm 22:15** (NLT)*

A few chapters later, David described how his thirst was slaked.

*But instead, they give me poison for food; they offer me sour wine for my thirst. **Psalm 69:21** (NLT)<sup>74</sup>*

When Jesus told Cleopas and his companion *that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled* (Luke 24:44), He was referring to more than His death in general. He was claiming every prophetic detail would be completed. When Jesus tasted the sour wine, He knew there were no more prophecies connected to His crucifixion that remained unfulfilled.

*Eternal God, your Word is eternal. What you declared in ages past has come to pass in the fulness of time. You are the Ancient of Days who does not change, in you there is no shadow of turning, and therefore, your Word is the anchor for our soul and the assurance of our salvation. You are the solid and firm foundation of our faith in every storm and the righteous run unto you, Rock of Ages, and we are safe. Amen.*

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<sup>73</sup> Tovia Singer, "Who Is God's Suffering Servant? The Rabbinic Interpretation of Isaiah 53," <https://outreachjudaism.org/gods-suffering-servant-isaiah-53/>; Accessed July 25, 2022. Editors Got Questions, "Is the 'Suffering Servant' Prophecy in Isaiah 53 About Jesus?" [www.gotquestions.org/suffering-servant-Isaiah-53.html](http://www.gotquestions.org/suffering-servant-Isaiah-53.html), Accessed July 26, 2022.

<sup>74</sup> Matthew cites the act of giving sour wine (vinegar) twice in his Gospel (Matt 26:34, 48). Not every prophecy is a direct one-to-one correlation. The New Testament writers often saw in the Old Testament texts an allusion that connected the identity of the Messiah to Jesus.



## Day Twenty-Nine

### Behind the Veil

*Under the old covenant, the priest stands and ministers before the altar day after day, offering the same sacrifices again and again, which can never take away sins. But our High Priest offered himself to God as a single sacrifice for sins, good for all time. Then he sat down in the place of honor at God's right hand. **Hebrews 10:11-12** (NLT)*

#### The Priestly Sacrifice was Finished

Jesus was crucified outside the gates of Jerusalem (Heb 13:12) and as He was dying the veil of the Temple in the city was miraculously torn in two from the top to the bottom (Luke 23:45). The heavy curtain was a barrier separating the sanctuary within the Temple suspended between the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place. The drape was a massive tapestry of fine linen made of twisted threads of purple, blue, and scarlet, measuring sixty feet wide, thirty feet tall, and four inches thick.<sup>75</sup> The priestly sons of Levi had access to the Holy Place where the table of showbread would be refreshed, the lampstands continually refilled, and the altar of incense reignited symbolizing the prayers of the people of God.<sup>76</sup>

Behind the veil was the Holy of Holies, considered to be the most sacred space in the Temple complex. Guarded by the cherubim,<sup>77</sup> was the Ark of the Covenant representing the very throne of God as He ruled from His mercy seat.<sup>78</sup> Once a year only the High Priest was permitted to enter the Most Holy Place with the blood sacrifice of an innocent animal and sprinkle the blood on the mercy seat as an atonement for the sins of the nation (Lev 16). The torn veil from the top downward points to a divine act whereby access to God by all people was now available. The sacrificial system of the Mosaic Law had fulfilled its purpose in providing the framework from which a better sacrifice would be offered (Heb 9:1-10:18). The sacrifice of Jesus on the cross was once and for all time. The ritual of slaughtering an animal, the pomp of

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<sup>75</sup> Wybren H. Oord, "The Veil of the Tabernacle," [www.christianstudylibrary.org/article/veil-tabernacle](http://www.christianstudylibrary.org/article/veil-tabernacle), Accessed August 28, 2022. There is not a clear consensus on the exact measurement of the veil since the length of a cubit is debatable.

<sup>76</sup> Editors My Jewish Learning, "Ritual Objects in the Jerusalem Temple," [www.myjewishlearning.com/article/ritual-objects-in-the-jerusalem-temple/](http://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/ritual-objects-in-the-jerusalem-temple/), Accessed August 26, 2022.

<sup>77</sup> Editors Solomon's Temple, "Cherubim," [www.3dbibleproject.com/en/temple/details/cherubim.htm](http://www.3dbibleproject.com/en/temple/details/cherubim.htm), Accessed August 20, 2022. Cherubim is the plural of cherub and refers to high ranking angels tasked with guarding the glory of God. They were placed at the entrance of Eden (Gen 3:24) and within the Holy of Holies expanding the entire width of the Most Holy Place designed to communicate the unapproachableness to God's throne by sinners.

<sup>78</sup> The Ark of the Covenant was a gold covered box containing the Ten Commandments and the budded staff of Aaron. Its golden lid was called the mercy seat where God would be symbolically seated.

passing through the dividing veil, and the annual sprinkling of innocent blood would no longer be necessary. The partial picture of atonement was being replaced with the completed portrait of the love and justice of God (Ps 85:10).

Jesus sat down at the right hand of the Father, not because He was tired, but because He was finished with the task the Father had assigned. The Old Testament Tabernacle and Temple had furnishings that allowed the priest to fulfill their ritual assignments, but neither the mobile sanctuary in the wilderness or permanent sanctuary in Jerusalem had a place for the priests to sit since the work was never done. His personal suffering was over, the prophetic Scriptures were fulfilled, and the priestly sacrifices were no more. "It is finished" was not a sorrowful lament, but a shout of victory.

From 1927 to 1941 Gutzon Borglum designed and sculpted Mount Rushmore in Keystone, South Dakota. The sixty-foot faces of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Theodore Roosevelt, and Abraham Lincoln majestically peer from their mountain perch as a reminder to coming generations of our national heritage and hope. Most people are unaware that the Black Hill's project changed design several times and Borglum died before he could complete the job. Not so with Christ and His cross! The blueprint was laid from the foundation of the world (1 Pet 1:20), each phase of the project was completed on time (Gal 4:4) without alteration or modification, and the debt was fully covered at Calvary.

*High Priest of Heaven, hear our prayer and intercede for us. You were tempted in all points as we are, yet without succumbing to sin. You faced the challenges of the Wicked One in the wilderness but emerged victorious. You despised the shame of the cross but endured its torturous agony until every drop of righteous wrath was poured out. We declare along with the doubting disciple, "You, Jesus, are our Lord and our God!" Amen.*

## Day Thirty

It is Finished

*“Awake, awake! Stand up, O Jerusalem, you who have drunk at the hand of the LORD The cup of His fury; You have drunk the dregs of the cup of trembling, and drained it out.” Isaiah 51:17 (NKJV)*

### The Price of Sin was Paid

The imagery of the contents of a cup as a representation of the wrath of God can be found in the Old Testament. Dregs are the sediment that settles at the bottom of the cup such as the remnant of a tea bag or coffee grounds. It usually refers to something that is undesirable, least valuable, or a small portion that is unwanted. It's the bottom of the barrel or the dregs of society. Isaiah used the word to picture the full fury of God's wrath toward sin. It was God who gave Israel the cup and they drank every drop until God's anger was abated (Isa 51:18-21).

Once the cup was emptied, God gave the promise that His people would never again taste its bitter contents. The cup of judgment would then be passed to those who had tormented Israel, destroyed Jerusalem, and killed her young men.

*This is what your Sovereign LORD says, your God, who defends his people: “See, I have taken out of your hand the cup that made you stagger; from that cup, the goblet of my wrath, you will never drink again. I will put it into the hands of your tormentors, who said to you, ‘Fall prostrate that we may walk on you.’ And you made your back like the ground, like a street to be walked on.” **Isa 51:22-23** (NIV)*

It was the final drop, the dregs of the cup, that Jesus now requests. He is receiving the full wrath of God for the sin in the garden. The Apostle John wrote that Jesus is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2). When Jesus drinks from the cup, a prophecy is being fulfilled as well as an eternal transaction completed. The debt of sin is being paid in full and sinners are being set free. “Jesus did not sip from the cup,” wrote Charles Spurgeon, “but drank its contents completely so that there would be nothing left for you and me taste.” Spurgeon rightly referred to the grail as the cup of damnation.

“The whole of the punishment of his people was distilled into one cup; no mortal lip might give it so much as a solitary sip. When he put it to his own lips, it was so bitter, he well-nigh spurned it. “Let this cup pass from me.” But his love for his people was so strong, that he took the cup in both his hands, and “At one tremendous draught of love He drank damnation dry,” for all his people. He drank it all, he endured all, he suffered all; so that now for ever there are no flames of hell for them, no racks of torment; they have no eternal woes; Christ hath suffered all they ought to have suffered, and they must, they shall go free.”<sup>79</sup>

Repentance is the response of a heart that has experienced the grace of God. We recognize our guilt, turn from our rebellion, and surrender to the Savior as the love and light of Calvary dawns in our soul. We are declared righteous (Rom 3:22; 5:1) because of His death and we are given life because of His resurrection. All human boasting is thereby removed and God alone receives the glory (Gal 6:14). Oswald Chambers understood the basis of forgiveness to be centered on the cross and not our tearful repentance.

“We trample the blood of the Son of God if we think we are forgiven because we are sorry for our sins. The only explanation for the forgiveness of God and for the unfathomable depth of His forgetting is the death of Jesus Christ. Our repentance is merely the outcome of our personal realization of the atonement which He has worked out for us. It does not matter who or what we are; there is absolute reinstatement into God by the death of Jesus Christ and by no other way, not because Jesus Christ pleads, but because He died. It is not earned, but accepted. All the pleading which deliberately refuses to recognize the Cross is of no avail; it is battering at a door other than the one that Jesus has opened. Our Lord does not pretend we are all right when we are all wrong. The atonement is a propitiation where by God, through the death of Jesus, makes an unholy man holy.”<sup>80</sup>

*Tetelestai* was the cry from the cross. Sin’s debt was considered paid in full. Evangelist Alexander Weston was approached by a man who asked him, “What must I do to be saved?” “It’s too late,” Weston said. The response puzzled the seeker and he anxiously inquired, “Do you mean it is too late for me to be saved? Is there anything I can do?” The preacher replied, “It’s already been done! The only thing you can do is believe.” Believe is what Paul told the anxious jailor at Philippi (Acts 16:31), believe is what Peter preached to the household of

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<sup>79</sup> The Old Guys Quotes, “Charles Spurgeon: He Drank Damnation Dry,” <https://theoldguys.org/2013/12/05/charles-spurgeon-he-drank-damnation-dry/>, Accessed August 27, 2022. The quote is an excerpt from *The New Park Street Pulpit Sermons, Vol. III* (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1855), 155. Sermon No. 126; Titled: Justification by Grace; Delivered on Sabbath Morning, April 5th, 1857.

<sup>80</sup> Grace Quotes, <https://gracequotes.org/quote/we-trample-the-blood-of-the-son-of-god-if-we-think-we-are-forgiven-because-we-are-sorry-for-our-sins-the-only-explanation-for-the-forgiveness-of-god-and-for-the-unfathomable-depth-of-his-forgetting-i/>, Accessed August 26, 2022.

Cornelius (Acts 10:43), believe is what Jesus said to searching Nicodemus (John 3:15). Do you believe? Do you believe He died on the cross? Do you believe He died on the cross for you?

While the work of salvation is finished, the ongoing process of sanctification remains (Phil 1:6). Those who believe are not only saved but are being shaped into the very image of Christ (Rom 8:29-30). The grace of God continues to mold every church and every Christian to be a reflection of the original design (Gen 1:27). He is not recreating us into the image of Adam, but fashioning those He redeems into His own image (2 Cor 5:17). We are becoming new creatures for a new heaven and a new earth (Rev 21:1). In that glorious day, Jesus will say, "It is finished" one more time.

*And he also said, "It is finished! I am the Alpha and the Omega—the Beginning and the End. To all who are thirsty I will give freely from the springs of the water of life. **Rev 21:6** (NLT)*

*God, please move on our hearts that we might express more than remorse, but genuine repentance. Help us to sense the awfulness of our sin and to recognize the cost that Jesus paid with his own blood for our redemption. May the sorrow of our soul give way to true faith and a desire to walk in obedience to your Word and will. Amen.*

## Day Thirty-One

### His Last Breath

*And when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said, "Father, 'into Your hands I commit My spirit.'" Having said this, He breathed His last. **Luke 23:46** (NKJV)*

Essie Dunbar was 30 years old when she died the first time. In 1915, the Blackville, South Carolina resident suffered an epileptic attack. Dr. Briggs declared her officially deceased because she was no longer breathing and lacked a pulse. Her body was placed in a coffin and then buried the next morning. Essie's sister arrived late for the funeral and demanded to have the body exhumed that she might express her final goodbye. When they dug up the casket and opened the lid, Essie sat up and smiled at her sister. The woman lived an additional 47 years before truly dying from natural causes.<sup>81</sup>

All four gospels record Jesus died and was buried. The fact He actually died is foundational to the faith. If Jesus did not die on the cross then the whole of the Christian faith is based on a lie.

*For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. **1 Corinthians 15:3-4** (NIV)*

It is not surprising that Satan has sought to discredit the biblical account of the crucifixion considering its significance in salvation. Throughout the past 2000 years efforts have been made to provide a different narrative or explanation concerning the events at Golgotha. Gnosticism was a complex and mystical belief system that incorporated Christian ideas into pagan theology. It embraced a dualistic understanding of human beings teaching the physical body was inherently evil, while the spirit alone was good. Gnostics claimed an elevated knowledge (gnosis) gained through special revelation outside of Scripture. The person of Jesus only appeared in physical form while on earth. The spirit descended on Jesus at His baptism but departed from Him prior to His crucifixion.<sup>82</sup> Gnostic doctrine was considered heresy and rightfully condemned as an attack on the atonement and the deity of Christ. As a sacrificial

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<sup>81</sup> Andrei Tapalaga, "The Woman Who Lived Another 40 Years After Being Buried," <https://historyofyesterday.com/the-woman-who-lived-another-40-years-after-being-buried/>, September 10, 2022.

<sup>82</sup> Got Questions, "What is Christian Gnosticism?" <https://www.gotquestions.org/Christian-gnosticism.html>, Accessed June 2, 2022.

substitute for sinful man, Jesus had to be fully human possessing a real physical body (Heb 2:14-17).

Islam acknowledges and embraces Jesus as one of Almighty God's greatest messengers to humankind. He was born of the Virgin Mary, lived a simple and pious life, performed miracles, and taught a message of love and mercy calling people to faith and obedience to the Creator. Envious Jews conspired to have the Prophet Jesus killed. In the midst of accusations, the flurry of the arrest, and the abuse of Jesus, the blood thirsty mob became confused and crucified His betrayer while the Son of Mary escaped and returned to heaven.<sup>83</sup> In this religious system salvation is secured through the personal merit of the individual rather than the redemptive work of Christ.

Within the ranks of Christianity, liberal theology endorsed the possibility Jesus swooned on the cross to the point of unconsciousness but was later resuscitated in the coolness of the borrowed tomb. First proposed by Heinrich E.G. Paulus in *The Life of Jesus* (1828), and later modified by scholar Hugh J. Schonfield in his book *The Passover Plot* (1969), the Swoon Theory argues that Jesus slipped into a coma-like state, revived in the tomb, rolled away the stone and evaded the Roman soldiers who were standing guard. Schonfield writes Jesus enlisted the aid of Joseph of Arimathea and Lazarus of Bethany to advance the crucifixion hoax.<sup>84</sup> To deny the core of Christianity while claiming to be Christian hollows out biblical faith, making those who preach the error, enemies of the cross (Phil 3:18).

A comical and common Easter sermon illustration records the exchanging of letters between Uticus and Bewildered within the context of an advice column in a local newspaper.<sup>85</sup>

Dear Uticus,

Our preacher said on Easter that Jesus just swooned on the cross and that His disciples nursed Him back to health. What do you think?

Sincerely, Bewildered.

Dear Bewildered,

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<sup>83</sup> Editors Muslim Unity Center, "How is Jesus Perceived in Islam?" [www.muslimunitycenter.org/how-is-jesus-perceived-in-islam/](http://www.muslimunitycenter.org/how-is-jesus-perceived-in-islam/), Accessed June 4, 2022.

<sup>84</sup> Tim Chaffey, *Faking Death*, <https://answersingenesis.org/jesus-christ/resurrection/faking-death/>, March 29, 2013.

<sup>85</sup> Editors Salt for Sermons, "Explain Easter with One Piece of Paper," <https://saltforsermons.org.uk/category/easter/>, April 4, 2017.

Beat your preacher with a cat of nine tails with 39 heavy strokes, nail him to a cross, hang him in the sun for six hours, run a spear through his heart, embalm him, put him in an airless tomb for 36 hours, and see what happens.

Sincerely, Uticus.

Each of these alternative proposals, and many others like them, do not deny the historical event of the crucifixion, but have serious disagreement with either details or doctrinal interpretations of the story. This raises the question, "Did Jesus really die on the cross and does it really matter?" Essie Dunbar did not die in 1915. Although many people considered her a ghost or a zombie after her live burial, she went on to live another four decades. If Jesus does not literally die on the cross as the Son of God, then the Bible is not true, sin's debt is not paid, and the hope of every believer is dashed on the rocks of fabricated theology (1 Cor 15:12-19). A closer examination of the last moment, the last words, and the last breath of Jesus from the cross provides credibility to the drama and certainty to our faith.

*Father, you are great and glorious. While the hammers of criticism have sought to silence your truth throughout the centuries, the anvil of your Word remains. The work of Calvary is finished and Jesus has forever settled our sin debt. His stripes have made us whole and we boldly come into your presence with both our praises and our petitions. Amen.*



## Day Thirty-Two

### The Triumph of the Cross

*The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.” **John 10:17-18** (NIV)*

#### His Last Moment

The last enemy we will face is death (1 Cor 15:26). It silently stalks us with subtle reminders of greying hair and emerging wrinkles that its arrival is inevitable. Like a thief, death is no respecter of persons and comes at an unexpected hour carrying away our most prized possessions. Our own thoughts of when, where, and how we will die is often a fearful mystery. While death can come suddenly, most people march haltingly and reluctantly to the place where death awaits. With each passing day their strength and cognitive ability slowly seep from their bodies until their final moments are marked by shallow breaths and dropping blood pressure.

The myriad of unsung nursing heroes quietly ministers to their dying patients and their families in these waning moments. They recognize the clear signs that death is near. Body temperatures lower, breathing patterns change, and the heart rate decelerates. There may be a loss of consciousness, or confusion expressed by non-sensical statements, or conversations carried on with persons not readily visible to others in the room.<sup>86</sup> A person may mentally desire to be released from this war, but the physical body remains stubbornly determined to fight for every last second of life.

After six hours of crucifixion, Jesus has come to his final moments. He is neither fearful or mystified. His body has lost a tremendous amount of blood, His mind stressed with the bombardment of accusation, and His spirit grieved with divine abandonment, yet He is not swooning on the cross or struggling to stay alive. There is no death rattle in His voice, no vital signs indicating His death is imminent, and no loss of consciousness or cognition. Jesus is in full control of all that is happening at the cross. He demonstrated His mastery over death when He commanded the dead daughter of Jarius to arise (Luke 8:41-56) and the lifeless body of his friend Lazarus (John 11:1-44) to come out of the graveyard. Jesus is not trying to loosen the grip of death or pry its fingers open so He could be free. The Father gave the Son complete authority in all matters of life and death.

The conflict on the cross was not with Satan and his minions or with death and its threat of finality. It was the taste of sin that Jesus dreaded and the separation from the presence of

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<sup>86</sup> Renaissance Funeral Home and Crematory, “What Happens in the Minutes Before Death?” <https://rfhr.com/what-happens-minutes-before-death/>, Accessed September 3, 2022.

the Father that caused His soul to be flooded with angst. The Lord of life is also the Lord of death. Jesus flexed his divine muscles as He throttled death at the cross and once again at His own resurrection (Luke 24:6-7) three days later. He promised resurrection to believers (John 11:25-26), removed the fear of death for His followers (Heb 2:15), and put hope in the heart of the redeemed that death would never have the last word (1 Cor 15:55-56). The final act of His authority will happen when the sentencing of creation is complete and death and hell are cast into the Lake of Fire (Rev 20:14). The last moment of the life of Jesus was not of a whimpering and whipped dog, but the roar of a conquering lion from the tribe of Judah (Rev 5:5).

*You are indeed the Lion of the Tribe of Judah; the Lamb that was slain but raised with healing in his wings. Lord, all the angels of heaven and all the redeemed of earth, kneel before your majesty as a preview of that day when every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Amen.*

## Day Thirty-Three

### The Shout of Victory

*Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. In a loud voice they were saying: "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!"* **Revelation 5:11-12** (NIV)

#### His Last Word

Jesus spoke seven sayings from the cross. "Father, forgive them," "Today, you will be with me in paradise," "Woman, behold your son," "My God, My God," "I thirst," "It is finished," and "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." His final word was a prayer to the Father. The ordeal of crucifixion began with intercession for sinners. Jesus asked the Father to show forgiveness to His ignorant enemies, but within a few hours, the dark clouds of sin gathered, separating Him from the Father and obscuring His face. The awful hour Jesus dreaded most had now come and gone. Sin's price had been paid and with joyful confidence Jesus prays to His Father knowing eternal fellowship had been restored.

The closing prayer of Jesus is not spoken with a sigh of resignation but with the shout of satisfaction. He is not elevating His voice to gain the attention of God who is distracted or preoccupied with other business. His benediction is heard clearly by those who are around the cross announcing His race was completed and His departure was imminent. He loudly commits His spirit into the hands of the Father as if He were speaking into a megaphone.<sup>87</sup> *Megas phoneo* is the same Greek phrase used by the host of heaven in adoration and worship of the Lamb in the Revelation.

#### A Word of Trust

The commitment of His spirit into the hands of the Father are words of trust. Commit is a banking word. When you make a deposit, you are trusting the repository will safeguard your money. However, even if the institution is insured by the FDIC (Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation), accounts are covered with a limit of \$250,000 in the event of an economic catastrophe.<sup>88</sup> The Bank of Heaven guarantees a greater security. As Paul faced his final days he declared to young Timothy, "I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able

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<sup>87</sup> [www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g5455/kjv/tr/0-1/](http://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g5455/kjv/tr/0-1/), Accessed August 5, 2022. Strong's identifies the Greek word *phoneo* as the sound a rooster makes. It means to cry aloud, to summon, to invite. From *phoneo* comes the English word *megaphone* (a device used to amplify the voice).

<sup>88</sup> Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, "Deposit Insurance at a Glance," [www.fdic.gov/resources/deposit-insurance/brochures/deposits-at-a-glance](http://www.fdic.gov/resources/deposit-insurance/brochures/deposits-at-a-glance), Accessed August 6, 2022.

to keep what I have committed to Him until that day (2 Tim 1:12).” We are kept by the power of God (1 Pet 1:5), sealed by the Holy Spirit (Eph 1:13), secured by His love (Rom 8:38-39), and placed in His hand from which no man can pluck us out (John 10:28).

This same confidence in the keeping ability of God was expressed by Stephen as he was being pelted with the rocks of jealousy. He had been accused of blasphemy but was divinely empowered to defend his comments before a Jewish council. Stephen masterfully recounted the heritage of his people demonstrating Israel’s historical resistance to the plans and purposes of God (Acts 7:2-53). The anger of these Jewish leaders reached a boiling point as they rushed at Stephen and threw stones at him to permanently silence his voice. Luke records in the Book of Acts the final words of this faithful deacon.

*And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not charge them with this sin.” And when he had said this, he fell asleep. **Acts 7:59-60** (NKJV)*

With courage and confidence, Stephen committed his soul into the care of the Creator. It is not unusual to hear words of committal at a graveside service. The physical body is committed to the ground of the earth while the spiritual body is committed to the glory of heaven. Jesus is surrendering His spirit with unreserved assurance knowing in three days His spirit would be reunited with His glorified and resurrected body.

#### A Word of Truth

The commitment of His spirit into the hands of the Father are not only words of trust, they are also words of truth. Jesus lived His entire life in the will of God (John 6:38) and in accordance to the Word of God. Throughout His earthly ministry He would cite Scripture, most often the Psalms and Deuteronomy<sup>89</sup>, as the basis of His teaching or source of His authority. As Jesus faced the temptations in the wilderness, He rebuked the Adversary three times with the preface, “It is written (Matt 4:4, 7, 10).” He quoted the prophet Isaiah, who wrote of the mission and ministry of the Messiah (Isa 61:1-2), declaring the words were a reference to Himself (Luke 4:21). He repeated what Moses had written in the Torah when asked the question, “What is the greatest commandment (Deut 6:4-5; Mark 12:29-30)?” Harold Wilmington references 180 verses in the four gospels as direct quotes or allusions to Old Testament texts cited by Jesus.<sup>90</sup>

It is not surprising the last words Jesus spoke before He died was a quote from the Scriptures. *Into your hands I commit my spirit; deliver me, LORD, my faithful God* (Ps 31:5 NIV), were words first spoken by David but appropriately applied to Jesus. Jesus had come in the

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<sup>89</sup> Shari Abbott, “Which Old Testament Book Did Jesus Quote Most Often?” <https://reasonsforhopejesus.com/old-testament-book-jesus-quote-often/>, Accessed August 7, 2022.

<sup>90</sup> Harold Wilmington, “Old Testament Passages Quoted by Jesus Christ,” [https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/second\\_person/71](https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/second_person/71), November, 2017. The Second Person File. 71.

volume of the book (Heb 10:7) to fulfill all that had been written about Him (Matt 5:17-18; Acts 13:29-30). The Scriptures formed the basis of His purpose in life, and in His last moments, they provided comfort and confidence.

This promise of help and hope is not limited to Christ alone, but every believer may lay claim to the truth of God's Word. Bruce Hurt tells the story of a woman who had been diagnosed with throat cancer and was facing a serious operation that could potentially lead to loss of speech or loss of life. Prior to the procedure, the surgeon asked the woman if there was anything else she would like to say? With the peace that passes all understanding, she calmly declared, "Blessed be the name of the Lord." God had given her hope in life, and now in the hour of her possible death, the anchor of her soul held fast (Heb 6:19) as she trusted in the Word of God and the God of the Word.

*Righteous Judge, we have been weighed in your balances and have been found wanting. We have come short of your glory and our righteousness are but filthy rags. What mystery and wonder, that we could give you these soiled and stained robes and in receive in exchange, a pure spotless cloak fitting for the celebration of the marriage of the Lamb. Amen.*

## Day Thirty-Four

### Death Never Has the Last Word

*Then the LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. **Genesis 2:7** (NIV)*

Genesis records God's crowning act in creation when He fashioned man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life (Gen 2:7). Divine air-filled Adam's lungs as he opened his eyes to see the beauty of Eden and the glory of God. He was alive and alert. The converse is true as Jesus exhaled His final breath and closed His eyes in death. His physical body hung limp and lifeless on the cross. His heart quit beating, His tongue silenced, and His suffering complete.

There is a finality to death. The family stands vigil around the hospital bed of a loved one waiting for that last breath. Their eyes are focused on the movement of the chest until its stillness signifies death has arrived. Someone in the room quietly observes the obvious, "They're gone." Despite the many days of this anticipated moment, the reality and coldness of the news is overwhelming. Each of the Gospel writers record the very moment Jesus died. Mark and Luke wrote, "He breathed his last" (Mark 15:37; Luke 23:46). Matthew said, "He yielded his spirit (Matt 27:50)," and John declared, "He gave up His spirit (John 19:30)." There occurred a separation between His body and His soul as death punctuated the conclusion to the life of the Messiah with a period.

This moment demands closer examination. His last breath was not a sigh of finality but a demonstration of authority. No one is taking His life, rather it is Jesus who is giving His life. He is not fighting to remain alive as long as possible, but once the contents of the cup of sin is consumed and the wrath of God fully satisfied, Jesus determines when death can complete its task.

*"The Father loves me because I sacrifice my life so I may take it back again. No one can take my life from me. I sacrifice it voluntarily. For I have the authority to lay it down when I want to and also to take it up again. For this is what my Father has commanded."*  
**John 10:17-18** (NLT)

The Apostle John wrote that Jesus bowed His head, then gave up His spirit. The normal pattern for death is once we breath our last, then our head droops in surrender. As sovereign over life and death, Jesus announces when the angel of death may approach the King and claim his prize. Haughty death has not humbled the Savior, but Jesus obediently humbled Himself to the point of death, even the death of the cross (Phil 2:8). Charles Spurgeon observed, "When

Jesus died, He bowed His head in worship and submission.” His surrender was not to the demands of the devil but the will of the Father.

Jesus faced His last enemy (1 Cor 15:26) with the same courage and boldness David exhibited when he stepped into the Valley of Elah to confront the boastful Philistine. Armed with a sling and a stone, with faith and accuracy, he brought the giant down. Fearlessly Jesus entered the Valley of the Shadow of Death (Ps 23:4) knowing He would emerge the Victor (Ps 16:10). From all appearances, when Jesus gave up the ghost, death had won. The truth, however, is that death had been defeated and Jesus would triumph over it (Col 2:14-15).

During the days when Jesus walked with His disciples, He sought to prepare them for the trial He knew was coming. He wanted to help them view death from the perspective of eternity. For the believer, death is a blessed event (Ps 116:15) and the grave is a place of victory (1 Cor 15:55-57). Certainly, we sorrow for our temporary loss, but our tears are shed in the hope of both resurrection and reunion (1 Thess 4:13-18). Jesus exposed death as a fraud. The god of this world (2 Cor 4:4) used the threat of death to cower and control humanity. Yet the power of the cross puts death in its proper submissive place.

*It is not the courage of a David or the wisdom of a Solomon that we need. It is you, Lord, that our hearts desire. We need the same God of the patriarchs and disciples. When we are transformed through the power of your regeneration the gifts of the Spirit are manifested in our lives providing help and healing to the nations. Here is our heart, Lord. Take it and fill it with your own glory. Amen.*

## Day Thirty-Five

### More to the Story

*Because God's children are human beings—made of flesh and blood—the Son also became flesh and blood. For only as a human being could he die, and only by dying could he break the power of the devil, who had the power of death. Only in this way could he set free all who have lived their lives as slaves to the fear of dying. **Hebrews 2:14-15** (NLT)*

Evangelist Vance Havner readily acknowledged the mysteries that surround death, especially as he pondered the passing of his own wife. But his faith in the Christ of the cross flooded his heart with blessed assurance when he wrote:

“When before the throne we stand in Him complete, all the riddles that puzzle us here will fall into place and we shall know in fulfillment what we now believe in faith - that all things work together for good in His eternal purpose. No longer will we cry "My God, why?" Instead, "alas" will become "Alleluia". All question marks will be straightened into exclamation points, sorrow will change to singing and pain will be lost in praise.”<sup>91</sup>

The life of Jesus does not end with a period but with an exclamation mark. Perhaps it is more accurate to say His death on the cross is punctuated with an ellipsis (three dots) indicating an intentional omission in the sentence. Thomas Jefferson edited the New Testament excluding any references to the miraculous or supernatural. He admired the philosophy of Jesus but his enlightened mind kept him from embracing any notion of divinity. The Jefferson Bible ends with Jesus dying on the cross and being buried in the garden tomb.<sup>92</sup> Jesus dies on the cross, but there is more to the story, much more...

*Sweet Jesus, thank you for the continuing work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Thank you for placing us in the security of your palm and then fashioning us into your restored image. Even in those days where all hope seems lost, the same authority that spoke creation into existence, speaks to us and brings light and life. Only speak the word, and we shall be saved. Amen.*

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<sup>91</sup> The Berean Call: TBC Staff, “When Everything Fits into Place,” <https://www.thebereancall.org/content/when-everything-fits-place>, June 23, 2015.

<sup>92</sup> Erin Blakemore, “Why Thomas Jefferson Rewrote the Bible Without Jesus’ Miracles and Resurrection.” <https://www.history.com/news/thomas-jefferson-bible-religious-beliefs>, August 1, 2019.



## **On the Third Day**

## Day Thirty-Six

### Did Jesus Really Die

*From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. **Matthew 16:21** (NIV)*

#### The Certainty of Death

What about the challenges that question the veracity of His death? Did Jesus really die or did He simply appear to be dead? Did He slip into a coma and revive in the coldness of the tomb? When Jesus breathed His last breath, there was not only a finality to His death but a certainty as well. There are a number of witnesses who can attest to the fact of His death. First, we have the testimony of Jesus. Throughout His earthly ministry, Jesus would periodically share with His disciples the details of His death as they pressed towards Jerusalem. Peter responded, “You are the Christ,” to the question, “Who do you say that I am?” In simple and straightforward language, Jesus follows the declaration with the exact outline of the events soon to take place.

After His glorified appearance on the mount of Transfiguration (Matt 17:1), Jesus relayed to His followers the plan of both His crucifixion and resurrection.

*Leaving that region, they traveled through Galilee. Jesus didn't want anyone to know he was there, for he wanted to spend more time with his disciples and teach them. He said to them, “The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of his enemies. He will be killed, but three days later he will rise from the dead.” **Mark 9:30-31** (NLT)*

Again, days prior to His betrayal by Judas and His arrest in the garden, Jesus details what the prophets declared was soon to happen.

*Then He took the twelve aside and said to them, “Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man will be accomplished. For He will be delivered to the Gentiles and will be mocked and insulted and spit upon. They will scourge Him and kill Him. And the third day He will rise again.” **Luke 18:31-33** (NKJV)*

Despite His plain and repeated purpose, the disciples failed to grasp what Jesus was saying. Perhaps they heard what He said, but their determined ambition to crown Him as Israel's king kept them from believing His words. This same unbelief is exhibited in our day when men deny the simple statements of Jesus who predicted His own death. If Jesus did not die on the cross, then He perpetrated a lie. As a liar, His testimony would be considered invalid and His sacrifice as a sinless Savior unacceptable.

The witness of the executioners confirmed the certainty of the death of Jesus. Under the pretense of wanting to faithfully obey the demands of the Torah, the chief priests requested of Pilate the legs of the criminals be broken so as to hasten their death (John 19:31). Their desire to keep the Sabbath day holy (Exo 20:8) was superseded by their determination to kill the blasphemer. Governor Pilate agreed to their demands and gave the order. *Crurifragium* is the act whereby a heavy hammer is used to shatter the shin bones of victims of crucifixion impairing their ability to support their weight and draw a breath.<sup>93</sup> The criminal would die of asphyxiation within a matter of moments.

The legs of the two men who flanked Jesus at Golgotha were crushed. When the Roman soldier wielding the hammer approached Jesus, he noted Jesus was already dead (John 19:33) and breaking His legs would be unnecessary. Unwittingly the soldier was fulfilling an Old Testament picture and prophecy. The Passover lamb of Exodus was to be offered and eaten without its bones being broken (Exo 12:46) and the psalmist David declared God *guards all his bones; not one of them is broken* (Ps 34:20). Nonetheless, these experts at execution needed solid confirmation to verify His death.

One of the soldiers rammed the tip of his spear into the side of the Son of God. The gash was large enough for a man's hand to be inserted (John 20:27). The lifeless body of Jesus did not flinch, but from the wound flowed out blood and water (John 19:34). Science has sought to explain from a medical vantage the fluids which poured from the puncture was the result of pericardial effusion and pleural effusion. The physiological trauma of the flogging and crucifixion to the body would have contributed to capillaries leaking watery fluid from the blood to the tissues. Fluids would then build around the heart and lungs producing the stream of blood and water once the soldier thrust his weapon into the side of Jesus.<sup>94</sup>

There is no shortage of responses as to what the significance of the blood and water may represent. Witness Lee sees the blood as a representation of redemption and the water as the impartation of life.<sup>95</sup> JP Nunez provides commentary from a Roman Catholic perspective indicating the blood as the Eucharist and the water bearing a dual meaning of both the Holy Spirit and baptism.<sup>96</sup> According to the Director of the Gospel Coalition Canada, Wyatt Graham sees the

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<sup>93</sup> Kristina Killgrove, *This Bone is the Only Skeletal Evidence for Crucifixion in the Ancient World*, [www.forbes.com/sites/kristinakillgrove/2015/12/08/this-bone-provides-the-only-skeletal-evidence-for-crucifixion-in-the-ancient-world/?sh=4f78f56f476d](http://www.forbes.com/sites/kristinakillgrove/2015/12/08/this-bone-provides-the-only-skeletal-evidence-for-crucifixion-in-the-ancient-world/?sh=4f78f56f476d), December 8, 2015.

<sup>94</sup> Cahleen Shrier, *The Science of the Crucifixion*, [www.apu.edu/articles/the-science-of-the-crucifixion/#:~:text=When%20they%20came%20to%20Jesus,surrounding%20the%20heart%20and%20lungs;](http://www.apu.edu/articles/the-science-of-the-crucifixion/#:~:text=When%20they%20came%20to%20Jesus,surrounding%20the%20heart%20and%20lungs;) March 1, 2002.

<sup>95</sup> Living Stream Ministry, *The Fulfillment of the Tabernacle and the Offerings in the Writings of John*, [www.ministrysamples.org/excerpts/THE-SIGN-OF-BLOOD-AND-WATER-FLOWING-OUT-OF-THE-LORDS-PIERCED-SIDE.HTML](http://www.ministrysamples.org/excerpts/THE-SIGN-OF-BLOOD-AND-WATER-FLOWING-OUT-OF-THE-LORDS-PIERCED-SIDE.HTML), Accessed July 27, 2022.

<sup>96</sup> JP Nunez, *The Blood and Water that Flowed From Jesus' Side*, <https://catholicstand.com/the-blood-and-water-that-flowed-from-jesus-side/>, October 10, 2018.

elements as simply symbols of the New Covenant and baptism.<sup>97</sup> While these attempts to spiritualize the passage may find plausible support from other biblical texts, it seems that John adds this detail to his gospel primarily as a means to authenticate the death of Jesus.

*Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Prince of Peace, we praise and adore you today and express our endless thanks for your kindness and love demonstrated towards us. You are the Lord of life who laughs at rebels and dismisses death. You raised Lazarus with a single command, and one day, you will speak with the sound of a trumpet and the dead in Christ will rise to meet you in the air. Even so, come Lord Jesus. Amen.*

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<sup>97</sup> Wyatt Graham, "Why Did Blood and Water flow from Christ at the Cross?" <https://wyattgraham.com/why-did-blood-and-water-flow-from-christ-at-the-cross/>, July 4, 2019.

## Day Thirty-Seven

### This Man Was the Son of God

*Then I will pour out a spirit of grace and prayer on the family of David and on the people of Jerusalem. They will look on me whom they have pierced and mourn for him as for an only son. They will grieve bitterly for him as for a firstborn son who has died. **Zechariah 12:10** (NLT)*

The Apostle John recognized the prophetic fulfillment of the Roman soldier's actions when he stabbed the Savior's side quoting the minor prophet Zechariah, "They shall look upon Him whom they have pierced (Zech 12:10; John 19:37)." John is doing more than merely providing historical information and prophetic proof of the sequence of events. He is telling the story of the cross so we might believe (John 19:35). He wants us to believe the story, but more importantly, he has written his gospel and epistles so we might believe the Savior and have confidence in our salvation (1 John 5:13). At least one of the soldiers at the cross that day believed.

The centurion responsible for the crucifixion detail witnessed firsthand all the horrifying moments of Calvary. He heard the hateful and hurtful words of the religious leaders as well as the intercessory response of Jesus asking the Father to forgive. He witnessed the loving exchange between a mother and her Son. He overheard the railing of the crucified thief who hung beside Jesus and the promise of Paradise to another thief declaring his hope in a coming kingdom. He felt the darkness descend at noon and cringed at the cry, "My God, My God." He stood amazed that the final words from the cross sounded more like a victory shout than the lament of a despondent and defeated foe. The placard above the head of Jesus identified Him as the King of the Jews, but this hardened soldier of Rome saw something more after six hours.

Luke records the centurion saying, "Surely this was a righteous man" attesting to the innocence of Jesus and the injustice of the kangaroo court. These words are couched in the context of worship. The Gentile soldier gave glory to God as he spoke (Luke 23:47) suggesting a recognition of the true identity of the Christ. Matthew includes the same comment by the centurion with one variation, "Truly this was the Son of God (Matt 27:54)." Why did he see Jesus differently while the other guards remained blinded to the truth? How is it possible to witness all that transpired that day and conclude this was just another crucifixion? It was divine revelation that enabled Peter to boldly proclaim, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God (Matt 16:16). God gives seeing eyes (Eph 1:18) and hearing ears (Matt 11:15) leading a person to salvation. The centurion was given grace to believe.

There is an unsubstantiated legend connected with Augustus Toplady who was inspired to write the beloved hymn *Rock of Ages* while finding shelter from a thunderstorm in a rocky cleft

at Burrington Combe in Somerset, England (1775).<sup>98</sup> Despite the accuracy of its origin, Toplady grasped the mystery and marvel of the death of Jesus and the spearing of His side.

Rock of Ages, cleft for me, let me hide myself in thee;  
Let the water and the blood from thy wounded side which flowed,  
Be of sin the double cure; save from wrath and make me pure.

Jesus said He would die. His enemies made sure He was dead. Are there any more witnesses who can provide further testimony to the credibility of the news of His death? Once confirmation of the death of Jesus reached Pilate, the Governor granted permission to Joseph from the Jewish town of Arimathea to initiate the burial process for the corpse. Condemned criminals were not afforded an honorable burial and were often discarded to rot or be eaten by carrion. However, Joseph was a man of considerable influence. He was a wealthy member of the Jewish Council who privately believed Jesus was the Hope of Israel (Mark 15:53).

Joseph would need to act quickly as the evening shades lengthened and the beginning of the Sabbath loomed in the dusky twilight. He enlisted the help of a fellow Pharisee whose name was Nicodemus. This is the same man who arranged a midnight meeting with Jesus for fear of reprisal from the other religious leaders (John 3:1). The death of Jesus forced the faith of both Joseph and Nicodemus to become public. They took the body of Jesus down from the cross, washed the corpse, and wrapped it with strips of cloth soaked in 75 pounds of spices to mask the stench of decomposing flesh.<sup>99</sup> The body was then laid in the newly purchased garden tomb of the Arimathean and a large stone rolled securely into its proper place (Luke 23:50-55; John 19:38-42).<sup>100</sup>

The Old Testament provides prophetic passages centered on the birth, ministry, and death of the Messiah, so it also speaks of His burial. Seven hundred years prior to the event, Isaiah wrote the Suffering Servant would be *assigned a grave with the wicked and with the rich in his death* (Isa 53:9). The friends of Jesus were convinced there was no life left in the body as they handled the corpse and carried it to the grave yard. John Phillips masterfully imagines what might have taken place late Friday afternoon once the ordeal of crucifixion ended.

“Like all funerals, the world goes on about its business. Pilate went home to supper, the priests presided over Passover, John took care of Mary, and the disciples went into hiding. Peter was somewhere weeping, and one soldier tried on his new tunic while another one washed the blood off of his spear.”

*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. Holy Spirit, help our confession of Jesus be*

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<sup>98</sup> [https://hymnary.org/text/rock\\_of\\_ages\\_cleft\\_for\\_me\\_let\\_me\\_hide](https://hymnary.org/text/rock_of_ages_cleft_for_me_let_me_hide), Accessed August 8, 2022.

<sup>99</sup> Wayne Jackson, “The Burial of Christ’s Body,” <https://www.christiancourier.com/articles/1340-the-burial-of-christs-body>, October 8, 2022.

<sup>100</sup> Allister Begg, “The Burial of Jesus,” [www.truthforlife.org/resources/sermon/the-burial-of-jesus/](http://www.truthforlife.org/resources/sermon/the-burial-of-jesus/), December 14, 2003. Begg presents a thoughtful message in sermonic form dealing with the theological and practical implications of the burial of Jesus.

*bold and public. Grant our tongue to sing of his praises among the saints and to declare his name among the nations. May the song of our salvation find full expression in the words we speak and the life we live. Amen.*

## Day Thirty-Eight

### The Great Exchange

*But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. **Rom 5:8** (NIV)*

From all earthly accounts it was over. The kiss of betrayal from a trusted friend, the desertion of His loyal disciples, the mock trial before a corrupt Sanhedrin, the scourge at the hands of sadistic soldiers, and the compromising conviction pronounced by the puppet Pilate. The parade of prisoners through the narrow streets, the torture of nails driven into His hands and feet, the shame of His nakedness on full display, and the cruel comments from those He came to save were done. The greatest horror of the cross was separation from His Father. It was the midnight of His soul but He emerged from the darkness with the words, "It is finished," as He bowed His head and died.

What ended at the cross was not the life of Jesus but the supremacy of sin and the fear of death. Satan sought to crush the Christ but, in the process, experienced a devastating head wound stripping him of his power over fallen humanity. What had begun in eternity past, in the heart of God, had now been fulfilled in the fulness of time. His birth to the Virgin, His sinless life, and His sacrificial death, satisfied the righteous wrath of God toward sin. The resurrection would authenticate the offering of His life on the altar of the cross as acceptable to the Father and the gates of glory would be opened for those who would turn from sin and turn to the Savior.

It is impossible to comprehend all that happened within the context of those short six hours. With a fair amount of accuracy, it is possible to chronicle the biblical events as they transpired hour by hour. It is what happened in the heart of God between the Father and the Son that is beyond human reason. There is no explanation for the love of God toward sinful rebels. Yet the revelation of His grace is declared in the Scriptures and demonstrated on the cross.

*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. **John 3:16** (NKJV)*

*And Jesus said unto him, this day is salvation come to this house, for so much as he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost. **Luke 19:9-10** (KJV)*

*This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. **1 Timothy 1:15** (NKJV)*



*But we do see Jesus, who was made lower than the angels for a little while, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. **Hebrews 2:9** (NIV)*

*God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago. **Ephesians 2:8-10** (NLT)*

*This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. **1 John 4:10** (NIV)*

*Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. **John 15:13** (KJV)*

It is this incredible and indescribable love that draws us to Him and leads us to lay down our lives before Him. In humble and grateful submission, we give Him our sinfulness and in exchange, He gives us His righteousness. Thereby we join with the multitude of the redeemed and the myriad of heavenly angels in declaring *that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father* (Phil 2:11). Our peace, our joy, and our hope rests on the crucified Christ.

*Jesus, you are indeed the unspeakable gift. We have received all we need for holiness and godliness through your gospel. Jesus, you are enough. You are enough for the forgiveness of our sin, the defeat of the devil, the strength for every trial, and the source that meets every need according to your riches in glory. We cannot help but speak what we have seen and heard. Amen.*

## Day Thirty-Nine

### The Power of the Resurrection

*After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men. The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. **Matthew 28:1-6** (NIV)*

There were conflicting reports that morning. Jesus had died three days earlier but now news spread among the Passover pilgrims throughout the crowded city of Jerusalem that grave robbers had taken the body of Jesus, while others were claiming He had risen from the dead. The unbelievable tale told by a small group of grieving and foolish women testified of white-robed angels, sleeping soldiers, a large stone rolled away, and an empty tomb.

It was certainly true that the physical body of Jesus was missing. The reaction to the report was received with mixed reviews. Pilate was incredulous towards the soldiers who were derelict in their duties and sought their immediate execution. The religious leaders were fearful that the gullible followers of Jesus would be emboldened to continue their mission, so they paid the guards a large sum to say His body was stolen while they slept (Matt 28:12-15). Even though they had the joyful witness of the women and the repeated promise of the Savior (Matt 16:21; 17:23; 20:19; Mark 8:31; John 10:18), the disciples were among those who disregarded the possibility of a resurrection.

It would not be until Jesus appeared to the disciples that their faith would find solid footing (John 20:19). Their doubt was displaced and their fear faded as Jesus spoke His peace into their hearts. Although Thomas was not initially present, the invitation by Jesus for the doubter to put his hands into the scars of Golgotha, prostrated the disciple and surfaced within him the bold declaration, "My Lord and my God (John 20:28)."

It should not have been hard for the disciples to believe. They had walked with Jesus and witnessed the miracles of raising lifeless Lazarus (John 11), the widows only son (Luke 7), and the twelve-year-old daughter of Jairus (Luke 8). They overheard Jesus tell Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life (John 11:25)." They saw Him walk on water, open blinded eyes, feed a multitude with a handful of fish and loaves, but they could not believe He actually rose from the dead.

Biblical faith does not come by way of reason but revelation. While we are commanded to reason together (Isa 1:18), it is the work and wonder of the Holy Spirit that makes the resurrection a reality in our hearts, minds, and lives (Eph 1:18; Matt 16:17; 1 Cor 2:14). It is only

when we have met the Savior on our Emmaus Road (Luke 24:13-35) that there will be a change in our direction and affection (2 Cor 5:17).

Immediately after the death of Jesus, the disciples dispersed and cowered in the shadows, but after the resurrection a new hope reignited their passion and the arrival of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost gave them new power (Acts 2). This is the glory of the good news. Helpless, hopeless, and hell-bound sinners are forgiven of their sins and granted the promise of abundant and eternal life through the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. The echo of the angel has reverberated throughout the centuries to all who would hear and believe, "He is not here, He is risen!"

Have you been to Jesus for the cleansing power?  
Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?  
Are you fully trusting in His grace this hour?  
Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?

Are you washed in the blood,  
In the soul-cleansing blood of the Lamb?  
Are your garments spotless? Are they white as snow?  
Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?

--E. A. Hoffman (1878)

*Father God, your incarnation of flesh among us proved your promise, your crucifixion proved your love, and your resurrection proved your power. You are for us and not against us. It is not your will that we perish but have everlasting life. Thank you, Lord, for showing us your heart when you showed us Jesus. If we have seen the Son, we have seen the Father. Amen.*

## Day Forty

### Our Only Hope

*For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. **1 Corinthians 15:3-5** (NIV)*

It is the whole gospel that is the power of God unto salvation (Rom 1:16-17). As one of the earliest confessions of faith, Paul reminds us that the contents of the good news is that Jesus was crucified, buried, and resurrected. It is not merely the fact that Jesus died but that He also rose from the dead that authenticates all that has been declared concerning His identity. If Jesus did not raise from the dead, then our faith and our preaching is in vain (1 Cor 15:12-19). Our hope is misplaced and the promise of eternal life is empty and delusional.

Yet the transformed lives of His disciples and the boldness of their resurrection proclamations was a testimony that the Savior was not only alive, but alive in them. The entirety of their belief was based on the reality of the resurrection of Jesus. Their fearless faith rested on the promise that the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead would raise them up also (Rom 8:11). Their recorded sermons in the Book of Acts reflect the appropriate emphasis on both the crucifixion and resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

*Therefore, let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ. **Acts 2:36** (NKJV)*

*The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. **Acts 3:13-15** (NIV)*

*Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: "Rulers and elders of the people! If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a man who was lame and are being asked how he was healed, then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. **Acts 4:8-10** (NIV)*

*When they had carried out all that was written about him, they took him down from the cross and laid him in a tomb. But God raised him from the dead and for many days he was seen by those who had traveled with him from Galilee to Jerusalem. They are now his witnesses to our people. **Acts 13:29-31** (NIV)*

*Therefore, having obtained help from God, to this day I stand, witnessing both to small and great, saying no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come— That Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should shew light unto the people, and to the Gentiles. **Acts 26:22-23** (NKJV)*

Like His crucifixion, the story of the resurrection is deeply rooted in Old Testament passages (Psalm 16:10; Isa 29:16; 53:8-10; Job 19:25-26; Dan 12:2). Jesus cited the prophet Jonah and his three-day ordeal inside a large fish as an illustration of His three days in the heart of the earth (Matt 12:40). The core of Christianity declares that Jesus was crucified because of our sins and He was raised from the dead to make us right with God (Rom 4:25). Without the cross there is no forgiveness of sin (Heb 9:22) and without the resurrection there is no hope of eternal life (1 Pet 1:3).

Timothy Keller succinctly summarizes the necessity of the resurrection when he writes, “If Jesus rose from the dead, then you have to accept all that he said; if he didn’t rise from the dead, then why worry about any of what he said? The issue on which everything hangs is not whether or not you like his teaching but whether or not he rose from the dead.” His resurrection is the declaration that Jesus is Lord and in eternity, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess this eternal truth (Phil 2:5-8).

The debt of sin has been paid and the resurrection is the receipt. The incarnation of the Christ was the promise and the resurrection of the Christ was the promise fulfilled. His death gives us life and His resurrection grants to us life abundantly (John 10:10). This is our present hope and it is a hope that will extend into all eternity! John Owen, the Puritan preacher, was on his death bed, he wanted to dictate a letter to some close friends. He began, “I am still in the land of the living.” “Stop,” Owen said. “Change that and say, ‘I am yet in the land of the dying, but I soon hope to be in the land of the living.’” This is the power and promise of the Crucified Christ.

*Lord Jesus, we surrender our hearts to you today. We believe you died, were buried, and you rose again just as the Scriptures declare. We ask you to be the Lord and Savior of our lives. Forgive us of our sin, fill us with your Spirit, and use us for your glory. Thank you for the old rugged cross and the empty tomb! Thank you, Jesus, for the promise of your Spirit and the promise of heaven. Indeed, and forever, I am my beloved’s and my Beloved is mine. Amen*

