

PASSION WEEK

A Study of the Events Surrounding
Jesus' Crucifixion and Their Timing

By Will Duke

BIBLICAL TIMEKEEPING

The Jewish Day

The Jewish day began at sunset; for example, the Sabbath (Saturday) began at sundown on our Friday evening and lasted until sundown on our Saturday. The Passion Week Chart reflects this reality: each day begins at sundown on our prior day. Therefore, in the Jewish day, evening came first, then night, and finally daytime. This is why the creation accounts describe each day as an evening and a morning (e.g., Ge. 1:5).

The Jewish Calendar

A Jewish year is based on 12 lunar cycles. Each month begins with the first sighting of the new crescent after the dark moon. The word “month” comes from the word “moon.” Each Jewish month is 28 days long, so each year, the calendar loses 11 days. As a consequence, the month of Nisan begins 11 days earlier each successive year. In order to keep Nisan in the spring, every third year, an additional 28-day month is inserted before the month of Nisan. We’re not sure what they called that month; it may have been the second month of Adar (the last month of the year) or a second Nisan.

The Passover

Instituted by God at the time of the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt, it commemorates the “passing over” by the death angel of Jewish homes on which lamb’s blood had been painted on the doorposts and lintel (Ex. 12:1-20). Passover is a seven-day long spring festival commencing on the 15th of the month of Nisan. Nisan is the first month of the Jewish religious calendar (the seventh of the civil calendar). The name “Nisan” is from the Babylonian word *nisānu* meaning “first fruits.” It is also called the month of Abib which is Hebrew for “head of grain” (Ex. 13:4). The month of Nisan (or Abib) begins around the spring equinox.

Jewish Day Compared to Our Day	Our Hours (Approximate)		Roman Night Watches ¹ Hours of the Day
Previous Day	1800	Sunset	First Watch
Previous Day	1900		
Previous Day	2000		
Previous Day	2100		Second Watch
Previous Day	2200		
Previous Day	2300		
Previous Day	2400		Third Watch
Same as Our Day	0100		
Same as Our Day	0200		
Same as Our Day	0300		Fourth Watch
Same as Our Day	0400		
Same as Our Day	0500		
Same as Our Day	0600	Sunrise	First Hour ²
Same as Our Day	0700		Second Hour
Same as Our Day	0800		Third Hour
Same as Our Day	0900		Fourth Hour
Same as Our Day	1000		Fifth Hour
Same as Our Day	1100		Sixth Hour
Same as Our Day	1200		Seventh Hour
Same as Our Day	1300		Eighth Hour
Same as Our Day	1400		Ninth Hour
Same as Our Day	1500		Tenth Hour
Same as Our Day	1600		Eleventh Hour
Same as Our Day	1700		Twelfth Hour

¹ In Old Testament times, the Jews had only three watches between sunrise and sunset:

First Watch—Sunset to 2200 (La. 2:19)

Middle Watch—2200 to 0200 (Jdg. 7:19)

Morning Watch—0200-Sunrise (1 Sa. 11:11)

This was replaced by four watches when Judea became a part of the Roman Empire in 64 B.C.

² Hours were counted from Sunrise. There were twelve hours from sunrise to sunset, so the length of the hours varied with the season.

Passion Week

Bethany, the Mount of Olives and Jerusalem

4. Clearing of the temple
MONDAY
 Mt 21:12-17;
 Mk 11:15-18;
 Lk 19:45-48

Jesus returned to the temple and found the court of the Gentiles full of traders and money changers making a large profit. Jesus drove them out and overturned their benches and tables.

5. Day of controversy and parables
TUESDAY
 Mt 21:23-24:51; Mk 11:27-13:37; Lk 20:1-21:36

IN JERUSALEM
 Jesus evaded the traps set by the priests.

ON THE MOUNT OF OLIVES OVERLOOKING JERUSALEM
 (Tuesday afternoon, exact location unknown)
 He taught in parables and warned the people against the Pharisees. He predicted the destruction of Herod's great temple and told his disciples about future events, including his own return.

6. Day of rest
WEDNESDAY
 Although the Gospels do not mention this day, the counting of the days (Mk 14:1; Jn 12:1) seems to indicate that there was another day about which the Gospels record nothing.

7. Passover, Last Supper
THURSDAY
 Mt 26:17-30;
 Mk 14:12-26; Lk 22:7-23

In an upper room Jesus prepared both himself and his disciples for his death. He gave the Passover meal a new meaning. The loaf of bread and cup of wine represented his body soon to be sacrificed and his blood soon to be shed. And so he instituted the "Lord's Supper." After singing a hymn they went to the Garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus prayed in agony, knowing what lay ahead for him.

8. Crucifixion
FRIDAY
 Mt 27; Mk 15; Lk 22:66-23:56; Jn 18:28-19:37

Following betrayal, arrest, desertion, false trials, denial, condemnation, beatings and mockery, Jesus was required to carry his cross to The Place of the Skull, where he was crucified with two other prisoners.

9. In the tomb
 Jesus' body was placed in the tomb before 6:00 P.M. Friday night, when the Sabbath began and all work stopped, and it lay in the tomb throughout the Sabbath.

10. Resurrection
SUNDAY
 Mt 28:1-10; Mk 16:1-8; Lk 24:1-49; Jn 20

Early in the morning, women went to the tomb and found that the stone closing the tomb's entrance had been rolled back. An angel told them Jesus was alive and gave them a message. Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene in the garden, to Peter, to two disciples on the road to Emmaus, and later that day to all the disciples but Thomas.

3. The Triumphal Entry
SUNDAY
 Mt 21:1-11; Mk 11:1-11;
 Lk 19:28-44; Jn 12:12-19

On the first day of the week Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, fulfilling an ancient prophecy (Zec 9:9). The crowd welcomed him with the words of Ps 118:25-26, thus ascribing to him a Messianic title as the agent of the Lord, the coming King of Israel.

1. Arrival in Bethany
FRIDAY
 Jn 12:1

Jesus arrived in Bethany six days before the Passover to spend some time with his friends, Mary, Martha and Lazarus. On the following Tuesday evening, while Jesus was still in Bethany, Mary anointed his feet with costly perfume as an act of humility. This tender expression indicated Mary's devotion to Jesus and her willingness to serve him.

2. Sabbath—day of rest
SATURDAY
 Not mentioned in the Gospels.

The Lord spent the Sabbath day in traditional fashion with his friends.

FRIDAY³

It was Friday, six days before the greatest religious event in the Jewish year, the Passover Festival. Jerusalem was crowded with throngs of pilgrims from every quarter. That evening before dark, Jesus and His disciples arrived at the home of His friends, Lazarus, Mary, and Martha, who lived in Bethany, a suburb of the Holy City. It was Lazarus, of course, whom He had raised from the dead only three months before.

SATURDAY

They all spent the next day, Saturday, the Sabbath, (in Bethany) in worship, rest, and quiet fellowship.

SUNDAY (Palm Sunday—The Triumphal Entry)

Sunday morning—In the morning, Jesus and His disciples prepared to enter the city. Mobs of Jewish pilgrims crowded the roads. Many had heard that the Galilean prophet, Whose fame was now nation-wide, was approaching the city, and they came out and lined the road to watch Him as He passed. All His previous reserve was now over. When He entered Jerusalem on that Palm Sunday, He entered it as the Messiah. That was the meaning of all the pageantry of that grand entrance, and Jesus openly accepted the tribute. We call this the “Triumphal Entry.” His popularity had waxed and waned over the three years of His public ministry, but now for a brief moment it was bright. Suddenly the flame that had died to a cold ember blazed up again.

Most of the pilgrims who acclaimed Jesus with their hosannas were no doubt provincials, and many were his own countrymen from Galilee in the north—an entirely different crowd from the city rabble which was to cry, “Crucify Him,” before the week was over. It must not be forgotten that even after the tide of popular sentiment had begun to turn against Him, and even up to the very last, there were thousands of people to whom Jesus remained a friend and a hero—people He had healed of diseases, families whose tangled home lives He had straightened out, men and women for whom, spiritually, He had made all things new. They brought their tribute to Him now. Amid the shouts of the welcoming throng, the King rode toward His capital.

³ The narrative of the sequence of events was adapted from the excellent work of Scottish minister, James S. Stewart, published in his book *The Life and Teaching of Jesus Christ*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, Dec. 20, 2000.

“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” (Mt. 21:9 and Ps. 118:26) they shouted.

By His action, Jesus declared Himself. No longer, as at the beginning of His ministry, did He withdraw from the praise of the crowd. No longer, as in Galilean days, did He hold back the secret of His royalty from all but the initiated few. Ringing in His mind were the words of the prophet Zechariah, words which often from His boyhood days He had pondered: “Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you” (Zech. 9:9a). At last the old prophet’s dream had come true. By His action on that Palm Sunday, Jesus said in a way more plain than words: “Behold your King!”

The entrance into Jerusalem was an acted parable. It gave the faithful the sign for which they had been waiting. It inaugurated the Master’s final mission to His people, and it was a fitting prelude to the days of intense activity and emotion which were to follow. It focused the whole city’s attention on Jesus, so that wherever He went during that climactic week, crowds followed Him, and His name was on every tongue.

And, not least important, it flung down the gauntlet to His enemies. It defied them. Much they could endure, but this procession through the streets was intolerable. This fanatic who threatened to usurp their positions of power over the people must be put down finally. In that tumultuous hour, Jesus was issuing a challenge. Every token of royal honor which He accepted that day gave point to the challenge, and every hosanna of the crowd drove it home. Let the powers of evil do their worst; He knew His power. He was the Lord’s Anointed. He was ready for the last campaign.

But even then, lest the excitement of the hour might revive in the minds of the crowd those materialistic and nationalistic ideas of messiahship and kingship which were so foreign to His mind, Jesus did something to make it clear that His was no earthly kingdom, but an empire of the spirit; He would have no proud warhorse to carry Him, only an ass’s colt. “See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey” (Mt. 21:5 and Zech. 9:9).

Moreover, something which happened as the procession moved slowly toward the city must have puzzled and startled any who were imagining that in Jesus they had found another Judas Maccabaeus.⁴ Where the winding road crept around the shoulder of the Mount of Olives, the city suddenly

⁴ Judas Maccabaeus led the rebellion against Antiochus Epiphanes, the Seleucid ruler of Syria, and restored Jewish national independence in 165 B.C., an event commemorated in the Jewish festival of Chanukah.

came into view, and Jesus halted (Lu. 19:41-44). They saw Him sitting silent and absorbed. They saw Him gazing at the city spread out before Him. And then—to their amazement—they saw tears in His eyes. Jesus wept! They did not know the reason for those tears. They did not understand how His heart was aching because of the stubbornness and the blindness of the city He loved. They did not realize that He was foreseeing the day, soon to come, when fire and the Roman sword would seal Jerusalem's fate. They only knew that the leader, Whom they had hoped to see asserting Himself and casting off the Roman tyrants with overwhelming might, was weeping. And they wondered. And they were disquieted. When the procession reformed and moved on, the hosannas were perhaps a little less convinced. Was this, after all, the king they had expected?

MONDAY (The second cleansing of the Temple)

Monday evening (our Sunday evening)—But Christ's thoughts were not their thoughts, and when the day was over and excitement still ran high, He slipped away and returned quietly to Bethany—to the bitter disappointment and chagrin of those who still wanted a Messiah who would take the throne by force.

Monday night—In Bethany

Monday daytime (our Monday)—Monday found Jesus again in the city. Fearlessly and without any attempt at concealment, He showed what He thought of the unholy commercial activity that had become commonplace in the Temple: they were desecrating His Father's house (Mt. 21:12-13). Never did the volcanic element in the soul of Christ blaze out more fiercely than in the hour He stood in the Temple courts with the whip of cords raised above His head and in His eyes a light before which strong men quailed and a whole jostling multitude was cowed to silence and shrank away. This was the second time Jesus had had to clear the Temple of these activities; He had done it three years before, early in His ministry (Jn. 2:13-22).

TUESDAY (A Day of Controversy)

Tuesday evening (our Monday evening)—That evening, Jesus and His disciples returned to Bethany and the friendly home of Lazarus, Mary, and Martha for the last time.

Tuesday night—In Bethany

Tuesday daytime—On Tuesday, Jesus and His disciples came again to the Temple. This was a day filled with parables of warning (Mt. 21:28-22:14) and public controversies (Mt. 21:23-27; 22:15-46) as His enemies sought to entrap Him with carefully devised questions designed to disqualify Him as a prophet, get Him in trouble with the Roman authorities, or trick Him into violating Jewish Law or customs. It was on this day that He made His strongest criticisms against the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. This made the breach complete and sealed His doom. This was the last day of Jesus' public ministry.

WEDNESDAY (The Olivet Discourse followed by a day of rest)

Wednesday evening—That evening (our Tuesday evening), Jesus led His disciples out of the Temple for the last time. As they were passing out the eastern gate and down into the Kidron Valley, one of the disciples marveled out loud about the beauty and greatness of the Temple. Jesus warned them that it would be soon destroyed, and not one stone would remain upon another (Mt. 24:1-3). Crossing the valley, He led them up on the Mt. of Olives where they could look out over the city as the evening darkened into night. There, sitting in the fragrant spring darkness, He told them of the amazing future that awaited them and those who would follow them. This glimpse ahead has come to be called the "Olivet Discourse" (Mt. 24). He told them of a period of the greatest tribulation that the world would ever see, of terrible judgments from God where even stars would fall from the skies. He also told them of His return on clouds of the sky and of the final judgment of the deeds of men. He told them parables about being ready for His return and about judgment and hell (Mt. 25).

Then His thoughts returned to their immediate situation. This was only two days before the Passover, and He warned them again that He was soon to be arrested and crucified (Mt. 26:1-2).

Wednesday night—Jesus did not return to Lazarus' home in Bethany this night or ever again. He and His disciples did not go far from Jerusalem but spent their nights on the Mount of Olives until His arrest there (Lk. 21:37).

Wednesday daytime—The daytime hours of that Wednesday seem to have been spent by Jesus in seclusion, probably in the hills around Jerusalem. No details of this time are given in any of the Gospels.

THURSDAY (The plot against Jesus and preparations for the Pass-over)

Thursday evening—Thursday evening, a meeting of the Sanhedrin had been hastily convened to discuss ways and means of eliminating Jesus. The Sanhedrin was the governing body of the Jewish nation (under the authority of the Romans) and consisted of seventy-one men. It was also the highest court of justice. It was an aristocratic body, composed of chief priests, scribes, and elders. As its members included leaders of both the Pharisees and the Sadducees, friction and strife often marked its deliberations; but in the matter of Jesus, they were unified; they all wanted Him arrested and eliminated. How to carry out that arrest was their dilemma. The real problem they faced was the crowds. They feared that an open, official move against Him might cause a sudden burst in His popularity. It was an awkward problem, demanding careful strategy.

Thursday night—As the Sanhedrin wrangled into the night about what to do about Jesus, an entirely unexpected solution offered itself: one of the Troublemaker's own followers asked for an audience before them. The man was immediately ushered in. He told them that he could help them take Jesus secretly, under the cover of darkness. He himself knew his Master's movements in advance, and he knew His favorite places. He would lead them there, and they would have Jesus at their mercy. So the ugly, treacherous scheme was laid, blood money was given, and the pact was sealed with Judas Iscariot.

Thursday daytime—Jesus' disciples spent the day making preparations for the Passover feast they would enjoy that evening with their master.

FRIDAY (The Passover)

Friday evening—At sundown, Friday began (this was our Thursday evening), and this was the time for the Passover feast. Jesus sat down with His disciples in what we have come to call the "upper room" in the home of one of Jesus' unnamed friends in Jerusalem. In only a couple of hours, the storm would break in devastating fury, but here in this quiet room the very peace of God was reigning. Here at the "Last Supper," the great remembrance celebration, also called communion or the Eucharist⁵ or the "Lord's

⁵ "Eucharist" comes from the Greek word εὐχαριστία (eucharistía) which means "thankfulness, gratitude, or thanksgiving. It is not used as a term for the communion supper in the New Testament but came into that use in the 14th century.

Supper," was instituted. Here, also, the Lord gave the wonderful promises of our home with many rooms and the sending to us of the Comforter (the Holy Spirit). And here, for the last time before He died, the Master ate and drank with the men whom the Father had given Him out of the world, the faithful few who had followed Him the last three years through good times and bad. These were the men who, at this hour, loved and trusted Him fervently and who believed that they would do anything for Him.

It is no wonder that this upper room has been more special to the hearts of believers through the ages than all the cathedrals that were ever built to honor Christ. Its story was not finished when the Master rose from the table there and led his friends out to the Garden of Gethsemane. For when after Calvary, the brokenhearted, leaderless disciples sought a hiding place and refuge from the threatening mob, it was to this same upper room that they came. This was the place that witnessed their hopeless mourning for the Master they had lost; and this was the place where that mourning was turned to bewildered, incredulous joy when Jesus came back to them through the closed and bolted door and revealed Himself risen and alive. Here, too, it is more than likely, that they gathered again when He had ascended to the Father; and here the Holy Spirit descended, filling them with the glory of Pentecost and giving birth to the Christian church.

If the tradition is correct which identifies this upper room with the house in Jerusalem where Peter went after his miraculous release from prison (Acts 12:12), we may conclude that the owner of this house, who is referred to so mysteriously in Mk. 14:14, is the husband of Mary, the mother of John Mark, the writer of the earliest Gospel. John Mark was the young man who, according to Mark's Gospel, was present in Gethsemane and only barely escaped when Jesus was arrested, leaving his robe behind (Mk. 14:51). We can imagine him helping his father prepare the upper room for Jesus and His friends, waiting outside the door while the Last Supper was celebrated that night, and then following the little group to the garden on the Mt. of Olives to see what was going to happen.

Friday night

Garden of Gethsemane—When midnight came, Jesus rose from the table in the upper room and led His disciples out to Gethsemane. Nestled at the foot of the Mt. of Olives, it was one of Jesus' favorite retreats. This was not the first time they had retired there for prayer and quiet, but tonight, He left most of the disciples at the edge of the grove and asked even Peter, James, and John (His inner circle) to give Him some space. The burden on His heart was now too heavy to be shared even with those who knew Him best, and His spirit craved solitude and His Father. He went forward to pray alone in the dark. He fell on His knees. He fell on His face and lay with His

Friday Night—Continued

face to the ground. Then began the agony which none of us will ever comprehend. “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from Me,” He prayed (Mt. 26:39).

We cannot presume to fathom the heart of Christ while that agony lasted. It is beyond us to probe for explanations here, but of one thing we may be certain: it was not from fear of death that made Jesus shrink. Many martyrs have faced the last hour unflinching with a song on their lips, and Jesus was braver than them all. It was not death that made Him cry out to His Father; it was sin. It was the burden of all the sins of the world of fallen, rebellious men that in that dread hour He was taking upon His sinless heart. It was the sudden sense of sin’s sheer horror and loathsomeness and God-forsakenness. It was, as Paul expressed it, in 2 Co. 5:21, One Who “had no sin” being “made . . . sin for us.” Deeper than this we dare not seek to go. If Christ, in His agony, left even the “beloved disciple” behind, it is not for us to intrude. We can only stand afar off and hear the cry out of the darkness: “Oh, My Father . . . may this cup be taken from Me.” But then, listening still, we hear another word breaking the silence, a prayer, calm and resolute, and full of the peace of a great acceptance: “My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may Your will be done” (Mt. 26:42). So the faith which had never wavered throughout His life even once, remained victor even here.

Arrest—By this time, the disciples, weary in body and mind with the strain of these last days, had fallen asleep. Had they been awake and watchful, they might have seen the lights of torches flickering on the edge of the wood. They might have seen dim figures moving through the trees. But there was none keeping guard. In any case, resistance by force was far from Jesus’ thoughts. When Judas and the Temple police and their attendant rabble came, they found little difficulty in arresting Him. The Master was led away, and the disciples, having lost their nerve completely now, “all . . . deserted Him and fled” (Mt. 26:56).

Judas Iscariot—Before going on to the subsequent events of that night of treachery, perhaps we should pause here and consider the man who betrayed Jesus. That a man who had been in Jesus’ company from the first, living daily under the spell and influence of the gracious presence of the Son of God, should have fallen into this appalling evil at the end, has seemed to some students of Scripture so utterly incomprehensible that they have been driven to conclude that this was no ordinary man at all, but Satan incarnate, a monster in human disguise. Such a solution to this enigma, however, is unsatisfactory; it does not do justice to the Gospel accounts nor to the facts of psychology. We must probe deeper.

There had been a day when Judas, like Peter and Andrew and the rest, had left all to follow Christ. That is a fact of great significance. He had forsaken home and kindred for Jesus’ sake. No doubt hopes of an Earthly kingdom played a part in that decision, but over and above these was the fact that the young man felt the magnetism of Jesus. The appeal of this young prophet from Galilee moved him as nothing else had ever moved him in his life before. And when Jesus called him, he readily responded.

Even more important is the fact of Jesus’ estimate of Judas. The Master’s eye, accustomed to reading all kinds of men, detected in Judas the makings of a real apostle; here was a man who had it in him, to do splendid service for the Kingdom. Some have suggested that Jesus gave Judas a place near Himself simply because it was necessary for God’s predestined plans that there should be a traitor in the band of disciples. That, however, turns predestination into fatalism. That is a slander of God’s providence and His gracious ordering of the creation. It degrades the incarnation to mere play-acting. No; Jesus called Judas to be a disciple for the same reason He called the other eleven. He saw in him a man of noble promise and boundless possibilities. No doubt He saw other things as well—moral contradictions jostling one another in the man’s secret soul, strange conflicts of light and darkness, courage and cowardice, self-surrender and self-love. But that simply means he was a man just like us, and it was out of such materials that Jesus fashioned His apostles then and His Christian leaders today. He hoped to do it here, too. When Judas first became a disciple, he was a potential man of God.

To begin with, all went well. Judas was out on the greatest adventure of his life, and he knew it. But gradually a subtle change came over him. It was as if the spring had gone out of the year. He was less comfortable with his Master now than formerly. The other disciples may never have noticed that anything was happening, but Jesus did. Jesus’ secret midnight prayers during this period must have been burdened with Judas’ name. The change in the man’s attitude seems to have been a direct outcome of Jesus’ constant endeavor to spiritualize his followers’ Earthly and materialistic messianic hopes. This was compounded by Jesus’ failure to take the tide of His popularity at the flood. To Judas, such dilatory and unpractical ways were inexplicable and unpardonable. If Jesus had only seized the opportunity, the flood tide might have led them all to fortune and spectacular success. But now, he feared, the chance was lost forever, deliberately thrown away. Judas’ heart was sore and aggrieved and turning bitter.

Friday Night—Continued

This suggests the real motive for his foul deed of treachery. Various motives have been suggested. For example, *was it love of money?* That there was a streak of covetousness in his nature is pretty certain, and he seems to have indulged in petty pilfering. John even says bluntly that he was a thief (Jn. 12:6). But it is hard to believe that money was the master passion for which he sold his Lord. He could easily have driven a better bargain with the priests if that had been his objective. Thirty pieces of silver might easily have been doubled or tripled.

Was jealousy, then, the motive? This, too, may have played a part. The fact that he was the only Judean⁶ among the Twelve may have tended to make him a little standoffish and critical of the others. And we can well believe that, to a man of his ambitious nature, Jesus' choice of Peter, James, and John to form the inner circle (Mk. 5:37; 9:2) must have rankled. But jealousy alone does not explain his crime.

Another theory suggests *fear as the motive*. According to this, Judas saw disaster impending and realized that, when the crash came, it would fall not only on Jesus but on His followers as well. When Jesus went down, He would drag the others with Him. The frightened disciple believed that the only way to save himself was to turn state's evidence in the hope that the authorities would let their informer go free. Certainly we cannot rule this out, but it does not seem to cover all the facts.

De Quincy made the famous suggestion that Judas played the traitor *in order to force Jesus' hand*. Writhing with impatience as he watched his Master apparently squandering one opportunity after another for asserting Himself and claiming the throne, Judas at last decided that if Jesus would not take action of His own accord, He would have to be compelled to act. But how? Obviously, the way to do it was to get Jesus into a compromising situation. Then He would be forced to take action and manifest His power. Then the Kingdom would come. It is an ingenious theory; and if accepted, it would go far to rehabilitate the worst reputation in history. But it will not hold water. It represents Jesus as an irresolute, procrastinating, ditherer. In place of Judas the traitor, it gives us Judas the misguided saint. Instead of a heinous crime, it speaks of an error in judgment. There is not a scrap of evidence for this in the Gospels, and it is quite inconsistent with the words of stern condemnation with which Jesus described the perpetrator of this deed. An error of judgment, the rashness of a too enthusiastic follower, Jesus would certainly have pardoned. But of Judas, He could only say: "Woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had

⁶ "Iscaariot" means "the man from Kerioth" which was a village in Judea.

not been born" (Mk. 14:21). No, this explanation does not fit the scriptural evidence.

We are left with what was almost certainly the real motive—*the man's bitter, revengeful spirit*. Disappointment of his worldly hopes bred spite, and spite deepened into hatred. Judas kept telling himself that he had been deceived, led on by false pretenses, that these years of his life had been wasted, and that all Jesus had done for him was to land him in desperate trouble. Well, he would strike back! He would have his revenge. Besides he had known for a long time that the steady eyes of Jesus were reading him like a book, discovering all his secret insincerities of thought and character. Jesus, he knew, saw right through him. And that intensified his anger and vindictiveness. He began to toy with the idea of treachery. Once that thought had lodged in his mind, the rest of Satan's task was easy. Soon the thought had become a fixed idea, and the idea a plan. Nothing could save him now, not even the sight of Jesus kneeling before him to wash his feet (Jn. 13:5), and not the final appeal of Jesus at the Last Supper (Jn. 13:26). By that time he had sold his soul irretrievably. Only the deed itself remained to be done. But what evil spirit suggested the signal that he arranged with his accomplices that night? It was the crowning touch of horror, the last point of infamy beyond which human infamy could not go, when out in the garden Judas betrayed his Master, not with a shout or a blow or a stab, but with a kiss.

Ecclesiastical Trial—To understand the events that followed His arrest, we must try to grasp clearly the reason why Jesus was subjected to a double trial. We call it a trial; in reality it was an inquisition, and the death sentence, when it was carried out, was nothing less than judicial murder.

Jesus appeared first before the Jewish Sanhedrin; this was the ecclesiastical trial. Then he was sent to a Roman tribunal; this was the civil trial. Had the charge against Jesus not been a capital one, the Sanhedrin alone could have decided the matter without having to involve Pilate at all. For in Judea, as in all the provinces of her far flung empire, Rome gave the conquered people a fair measure of self-government; and the judicious application of this home rule principle contributed greatly to the maintenance of peace throughout her dominions. But where death sentences were involved, Rome reserved the right of judgment to herself. Such cases, after going through the Jewish court, had to come up again for review before the Roman authorities, who had the power to sustain the verdict pronounced by the Jewish court and execute judgment on the accused or to overturn the proceedings altogether and set the prisoner free. This explains what happened on the night of Christ's arrest.

Friday Night—Continued

The Temple police, who arrested Jesus in Gethsemane, took him first to Annas (Jn. 18:13). Now this part of the proceedings was, strictly speaking, quite informal and arbitrary. Annas held no official position. But he wielded immense influence and prestige, and in the Sanhedrin, no man's opinion carried greater weight. Twenty years before, he had been high priest, a title which he still received by courtesy; and no fewer than five of his sons succeeded him in this position, the highest in the land. It is probable that it was Annas who had established, for reasons of personal gain, the commercial traffic within the Temple courts which Jesus had so strongly denounced and disrupted—twice. He was the evil genius behind the plots that had led to Jesus' capture; and though it was after midnight when the prisoner was brought in, the old man was alert and wakeful and determined to push the case forward without delay. After an informal preliminary inquiry, he sent Jesus on to Caiaphas.

Caiaphas was Annas' son-in-law, and he was the current high priest and head of the Sanhedrin. This was the man who was the accredited guardian of the nation's soul. He had been set apart to be the supreme interpreter and representative of the Most High. To him was committed the glorious privilege of entering once every year into the Holy of Holies and making atonement for the peoples' sins. Yet this was the same man who condemned the Son of God. History provides no more startling illustration of the truth that the best religious opportunities in the world and the most promising environment will not guarantee a man's salvation or of themselves turn his heart toward the Lord. As John Bunyan wrote in closing his book, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, "I saw that there was a way to hell, even from the gates of heaven."

News of the arrest of Jesus had by this time been carried around and had brought many members of the Sanhedrin to the High priest's house. According to its constitution, the Sanhedrin could not legally be convened before sunrise, but Caiaphas and the rest were impatient of delay and decided to proceed with the examination of the Prisoner at once. All that would then remain for the formal meeting after sunrise would be the ratification of any decisions they made, and thus valuable time could be saved (Mt. 26:57; 27:1). Caiaphas began by putting questions to Jesus about His disciples and His doctrine (Jn. 18:19). No doubt that he hoped to draw from Jesus some statement of His teaching which could be twisted around to mean that He had anti-Roman sympathies; this could then be used decisively against Him when the trial before the Roman governor began. But this line of attack failed. "You know My teaching," Jesus said in effect. "I have never made any secret of My beliefs; they are public property. Why ask me now?" And Caiaphas was frustrated (Jn. 18:20).

Equally unsuccessful was his second attempt. He brought in witnesses against the Prisoner in the hope that they would produce evidence on which, without more ado, sentence could be passed. But the witnesses failed to agree, and in any case their evidence was flimsy. Again, the leader of the Sanhedrin was stymied (Mk. 14:56, 59).

Growing anxious and uneasy at the course which the investigation was taking and at the complete failure of the court to substantiate any charge against the Accused, Caiaphas suddenly decided to bring his last and most dangerous weapon into action. Point blank, he demanded of Jesus whether He claimed to be the Messiah. Now or never, he felt, Jesus must incriminate Himself! And Jesus quietly replied "I am," adding significantly that a day was coming when the Son of Man would be seen sitting on the right hand of the Father. The high priest was overjoyed and triumphant that his Enemy had given Himself away at last and played into His accusers' hands. He cried out that this was blasphemy and that no further witnesses were needed, for the Prisoner had condemned Himself with His own mouth (Mk. 14:61-64).

For all intents and purposes, the Jewish trial was now over. Formal ratification of the verdict when the Sanhedrin met officially after sunrise would take only a few moments. Meanwhile, the condemned man could be handed over to the tender mercies of His jailers and of the mob. Even members of the court took part in that despicable display of cruelty that followed (Mk. 14:65).

It was while this infamy was being perpetrated that there occurred an incident which all four Gospels record and which the conscience of the Christian church has never been able to forget—Simon Peter's denial. Impetuous and devoted to the last, Peter had found a way into the high priest's courtyard. But he had not been there long when he began to wish he had not come. He had an uneasy feeling that he was being watched. There were eyes following him. The place seemed full of eyes. And when the challenge came, sudden, swift, and inescapable, he lost his nerve and retorted with an oath that Christ had never meant anything to him at all. Just then as cock crowed, the guards marched their Prisoner past, and Jesus heard his words. "The Lord turned, and looked straight at Peter," and "Peter remembered" (Lk. 22:60-61). Sorrow and heartbreak and pain unutterable were in that look, and the shamed disciple stumbled out into the night, weeping bitterly. The story of it stands here for all generations of Christians to read and ponder. Human hearts are the same today as they were then, and all disloyalties to the Master are just as dark as Peter's tragic failure. And, praise the Lord, forgiving love, today, is just as amazing as it was when Je-

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Jesus met His friend again on the other side of Calvary by the Sea of Galilee, gently restored him, and commanded him to feed His lambs (Jn. 21).

Before we turn from the ecclesiastical to the civil trial of Jesus, let us list the points in which the proceedings so far have violated the elementary rules of law and justice. In several respects, the Sanhedrin's judgment was illegal:

1. It was illegal in that the court judging Jesus' case was also an accomplice in His betrayal. Members of the Sanhedrin were at the core of the secret plots that culminated in Judas' treachery. Yet these same men then acted as His jury. This invalidated the proceedings from the outset.
2. The trial did not begin, as Jewish law demanded, with a statement of a definite charge against the Accused. Instead, they went on a fishing expedition, trying to turn up something they could use against Jesus. This was illegal.
3. The judge trying the case was also the leader of the prosecution. Caiaphas took his place as president of the court absolutely determined in advance to secure a conviction. He had already declared days before that it was "expedient . . . that one man should die for the people" (Jn. 11:50).
4. When the hearing of witnesses turned out to be a fiasco, the judge himself began putting leading questions to the prisoner. He knew that by doing so he was going dead against the law, but he would rather have broken the law a hundred times over than to let Jesus slip through his fingers.
5. There were no witnesses for the defense. None was summoned; none had a chance to appear. It was Jesus against the world. No voice would be tolerated except that of the prosecutors.
6. Finally, there was the haste with which the trial was completed. In the dead of night, the case was hurried through. The holding of a brief, formal meeting at sunrise to ratify the night's work and to give a faint show of legality to what had been done did not alter the fact that the Sanhedrin's midnight investigation was a flagrant breach of its own laws. But that was not the worst. There was a law that in capital charges, the sentence of death could be pronounced only on the day after the trial; 24 hours had to elapse. In addition, there was a further law that such cases were not to be heard at all on the day immediately preceding a Sabbath or one of the great festivals. In desperate anxiety to get Jesus out of the way before there was any chance of a popular uprising in His favor, His accusers flung principle to the winds and tore justice to shreds.

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At sunrise, the Sanhedrin officially convened, and they wasted no time before confronting Jesus with the same question that pleased Caiaphas so much: "Are you the Messiah?" Jesus told them that they wouldn't believe Him if He told them the truth. He went on to say that He would be seated at the right hand of God the Father. They demanded again that He answer clearly: "Are you the Son of God?" He responded to them as much as He had to Caiaphas: He simply said, "Yes, you are right."⁷ (Lk. 22:66-70)

They now had all they needed and quickly voted to condemn Jesus for the blasphemy of claiming to be equal with God (Lk. 22:71)

Civil Trial—When Caiaphas and his henchmen had done their work, Jesus was marched off to the Roman governor for His civil trial. Pontius Pilate had now been Procurator for six years, and he had not found the post to be an easy one. The Roman province of Judea was one of the most difficult and turbulent corners of Emperor Tiberius' vast dominions. But Pilate despised the Jews and refused to give any consideration to their religious traditions. He dealt with the administrative problems that were continually confronting him with relentless and unnecessary harshness. The Jews had not forgotten the day when, in open defiance of Jewish sentiment and in flagrant breach of the conciliatory approach which was the official Roman policy, Pilate had caused images of Caesar as god to be carried through the streets of the Holy City. Nor had they forgotten certain other occasions when he had read the riot act and sent his soldiers in among the crowds, causing bloodshed and even massacre (Lk. 13:1). Neither the common people nor the Sanhedrin had much love for Pilate, but the problem of Jesus motivated Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin to try to make a good impression on their governor. They wanted to win him over to their side and thus secure the death of Jesus.

⁷ Jesus answered them with the Greek idiom ὑμεῖς λέγετε ὅτι ἐγώ εἰμι (humeis légete hótí egó eimi) which literally means "you say that I am." The KJV translates this literally; the NKJV renders this "You rightly say that I am," and the NIV has "You are right in saying I am." The phrase simply means "yes, you are right." The KJV rendition has been used by people ignorant of the Greek language to argue that Jesus was disclaiming divinity and retorting that His accusers said it but not Him. But the language cannot be fairly used in this way. In Greek, it is an unequivocal statement that He was truly the divine Son of God.

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Pilate began, correctly, by demanding a definite statement of the charges against Him (Jn. 18:29). But this was extremely awkward for the Jews, because when the Sanhedrin had convicted Jesus, it had used the accusation of blasphemy—a purely religious matter and one which was not likely to carry much weight with Pilate nor be deemed worthy of the death penalty. So the Jews replied evasively, “If He were not a criminal, we would not have handed Him over to you” (Jn. 18:30 NIV). Naturally, this did not satisfy Pilate, and he pressed them for further information. Whereupon, Jesus’ accusers, adding yet another illegality to all that had gone before, quietly dropped the original charge of blasphemy and substituted another in its place, one of a kind which they felt Pilate would be more impressed: a charge of treason. They declared, first, that Jesus was perverting the nation; this was slander and had not been established. Second, they claimed that He forbade paying tribute to Caesar; this was another deliberate lie (see Mt. 22:21). Third, they claimed that He claimed to be a king. This was true, of course, but not in the sense that they implied. Having heard this triple charge, Pilate decided to examine Jesus in private.

No scene in history has impressed itself more vividly on the imagination of the world. Reading between the lines of the narrative, we begin to see that all through that momentous time when the judge was deliberating what to do with this strange prisoner Whom fate had thrown in his way, the Prisoner was wrestling for the soul of His judge. Pilate was not a lost man—yet. And Jesus would have liked to rescue him from himself. Moreover, the governor was sharp enough to see that this was no ordinary wrongdoer with Whom he had to deal. He was amazed at the composure, dignity, and even kingliness of the man who stood before him, while a mob outside was clamoring for his blood. He ended the interview and went out declaring his verdict “Not guilty!”

But this was like throwing gasoline on a fire. The crowd erupted; they would not stand for this outcome. Pilate began to fear that he was going to have difficulty pacifying them, and he was already in trouble with the emperor for failing to keep things quiet in Judea. He decided that he might be able to defuse the situation by sending the Prisoner to Herod, after all, Jesus was a Galilean and subject to Herod’s jurisdiction (Lk. 23:7). That would also serve to get the whole situation off his back. Why shouldn’t Herod, who luckily was in Jerusalem at the time, accept the responsibility and see the trial through to the end? It was a clever move, but unfortunately for Pilate, it did not work. Back to his palace came the escort and their Prisoner a short time later, bringing the message that Herod thanked the Roman governor for his courtesy, but he would not dream of robbing him of his privilege to finish the case himself.

Now, beginning to get a little more desperate to dump responsibility on someone else, Pilate tried a shameful expedient: he proposed that, as he could find no fault in Jesus, he would have Him scourged and then release Him. This sorry compromise was Pilate’s weak attempt to do his duty by Jesus and placate the crowd at the same time, but of course, it did neither one. The angry priests and their rabble would have none of it. The cries of “Crucify Him, crucify him!” drowned out everything else. Blocked in these two attempts, Pilate now tried one last device. He set before them both Jesus and a notorious murderer and rebel, Barabbas by name. He gave the crowd their choice, hoping that they would prefer that Jesus be released (Jn. 18:39). But the chief priests whipped up the crowd to demand Barabbas.

Pilate was at his wit’s end, when suddenly a voice yelled out of the crowd: “If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar!” (Jn. 19:12). And that settled it. For Pilate knew full well what that threat meant, and the last thing he wanted at this point was that a complaint against himself be sent back to the emperor. An official investigation would mean ruin, for there were things in his past conduct that could not bear examination. Anything would be better than that! It was him or Jesus. Well, it would have to be Jesus. As gladly as he would have set free the innocent Man standing before him, he felt forced by the circumstances to sacrifice Him. Still trying to absolve himself of any blame, he washed his hands of the whole affair (Mt. 27:24) as he yielded to the clamoring crowd and sent Jesus to His death.

So the trials, which were no trials at all, ended. One extraordinary feature of the whole story is that what we see in the biblical narrative is not Jesus on trial before Annas or Caiaphas or Pilate or Herod, but they on trial before Him. When all is said and done and Jesus has been marched away to Golgotha, it is not He who has been judged by them, but rather they who have been judged by Him. Face to face, each of them—Annas, Caiaphas, Pilate, Herod—each of them stood with the Son of Man for a brief moment, and His searchlight played upon their souls, revealing their inmost nature and exposing them for all the world and for all time to see. On that dark, crowded night, the real judge was Christ. And where these stood that night 2,000 years ago, each of us will stand at some point in our lives: face to face with Jesus in the place of decision. And each of us will pronounce a verdict on the Lord of All—a verdict that is, in the most fundamental sense, a verdict on ourselves.

In addition, each of us yet faces another time in which, if we are believers, we will stand before Him for His final evaluation of the quality of our obedience and submission to His lordship and to receive from Him our ap-

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propriate rewards (2 Co. 5:10). And if we have never trusted Christ as our Lord and Savior, we will stand before Him at the Great White Throne judgment to hear His ultimate condemnation: “Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels” (Mt. 25:41 NIV).

Crucifixion—Mark reports that it was about 9:00 am when the crucifixion began (Mk. 15:25).

When Moses in the desert approached the burning bush, he heard a voice warning him to take off his sandals because he was standing on holy ground. Our account now turns to Calvary, the holiest spot in all the universe, and we dare not approach it except with the greatest reverence. The writers of the four Gospels are good examples for us in this. Feeling that here they were handling an account too high and deep for human words, they have written with great restraint. As poignant and moving as their story is, they did not try to stir up the reader’s emotions; a dignified reserve characterizes it all, and the quietness and simplicity of their accounts intensify its effect immeasurably. For an example, where in all the literature of the world can we find a sentence carrying deeper feeling than this: “Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother” (Jn. 19:25 NIV). How restrained and uncontrived that is, for John makes no effort to elaborate on it; and yet, the picture it conjures in our minds is overwhelmingly moving. With perfect reverence, the Gospels lead us into the holy of holies of our Lord’s last hours; and in the writers’ simple, unadorned words, believers everywhere have found thoughts that often “lie too deep for tears.”

Jesus, as we have seen, was put to death by a coalition of definite historical forces. The religious and civil authorities, with the willing cooperation of the people, combined to execute Him. Pharisaic blindness and intolerance, priestly exclusiveness and self-seeking, imperial policy and power, popular disappointment and resentment and even revenge were the things that put Jesus on the cross. But it would be a serious error to suppose that these historical forces were the final, determining factors. No, Jesus was not forced to the crucifixion; He went to it in His own unconquered soul. It was no helpless victim of cruel circumstances Who died on Calvary, for in that sacrifice, as the New Testament insists from first to last, Jesus, Himself, willingly laid down His life upon the altar. The Son of Man came, as He said, “to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mk. 10:45 NIV). And again: “No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord” (Jn. 10:18 NIV).

Undoubtedly, there was an element of necessity in His death; “The Son of Man,” He said, “must suffer . . . and he must be killed” (Lk. 9:22 NIV).

But it was the necessity, not of violence or constraint, but of His own consuming love for people. From the beginning, Jesus had undertaken His work of world redemption with His eyes open, knowing full well the price and willingly accepting it. This was the source of His amazing calmness and self-possession as the end drew near. His judges were 180 degrees off when they imagined that they were the masters of the situation and controlled His destiny. Jesus, had always been master of life and circumstances and every new emergency that presented itself, and now He was supremely master of this last week. He went to the cross, not beaten by human malice or dragged helplessly by the chariots of fate, but voluntarily and victoriously to the glory of His Father. This was “the weakness of God,” which “is stronger than man’s strength” (1 Co. 1:25 NIV)

Here it may be well to remind ourselves of what death by crucifixion meant in the mind of the ancient world. In the years succeeding the crucifixion, Christianity has cast a halo of beauty around the cross. We put the cross on top of our churches; we emblazon the cross on the flags of nations; beneath the cross, we bury our dead; we make a red cross symbolize the ministry of healing. The poets and hymn writers sing of the “wondrous cross” and “the blessed cross.” The cross has even become one of the most popular pieces of jewelry, worn by saints and sinners alike.

But all this must not hide from us the fact that originally the cross was a thing of unspeakable shame and debasement. “Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree,” said Paul, quoting Deuteronomy (Gal. 3:13 NIV; Dt. 21:23). That was how the Jewish people of Jesus’ day expressed it. And the Roman view was the same: “This cruelest and most hideous of punishments,” said Cicero; “never may it come near the bodies of Roman citizens, never near their thoughts or eyes or ears!” As an instrument of death, it was invented in semi-barbaric lands of the East, and it was reserved by the Romans for slaves and the worst criminals. It was a fate of utter humiliation.

Small wonder that when the first apostles began their world mission, they found prejudice everywhere among Jews and Gentiles alike—the offense: the stumbling block of the cross (Gal. 5:11; 1 Co. 1:23). That the Messiah should die was hard enough to get people to accept, but that He should die *such* a death was utterly beyond belief. Yet that was what He did. Everything Christ ever touched—including the cross—He adorned and transfigured and made beautiful, but let us never forget from what appalling depths He lifted the meaning of the cross.

It was the custom in those days, as a further refinement of the cruelty of the cross and as a last master stroke of vindictive insult, to compel the

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condemned man to carry his own cross to the place of execution. But when the procession to Calvary had been formed and began to move off down the crowd-lined streets, it soon became apparent to His escort of soldiers that Jesus would not be able to carry this heavy burden all the way. He was exhausted by the terrible scourging to which He had already been subjected; the iron-tipped thongs of the Roman *flagellum* had done their cruel work all too well. He sank, at last, to the ground, and the procession was halted. The soldiers didn't have time for this, but no Roman would ever have thought of asking another Roman to help with the cross, so great was the shame of it. Therefore, the centurion, passing over all his own men, seized on a stranger standing by and conscripted him for the unwelcome task (Mk. 15:21).

A person's great hour sometimes leaps upon him, and destiny stands waiting all unexpected at the corner of some common road. So it was with Simon of Cyrene, when he turned aside with idle curiosity to watch a passing crowd, and before he knew what was happening, he was carrying the cross of the Son of God. No doubt his first feeling was one of anger and resentment that he had been forced into such a duty involving such a stigma. But when long afterward, he looked back upon that hour, it was to thank God for the crowning honor of his life. Mark calls him "the father of Alexander and Rufus" (Mk. 15:21 NIV), obviously referring to two prominent figures in the church which would spring up. We cannot escape the conclusion that it was the memory of this hour that changed Simon's life and brought him and his household with him into the Christian faith (see also Ro. 16:13). It is not surprising that the figure of this Cyrenian, appearing so abruptly on history's greatest page and then vanishing again, has fascinated the imagination of so many Christians over the years. Among all the services rendered by men and women to Christ in the days of His flesh, this man's service stands alone. Some, like Martha, could cook for Him; others like Mark's family could give Him a sanctuary when foes were near. Others like Mary could anoint His feet with expensive perfume (Jn. 12:1-8). But only Simon carried His cross.

When they reached Golgotha, the soldiers began their work. They laid the cross on the ground and the prisoner was stretched out upon it. They nailed His hands and feet. Then the cross was lifted up and dropped into its socket in the rock.

All four Gospels record that, over Jesus' head as He hung there dying, there was a sign. It was a common custom, whenever a criminal was executed, to announce the nature of his crime; a brief description of the charge on which the man had been condemned was nailed to the gallows itself so

that passers-by, looking up and seeing him there, might know what had brought him to that end. Jesus had been condemned because His claims to kingship were treasonable and constituted a public danger. Therefore, above His head was written: "JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS" (Jn. 19:19 NIV). It was Pilate who chose the wording, and we wonder what was in his mind. Was the title just a cheap sneer at the Galilean Carpenter's expense whose hallucinations had been His ruin, a last blow against this Misguided Soul Who had thought to rival Caesar? Or was it not so much a jest at Jesus' expense as a slam at the expense of the Jews, whom Pilate despised and loved to humiliate—as much as to say, "This is your king, all the king the poor slaves like you may deserve"? That may have been his meaning, for we are told that when the Jewish priests read the inscription, the veiled insult of it so incensed them that they went at once to Pilate and demanded its removal.

But Pilate only laughed to see them squirming beneath his sarcasm and retorted, "What I have written, I have written" (Jn. 19:22 NIV). And yet is it not possible that Pilate's meaning went deeper? May it not have been something of Jesus' strength and dignity and innate godlike majesty had laid its spell upon Pilate; to some hint of Jesus' essential royalty, some inkling of the truth of His incredible claim, had dawned upon the procurator's soul; and that it was in obedience to that deep instinct, which he would not have dared to admit even to himself, that he wrote these words?

Be that as it may, we cannot miss the significance of the fact that it was written in three languages, Greek, Latin, and Hebrew to make sure that everyone in the crowd might read it. The Christian church has always seen this fact as symbolic of the universal lordship of her Master. These were the three great world languages, each of them the servant of one dominant idea. Greek was the language of culture and knowledge; in that realm, Jesus is king! Latin was the language of law and government, and there, too, Jesus is king. Hebrew was the language of revealed religion; and Jesus is certainly king there! Hence, even as He hung dying, it was true that "on his head" are "many crowns" (Rev. 19:12 NIV).

The Tempter who had assailed Jesus in the desert and throughout His life was now to launch his last attack. Members of the Sanhedrin, not content with having secured Christ's condemnation, had come out to Calvary to gloat over His sufferings. They began jeering: "If you are the Son of God," "come down from the cross!" (Mt. 27:40 NIV). That was not only a taunt, it was also a temptation. It was a double temptation. It was a temptation to leave the last dregs of the bitter cup of suffering untasted, to escape before the uttermost farthing of the price of sin had been paid. But it was more: it

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was a temptation to do something dramatic and dazzling at this eleventh hour to compel men to believe. “Let him come down now from the cross,” cried the crowd, “and we will believe in him” (Mt. 27:42b NIV). That was the real sting of it for Jesus, for the creating of belief was the aim and object of His life. But now in dying, He rejected that last temptation and refused to perform the startling miracle. Way back in the desert He had settled it once for all that it would not be by such spectacular ways that His kingdom would come (see Mt. 4:1-11). And when in bitter mockery they cried, “He saved others,” . . . “but he can’t save himself!” (Mt. 27:42a NIV), they were saying something far deeper than they knew. It was a fact, it was indeed the central fact of the Gospel, that in His passion to save the world by giving the final revelation of love, Jesus would not and could not save Himself. He was bound to the cross, not by the Roman nails, but by His own heart, bound fast to it until the saving work was done; and His refusal to save Himself has become the saving of the world.

The Two Thieves—Jesus did not die alone. It may have been a desire on His enemies’ part to carry their jests and insults still further which prompted them to hang a thief on either side of Him. Who were these two unnamed men who have thus been thrust into the gaze of the centuries? Criminals perhaps like those Jesus referred to in His parable of the good Samaritan, thieves who infested the Jerusalem-to-Jericho road? It is more than likely that they were associates of Barabbas the insurrectionist. The revolutionary movement, which Barabbas headed, though begun out of nationalistic fervor against the Romans, had degenerated into mere criminal acts and murder. Crucified alongside Jesus, both of the dying thieves began reviling Him. But something about the Man on the center cross brought one of them to silence. This Man who was enduring the frightful agony without a cry, whose bearing even under the shadow of death had something in it strangely royal, who had been praying for the men who drove the nails, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Lk. 23:34 NIV)—Who could He be? Again and again, the thief turned his head to stare upon that serene and loving face. Who *must* He be?

Suddenly, out of the depths, faith rose: “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom!” (Lk. 23:42 NIV). It is an amazing tribute to the sheer kingliness of Christ that at the very last when everything to outward appearance was lost and royal pomp and circumstance were nowhere to be seen, one man, gazing at Him as death approached, felt instinctively that He was marching to a throne. “I tell you the truth,” Jesus replied, “today you will be with me in paradise” (Lk. 23:43 NIV). In this way, He affirmed again the truth that He had given His life to declare—that in a single moment, from the

rubbish heap of life, any ruined and hopeless soul may pass straight to the perfect release of forgiveness and wear the white robes of a saint.

Jesus Provides for His Mother—Jesus was always thinking about others, and even in the moment of His greatest physical and emotional pain, He was concerned that Mary be provided for after He was gone. Turning His bleeding face toward the Apostle John, He commended Mary into his care. (Jn. 19:25-27)

Friday Afternoon—

Darkness—After Jesus had hung on the cross for about three hours, at noon when the sun was brightest, darkness fell over the whole land for about three hours (noon until 3:00 pm) (Mt. 27:45). This was a supernatural darkness, not a solar eclipse.⁸ When Jesus was born, the skies were filled with supernatural light as “the glory of the Lord shone around them” (Lk. 2:9 NIV), but when He died, the Light of the World (Jn. 1:4,9) was taken from us, and the world was plunged into actual darkness⁹ as a mark of divine judgment.

Jesus’ Cries from the Cross—Near the end of this period of darkness and agony, there was one moment when even the soul of Jesus seemed to tremble, for the Father seemed to have hidden His face. We can never hope to comprehend what Jesus’ thoughts and feelings were when His cry rang out: “My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?” (Mt. 27:46 NIV; Ps. 22:1). We may say that that dark, mysterious moment was the culmination of His life-long self-identification with people in the most desolate experiences of their souls, but it was more. We may say that here the unspeakable shame and sickening horror of all the sins of all the children of men came down overwhelmingly on His own sinless heart, but even that does not fathom the depths of His bitter cry. We can only stand far off and bow our heads and leave Christ to traverse that darkness alone. One thing is gloriously certain, that when He reached that breaking point of faith, His

⁸ A solar eclipse lasts only a few minutes, not three hours; it does not produce real darkness as this event seems to have; and a solar eclipse cannot occur near the Passover because, being based on a lunar calendar, the Passover is always around the time of a full moon, and a solar eclipse occurs at the time of a new moon. Even if it did involve the blocking of the sun’s light, it would require a supernatural cause, not a natural solar eclipse.

⁹ How extensive the darkness was cannot be determined. The word translated “land” is the Greek word γῆ (gā), which can mean land or earth or even refer to the entire Earth.

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faith refused to break; for when that cry stabbed the silence, it was “*My God, My God*” still.

After that cry there came another, like a victor’s shout this time: “It is finished!” (Greek τετέλεσται or tetélestai) (Jn. 19:30 NIV). That, indeed, was what everyone else on Calvary was thinking then, too—but what a difference! It was finished for the soldiers, and they could go back to their barracks now. It was finished for His mother, Mary Magdalene, and the poor remnant who had loved Him to the end, and they could go wearily back to a world that would never be the same. It was finished for the jesting priests and the rabble mob, and they could congratulate themselves that their vengeance was complete and they were finally rid of the Troublemaker.

But when the Man on the center cross suddenly raised His resolute eyes to Heaven and cried with His dying breath that “*Tetélestai!*,” the whole kingdom of darkness trembled to its foundations. For it was not only the long strain of life with its turbulent close that was finished now for Jesus, nor was this a mere sigh of relief. The work was finished; Satan’s empire was finished; the redeeming of the Earth was finished; and this was a triumphant assertion of achievement; this was a conquering shout. With that glad cry, the soul of Jesus burst home into His Father’s presence. He had glorified God on the Earth; He had finished the work which the God had given Him to do.

Miracles at the Time of Jesus’ Death—

1. *The veil of the Temple was torn in two from top to bottom* (Mt. 27:51). The veil was that heavy tapestry that separated the Holy of Holies from the rest of the Temple. It was in the Holy of Holies that god’s symbolic presence dwelled. Only the High Priest could enter the Holy of Holies and he only once a year on the Day of Atonement when he offered blood to atone for the sin of the people. The veil was as much as 60 feet high, and Josephus reported that it was four inches thick.¹⁰

John MacArthur explains the significance of this miracle:

When Christ gave up His spirit, that once-for-all sacrifice for the sins of men was completed and the need for a veil no longer existed. By coming to the Son, any man could now come to God directly, without need of a priest, sacrifice, or ritu-

¹⁰ <http://www.gotquestions.org/temple-veil-torn.html>.

al. Consequently, the veil was torn in two from top to bottom by God’s miraculous act, because the barrier of sin was forever removed for those who put their trust in the Son as Lord as Savior.¹¹

Since then, God’s holy presence has been open to anyone who comes to Him through faith in Christ’s sacrifice on the cross.

Although the Temple was not destroyed until 70 A.D., some forty years later, and the people continued to offer sacrifices as before, even the symbolic value of the sacrificial system ceased with the exposure of the Holy of Holies. The divine significance of the system ended with the death of Christ, and the Old Covenant was replaced by the New.¹²

2. *Earthquake* (Mt. 27:51). This was another supernaturally caused event that marks the significance of Jesus’ death.
3. *Resurrection of some believers* (Mt. 27:52-53). There is quite a bit of disagreement about this miracle, and only Matthew mentions it. When they were actually raised is unclear from the wording because it says they did not appear to people in the city until after Jesus’ resurrection (v. 53), and Paul clearly states that Jesus was the first to be resurrected (1 Co. 15:20, 23). In any event, apparently, some deceased believers were raised to life in connection with the crucifixion and contacted believers in Jerusalem. What they communicated to them and what happened to them after that we are not told.

Significance of the Crucifixion—Standing symbolically on the holy ground of Calvary today, with eyes raised to the cross, we understand why the conscience of mankind for twenty centuries has been drawn to this one scene like a magnet, and why Christians have always felt that the heart of everything lies here. Jesus, Himself, knew and openly affirmed that by His death there would be let loose on the Earth a saving, cleansing power beyond all calculation. That power has gone to work mainly along two lines.

¹¹ John MacArthur, Jr., Matthew 24028 in *The Mac Arthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1989), 273.

¹² *Ibid.*, 274.

Friday Afternoon—Continued

On the one hand, the death of Jesus has *revealed sin in its true nature*. Let us remember that the evil things which put Jesus on the cross were by no means unfamiliar or abnormal. Self-interest in Caiaphas and Annas, fear in Pilate, impurity in Herod, anger and spite in Judas and in the crowd—these were the things which, coming in contact with the Sinless One, deliberately caused His death.

That is to say that Jesus was crucified by the ordinary sins of every day. We are all in this together. Our heart and conscience tell us, when we stand on Calvary, that what we see there is our own work, and that the sins we so lightly condone result always in the crucifixion of the Son of God. In this sense, to quote Revelation 13:8, Jesus is “the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world” (NIV), and is still slain today. So the cross of Jesus reveals the true nature and color of sin, and by doing this, it drives us to faith in Christ.

On the other hand, it *reveals God’s almighty love*. Jesus did not die on the cross to appease an angry God, nor to induce Him to change His mind and love us; any such idea is definitely sub-Christian. God’s love is eternal and unchanging. There never was a time when God had to be persuaded to love. Calvary was no inducement Jesus offered to God; it was God’s own love in action. Just as from a volcano there flashes out now and again for one sudden, startling moment the elemental fire which burns unseen in the Earth’s heart, so at the cross of Jesus, God’s love leapt out into history, sheer flame, showing in that crowning moment of time what God is in His inmost being forever. The cross reveals the heart of the Eternal God. It makes grace real. It makes love available for needy souls. It reconciles the sinful and brings the world to God’s feet.

Burial—In the late afternoon, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, the two members of the Sanhedrin who had believed Jesus to be the Messiah, went to Pilate and obtained permission to remove Jesus’ body. They took His body down from the cross, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, placed the body in Joseph’s own new, rock-carved tomb which was nearby, and rolled a great stone over the entrance. Many of the women followers of the Lord, including Mary Magdalene and Mary, Jesus’ mother, watched as the two men buried His body and then went to prepare the spices they wanted to put on His body (Mt. 27:57-61; Mk. 15:42-46; Lk. 23:50-56; Jn. 19:38-42).

Jesus was buried on Friday afternoon before sunset, when the Sabbath would begin.

SATURDAY (The Sabbath)

Saturday evening and night—

Saturday evening and night (our Friday evening and night), Jesus’ body lay in Joseph’s tomb.

Saturday morning—

Saturday morning (same as our Saturday morning), the chief priests and Pharisees began to worry that they may not have done everything needed to stamp out this radical group. They remembered that Jesus had predicted His resurrection in three days, so they went to Pilate and asked for a Roman guard to prevent Jesus’ disciples from stealing the body and claiming a resurrection had taken place. Pilate gave them the guards and commanded them to make the tomb as secure as possible. He didn’t want any additional trouble, either. The Jews set the guard and put a seal on the stone. Now they could rest easy. (Mt. 27:62-66)

Saturday daytime and Sunday evening and night—

All day Saturday and through the following night, Jesus’ body lay sealed and under guard in the tomb. The Roman Guards watched over the tomb, but none of Jesus’ followers came during this time because it was the Sabbath; they rested as the Law required (Lk. 23:56b).

SUNDAY (The Resurrection!)

All four Gospels carry the account of the resurrection, and they each differ somewhat. Skeptics have called them “conflicting accounts” and have attempted to use these differences to argue against the inspiration of the Scriptures. The accounts, however, do not contradict each other, and what follows is one possible way of putting the accounts together and seeing them as complementary. Below, the four are laid out in parallel columns so you can see how they fit together. This also illustrates why we have four separate accounts: it takes all of them to give us the whole story as each Gospel relates different aspects from different perspectives. Scripture quotations are from the NIV (1984). The comments in green stretching across all four columns are my descriptions of what is happening.

MATTHEW 28	MARK 16	LUKE 24	JOHN 20
Sunday evening after sunset (our Saturday evening)—after the end of the Sabbath when the stores would reopen, the women go and buy spices.			
	¹ When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus’ body.		
Sunday night before dawn —This was the day after the Sabbath, and Mary Magdalene and several of the women set out from Bethany (two miles away) to bring the spices they had bought and prepared Sunday evening (i.e., our Saturday evening) to anoint Jesus’ body. As they walked along in the twilight, they worried about how they were going to open the tomb.			
	² Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise,	¹ On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared	¹ Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark,
	they were on their way to the tomb		
	³ and they asked each other, “Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?”		
At dawn, while they were on the way, Jesus is resurrected. There is an earthquake, and an angel rolls the stone back and then sits on the stone. On seeing the angel, the guards faint dead away.			
² 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. ³ His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. ⁴ The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.			
Sunday morning just after dawn (our Sunday morning)—Arriving at the tomb just after dawn, Mary Magdalene and the other women find the stone rolled away and the tomb empty.			
		and went to the tomb.	Mary Magdalene went to the tomb
	⁴ But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away.	² They found the stone rolled away from the tomb,	and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance.
Mary sees that the tomb is empty and runs to tell Peter and John what had happened.			
			² So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put him!”

Sunday Morning

MATTHEW 28	MARK 16	LUKE 24	JOHN 20
In the meantime, the other women see the angel sitting on the stone. He tells them that Jesus has risen and invites them to enter the tomb to see where He lay.			
<p>⁵The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. ⁶He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay.</p>	<p>³As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed. ⁶"Don't be alarmed," he said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him.</p>		
The women enter the tomb and see other angels in the tomb. The angels tell them that Jesus has risen from the dead and to tell His disciples that He will meet them in Galilee; so they run back to the city with great joy.			
<p>⁷Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him. Now I have told you.' ⁸So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples.</p>	<p>⁷Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you." ⁸Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb.</p>	<p>³but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. ⁴While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. ⁵In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: ⁷The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again." ⁸Then they remembered his words.</p>	
Some of the women, however, are too afraid to tell anyone what they have seen.			
	<p>They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.</p>		
In response to Mary's plea, Peter and John come to the tomb and find it empty. Puzzled they return home.			
		<p>¹²Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened.</p>	<p>³So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. ⁴Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. ⁶Then Simon Peter, who was behind him, arrived and went into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, ⁷as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head. The cloth was folded up by itself separate from the linen. ⁸Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. ⁹(They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) ¹⁰Then the disciples went back to their homes,</p>

Sunday Morning

MATTHEW 28	MARK 16	LUKE 24	JOHN 20
<p>Mary Magdalene, having followed Peter and John back to the tomb, stays there. Jesus' body is missing and she is weeping. Two angels appear to her, and ask her why she is crying. She explains that she doesn't know what has happened to Jesus' body.</p>			
			<p>¹¹but Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb ¹²and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. ¹³They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?" "They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him."</p>
<p>Jesus then makes His first resurrection appearance, and it is to Mary Magdalene. He speaks to her and asks her why she is crying. Seeing only blurrily through her tear-filled eyes, she first thinks He must be the gardener. Then Jesus calls her name, and she immediately recognizes Him.</p>			
	<p>Mk. 16:9-20—I have omitted this passage as most reliable manuscripts do not include it.</p>		<p>¹⁴At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. ¹⁵"Woman," he said, "why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?" Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him." ¹⁶Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni" (which means Teacher).</p>
<p>Jesus tells her that He is really there, that has not yet ascended to the Father. He instructs her to go back to the disciples and tell them that He is going to ascend.</p>			
			<p>¹⁷Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"</p>
<p>Jesus then appears to the other women who are returning to the city. He also instructs them to report to the disciples and tell them that He will meet them in Galilee.</p>			
<p>⁹Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. ¹⁰Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."</p>			
<p>These women tell the disciples that they have seen the Lord: but the disciples do not believe them.</p>			
		<p>⁹When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. ¹⁰It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. ¹¹But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense.</p>	<p>¹⁸Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them that he had said these things to her.</p>

Sunday Afternoon

MATTHEW 28	MARK 16	LUKE 24	JOHN 20
<p>While they were gone, the guards report to the Jewish officials that Jesus and angels had appeared. The Jewish leaders bribe them to report that they had fallen asleep and the disciples came and stole the body and promise to keep them out of trouble with Pilate.</p>			
<p>¹¹While the women were on their way, some of the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened. ¹²When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, ¹³telling them, "You are to say, 'His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.' ¹⁴If this report gets to the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble." ¹⁵So the soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed. And this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day.</p>			
<p>Sunday afternoon—Jesus appears to Peter.</p>			
		<p>(³⁴"It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.")</p>	
<p>Sunday afternoon, Jesus appears to two disciples walking to Emmaus (about seven miles west of the city). Jesus joins them, but they do not recognize Him. They tell Him about the amazing events of the previous week in Jerusalem, that there was this prophet, Jesus, whom, they thought to be the Messiah, but He had been crucified, and now there were wild rumors among some of the women that He had been seen alive. Jesus then explains to them all about the prophecies concerning the Messiah. They beg Him to turn aside and have supper with them, so He agrees. As He says the blessing and breaks the bread, they suddenly recognize Him, and He disappears from their midst.</p>			
		<p>¹³Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. ¹⁴They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. ¹⁵As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; ¹⁶but they were kept from recognizing him. ¹⁷He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?" They stood still, their faces downcast.</p>	

Sunday Afternoon

MATTHEW 28	MARK 16	LUKE 24	JOHN 20
		<p>¹⁸One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there in these days?"</p> <p>¹⁹"What things?" he asked. "About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people."</p> <p>²⁰The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him;</p> <p>²¹but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. ²²In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning ²³but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. ²⁴Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see."</p> <p>²⁵He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" ²⁷And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.</p> <p>²⁸As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus acted as if he were going farther. ²⁹But they urged him strongly, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them. ³⁰When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. ³¹Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. ³²They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"</p>	

Sunday Afternoon

MATTHEW 28	MARK 16	LUKE 24	JOHN 20
<p>After Jesus disappeared, the two Emmaus disciples jump up and run back to Jerusalem arriving in the late afternoon before sunset (it was still the first day of the week). They go to the upper room where the believers were hiding behind locked doors because of fear of the authorities. Among the group gathered there were all of the apostles except Thomas. They breathlessly relate their encounter with Jesus on the road and how they had not recognized Him until He broke bread at their meal.</p>			
		<p>³³They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together ³⁴and saying, "It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon." ³⁵Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.</p>	
<p>As they were excitedly telling their story to their amazed and disbelieving listeners, Jesus appears in their midst. The disciples still cannot believe their eyes. At first they think Jesus must be a ghost, so Jesus has to prove that it is Him and not a ghost by showing them His scars from the crucifixion and by eating something in front of them. Finally, satisfied that it really is Him in the flesh, they rejoice.</p>			
		<p>³⁶While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." ³⁷They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. ³⁸He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? ³⁹Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have." ⁴⁰When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. ⁴¹And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?" ⁴²They gave him a piece of broiled fish, ⁴³and he took it and ate it in their presence.</p>	<p>¹⁹On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" ²⁰After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.</p>
<p>Jesus then commissions them and prepares them to receive the Holy Spirit (Whom they would receive after His ascension).</p>			
			<p>²¹Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." ²²And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."</p>

Succeeding Days

MATTHEW 28	MARK 16	LUKE 24	JOHN 20
<p>The next day—The disciples find Thomas and tell him what he missed, but it is just too farfetched for him to believe it. He declares that he will have to see Jesus’ scars for himself before he can accept it.</p>			
			<p>²⁴Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. ²⁵So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!” But he said to them, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it.”</p>
<p>One week later—The apostles were back in the upper room again, but this time all eleven were present, including Thomas. Jesus again appears in their midst, and Thomas is finally and thoroughly convinced.</p>			
			<p>²⁶A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” ²⁷Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.” ²⁸Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!” ²⁹Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”</p>

SUMMARY OF RESURRECTION APPEARANCES¹³

APPEARANCE	PLACE	TIME	MATTHEW	MARK	LUKE	JOHN	ACTS	1 CORIN-THIANS	REVE-LATION
The empty tomb	Jerusalem	Resurrection Sunday	28:1-10	16:1-8	24:1-12	20:1-9			
To Mary Magdalene in the garden	Jerusalem	Resurrection Sunday		16:9-11		20:11-18			
To other women	Jerusalem	Resurrection Sunday	28:9-10						
To two men going to Emmaus	Road to Emmaus	Resurrection Sunday		Mk. 16:12-13	24:13-32				
To Peter	Jerusalem	Resurrection Sunday			24:34			15:5	
To the ten disciples (missing Thomas) in the upper room	Jerusalem	Resurrection Sunday			24:36-43	20:19-25			
To the 11 disciples (with Thomas) in the upper room	Jerusalem	Following Sunday		16:14		20:26-31		15:5	
To seven disciples	Sea of Galilee	Some time later				21:1-23			
To the 11 disciples on a mountain	Galilee	Some time later	28:16-20	16:15-18					
To more than 500	Unknown	Some time later						15:6	
To James	Unknown	Some time later						15:7	
To His disciples at His ascension	Mount of Olives	40 days after Jesus' resurrection			24:44-49				
To Paul	Road to Damascus	Several years later					9:1-19 22:3-16 26:9-18		
To John	Island of Patmos	Over 60 years later							Rev. 1:9-18

¹³ Zondervan NIV Study Bible 2008 Update. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 1615.

THE MEANING OF THE RESURRECTION¹⁴

Let us look at two pictures. One is an upper room in Jerusalem on the night after Calvary and a little group of men cowering behind bolted doors. Fear is on every face. But even more markedly than fear, dejection is written there, hopeless, final, irretrievable dejection and despair. Dazed and stunned and bewildered, they sit in silence, too heartbroken to speak, too benumbed in soul even to pray. Everything has come to an end. Fate has beaten them. There is nothing left to live for. That is the first picture—utter, abject defeat.

Never had an enterprise looked more utterly ruined than when Jesus of Nazareth was taken down from the cross and laid in the tomb. The Apostles Creed says, “He was crucified, dead and buried;” the very words carry an awful finality. If the disciples thought about the future at all, they saw themselves creeping back shamefacedly to the homes they had left so eagerly at Jesus’ bidding, and they heard in their minds the jeers and taunts of the village street as they so humiliatingly returned. Not only was Christ dead, Christianity was dead. And against its tomb the great stone of despair had been rolled.

But there is also the second picture, and it occurs a few short weeks later. It is the same group of men, but they are not skulking behind closed doors now! They are out in the streets. They are men aflame with superhuman confidence. Their words ring like iron. They have a message to which the world can but listen. They are absolutely fearless and overwhelmingly happy. They are planning the conquest of the Earth.

Look at these two contrasting pictures. First, the misery of blasted hopes, then the valor of the saints. First, the fumbling, futile remnant; then the nucleus of a marching, militant church. And there is only a very brief time interval between the two. How had this startling, almost incredible change in these men’s lives occurred? Can we ex-

¹⁴ This section was adapted from the excellent work of Scottish minister, James S. Stewart, published in his book *The Life and Teaching of Jesus Christ*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, Dec. 20, 2000), 173-182.

plain it? Yes! Between the two pictures something had happened: *Christ had risen!*

The evidence for the resurrection is indisputable. Divergences of detail may certainly be found in the various Gospel accounts of the supreme event, but these, far from calling into question the credibility of the narratives, actually enhance it. Think of the circumstances: here were the disciples, caught up in a whirl of stupendous amazement and bewilderment by the discovery that their Lord was alive again! They were all immersed in a time of supreme emotion and excitement. Is it to be wondered that, when sometime later, the Gospel writers came to gather their memories of these crowded and glorious hours to set them down in writing that they would remember different details? Does that detract from the value of their evidence? On the contrary, we would have far more reason to question their accounts if there had been no differences. Then it would have been hard to resist the notion that the accounts had been artificially harmonized. No, each witness described the events each in his own way. The gospel evidence for the resurrection of Jesus bears the marks of reality and authenticity. It is the witness of men and women who were themselves utterly convinced; from the first to the last, the accounts carry conviction.

It is significant that when, only fifty days after the crucifixion, the apostles began to preach in Jerusalem about the resurrection, *the evidence convinced thousands*. The events of the crucifixion and resurrection had occurred so recently, if the facts which the apostles were openly declaring were not credible, their opponents could easily dispute their claims and disprove them. The Jewish leaders in Jerusalem wanted this new movement nipped in the bud, and if there were any way to discredit the claims of the apostles, they would have done it. As easy as it would have been to prove that Jesus had not risen from the dead, no proof was even attempted. This failure on the part of Jesus’ enemies is itself first-rate evidence of the truth of what the apostles were declaring. The facts remained unchallenged because they were above challenge. The resurrection was incontestable.

The Meaning of the Resurrection

Another clear evidence is the amazing transformation of the disciples themselves. Nothing less than the resurrection could explain the sudden and complete change in these men from absolute despair and futility to absolute radiance and mastery of life. No theory of an invented story or of visionary wish fulfillment can overcome this fact. The idea that the disciples, having lost their Master, fabricated a tale of His return to them, is absurd in the light of the lives of these men. Such a false story would not transform their characters nor motivate them to endure martyrdom.

The evidence, however, goes beyond the original disciples; it includes the existence of the Christian Church. It is a simple fact of history that it was the resurrection belief that brought the Church into being. When the Church swept out from Jerusalem to the conquest of the Earth, it was the resurrection message that was the driving power. If Christ had not truly risen, the Church which bears His name would have perished long ago. Throughout history, fierce attacks—social, political, and intellectual—have been launched against it. Many a time through the centuries its gravediggers have pronounced its death, but in every case they have failed to bury it. Only the fact of the resurrection of Jesus can explain the Church of the living God.

All these lines of evidence are valid and important, but the supreme proof of the resurrection, the thing which makes it not only credible but inevitable, is the person of Jesus, Himself. Now this is what the disciples, after the first startling shock had given place to steady certitude, had come to understand. Jesus, being Who and what He was, anything other than that He should rise again was unthinkable. As Luke expressed it, “it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him” (Ac. 2:24 NIV).

One thing that always impressed the disciples about their Master was His sheer vitality. “In Him, was life,” says John (Jn. 1:4 NIV). Peter called Him “the author of life” (Ac. 3:15). Look at any page in the Gospels, and one of the first things that strikes you about Jesus is that here is Someone Who is fully alive, as vital as the breath of God.

Everyone who came in contact with Jesus felt that He had enormous reserves at His command and that, however much they saw in Him, there was always more to see. This explains the astounding daring of the requests they brought to Him. Leprosy, for instance, was notoriously incurable; but “Lord, if you are willing,” said the leper simply, “you can make me clean” (Mt. 8:2 NIV). They could not even conceive of any situation for which Christ would not be adequate. Even death would have to give way, for had He not raised Lazarus from the dead?

The decisive thing for these disciples was their personal experience of Jesus. Daily walking with Him had taught them that He was more than a mere man. Though Calvary momentarily dimmed and clouded their faith, after the resurrection it shone out clear again. Having come to feel toward Him as they had always felt toward God, they saw now that the resurrection had been a certainty from the first; for if Jesus had died and that was all, then God would have died. So, in the last resort, the proof of the resurrection is the person of Jesus Himself and men’s experience of Jesus. It was not possible that He—God incarnate—should be held by death.

The first to see Jesus after His death was Mary Magdalene (Jn. 20:1, 11-18). The greatest news that ever broke upon the world, the news which was to change the whole life of humanity and shake down thrones and revolutionize kingdoms, the news which still today girdles the Earth with everlasting hope and sends a new thrill through every soul on Easter morning, was given first to one humble, obscure woman out of whom seven devils had been cast. One who had nothing to distinguish her but her forgiven heart and her love for her Master. Mary had come out before dawn to sit beside a dead body. She was telling herself that everything else besides that was gone. The voice of Jesus that would never speak again, the light in those eyes that would shine no more, the living soul that had left forever—all gone and only the dead body left for love and gratitude to cling to and try to serve.

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She came to the grave and found that even that small service was taken away from her. This was her moment of final desolation: “They have taken my Lord away,” she said, “and I don’t know where they have put him” (Jn. 20:13 NIV). Blinded with tears, her eyes could not recognize someone standing near; but He called her by name, and then she knew: “Jesus said to her, ‘Mary.’ She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, ‘Rabboni!’ (which means Teacher)” (Jn. 20:16 NIV). What Jesus had previously saved her from was a measure of her devotion to Him, and it is always those who love Jesus most who see Him first.¹⁵

Luke records the wonderful account of Jesus’ appearance to two disciples on the Emmaus road (Lk. 24:13-35). Of all the possible disappointments in life, to be disappointed in Jesus must surely be the worst. That was the disappointment weighing on the hearts of Clopas and his friend as they journeyed home in the falling twilight of that first resurrection day. Brokenly they spoke to each other of the hope that was gone, and memories of happier days crowded in—days when, looking at Jesus, so young and strong and steady-eyed and godlike, they had been sure that this was the prophesied king. “We had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel,” they explained to a Stranger who asked (Lk. 24:21 NIV). And now it had all ended in bitter disillusionment and heartache and regret. This was also confused by an impossible story being reported by some of the women that Jesus had been seen alive. But Christ is often nearest when people think Him gone forever. And as they listened to the talk of the Stranger Who had joined them on the way, their hearts began to burn. Almost before they knew it, they had reached their journey’s end. Never had the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus seemed so short.

It was hard to say good-bye to the Stranger Whose company had so mysteriously charmed their gloom away. Something prompted them to keep Him with them a little longer, so they invited Him to have

¹⁵ Remember Lucy in C.S. Lewis’ *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and especially in *Prince Caspian*, when she alone could see Aslan.

supper with them. There something happened—was it some familiar gesture as He broke the bread? Or was it the grace He said over the meal? Or was it the hands with which He raised the bread, hands bearing such ugly scars. Whatever it was, it rent the veil which had been hanging over their eyes. Finally, they recognized Him only to have Him disappear from their presence. Immediately, they jumped up and ran all the way back to the upper room in Jerusalem to tell the others that they had seen then Lord. The apostles confirmed to them that Jesus had, in fact, risen from the dead and had appeared to Peter. As recorded in the King James Version, their exchange has become a traditional greeting on Easter: “He is risen! “He is risen indeed!” (Lu. 24:34 KJV).

Later that same night in Jerusalem, the leaderless and confused disciples were reunited with their Master. They were huddled in fear in the upper room behind locked doors, when Jesus appeared in their midst (Jn. 20:19). Two of the original twelve disciples were missing in that great night—Judas and Thomas. In Luke’s restrained and solemn language, Judas had “left to go where he belongs” (Ac. 1:25 NIV). But where was Thomas? Perhaps he was wandering alone in the dark, brooding on his own deep grief and unable to bear any company, not even the company of his fellow disciples. He may even have been haunting the empty garden where he had deserted his Master only two nights before. The next morning, when Peter and John, with a strange new light in their eyes, accosted him and told him their amazing tidings, he looked at them sadly and told them that they were out of their minds.

But a week later, when they were all in the upper room, Jesus came again. This time, Jesus, Who is always patient with honest doubt, tailored His self revelation to the needs of His one groping follower. Thomas now saw what the others had already seen and with a great cry, “My Lord and my God!” (Jn. 20:28 NIV) the darkness was swept from his soul.

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Reading the Gospel accounts of the appearances of the risen Lord, we are stuck by this fact: while the Jesus whom these men and women saw was certainly the same dear Master Whom they had known before, there was something different. There was a certain reserve about Him now; “Do not hold on to me” He said (Jn. 20:17 NIV). It could not be called aloofness, but at least it meant that one chapter in the book of their fellowship together was now closed and another chapter, a higher order of fellowship, was beginning. Ordinary limitations of space and time had ceased to limit Him; He came and went in ways they could not understand.

Recognition did not always happen immediately, either, as we have seen in the stories of Mary at the tomb and the Emmaus disciples. Matthew reported that when some saw Him, they doubted (Mt. 28:17). Mark reported the Emmaus disciples as saying that He appeared to them “in a different form” (Mk. 16:12 NIV). Luke recorded that some thought they had seen a ghost (Lk. 24:37). John said that when Jesus appeared to them standing on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, they did not realize that it was Him at first (Jn. 21:4). He was the same—yet different. He was still the Friend with Whom in former days they had walked through the fields of Galilee and camped at night under the open sky. He was still the Teacher Who had taught them such memorable lessons from the lilies of the field and the birds of the air and from yokes and plows and candlelight and the shouting of children at their games. Yet somehow, they were conscious of a change.

But they came to understand that that should be expected, for He had been on a long journey since Calvary had snatched Him from them. He had been to the “undiscovered country” from which it was thought none could return, and the smell of that country was all about Him. He belonged no longer to this small, material world with its narrow time and space restrictions. He belonged to that greater, higher world of spirit which alone is real and eternal.

The Significance of the Resurrection. We have dwelt for some time on the fact of the resurrection and the recorded appearances by which that fact was first revealed. But we should now ask about its significance. It is obvious that an event like this must have consequences, not only for the disciples or even for the Church, but for the whole world. What does the resurrection of Jesus mean?

It means, first, God’s vindication of His Son. When the disciples taught about Jesus’ resurrection, they did not say that “He rose,” but that “He was raised” (Ac. 2:24, 32; 4:10; Ro. 6:4, 9; 1 Co. 15:15, etc.). Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they realized that what had happened had been nothing less than God in action. That One Who had died a felon’s death should nevertheless be Messiah was an idea not only shocking but actually blasphemous to orthodox Jewish minds, and many devout Jews who had secret hopes about Jesus must have considered the cross to be the end of any messianic claims. But the resurrection was God’s unexpected testimony that the most daring hopes that had ever been cherished about Jesus did not begin to go far enough. The resurrection set God’s personal seal of truth on Jesus’ claim to be the Messiah and began to show that the Messiah was to be much more than any of them had ever expected.

It means, further, the vindication of righteousness. Jesus had calmly staked everything He had and was upon the absolute validity of righteousness, truth, and love. These were the things whose supremacy He had always preached. It was for these things that He had given His own life up to the last limit of self-consecration—even His death. Had the sinless Jesus remained in the tomb, the conclusion would have been unavoidable: this world is morally chaotic; goodness is merely an insubstantial mirage; and righteousness is nothing more than a deceptive delusion. But on resurrection morning, it was just as if the whole nature of reality, by one mighty act, had endorsed and countersigned the noble, unselfish way of living. Now we know for sure that in God’s universe, right will ultimately triumph. Jesus was raised and righteousness was vindicated.

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The resurrection also means the assurance of immortality. Pagans, watching Christ's followers at work in the world, have been struck by many things, but nothing more forcibly than the Christians' concept of death. It was Jesus' resurrection that had robbed death of the terrors of its power. Jesus said, "I am going there to prepare a place for you. And . . . I will come back and take you to be with me" (Jn. 14:2-3 NIV). If death means that, what room is there for fear? Jesus' conquest of death also means our conquest of death; He said, "Because I live, you also will live" (Jn. 14:19 NIV). Easter morning brought immortality to light, and death was left lying broken in the dust.

As Paul triumphantly declared while looking from Jesus' resurrection forward to our own resurrections:

⁵⁰I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. ⁵¹Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed— ⁵²in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. ⁵³For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. ⁵⁴When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory."

⁵⁵"Where, O death, is your victory?
Where, O death, is your sting?"

⁵⁶The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.
⁵⁷But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁵⁸Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord,

because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.
(1 Co. 15:50-58 NIV)

Finally, the resurrection means a Christ Who is alive forever. Even when the forty wonderful days after Jesus' resurrection were over and His visible presence was withdrawn from the Earth, the disciples knew that they had not lost Him. Every day His own word was being verified in their experience: "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Mt. 28:20 NIV). Through the difficulties of their years of service, it wasn't just on their memories of Christ that they depended. It was His living presence and daily fellowship. Jesus had promised them that when He went to the Father, He would send them the Holy Spirit who would lead them, teach them, and comfort them (Jn. 14:16-17, 26). And when, like their Master, they saw death coming to meet them violently, it was His hands that held them up.

Their experience of the presence of the Lord is not unique. Hosts of men and women, since the days of the apostles, have walked and talked with Jesus. This is no miracle, for if Christ is risen indeed, He is living now. What is more natural than for Him to meet with His friends face to face? Such fellowship is a direct consequence of the resurrection.

When Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John came to the end of their Gospel accounts, it never occurred to them to write "The End" after the last line. They felt that they had only written volume one. When one of them, Luke, picked up the pen again and wrote volume two; he called it "The Acts of the Apostles." He referred to the first story he had written as what "Jesus *began* to do and teach" (Ac. 1:1 NIV), for Luke saw that, however much of the story he had told, there was vastly more to follow.

In a sense, of course, the task of Jesus on this Earth was finished when He returned to His Father. The earthly ministry, the agony of Gethsemane, the arrest, the trials, the exhaustion of the Via Dolorosa,

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the death on the cross—all that was finished and would never happen again. These were historical events. They came and passed. They happened once and only once. The full price of sin was paid. The revelation of redeeming love was perfect and complete. Nothing was left undone. Nothing remains to be added. Beyond Jesus we need never hope to go. In this sense, at any rate, it is true that the story of Jesus finds at Calvary and the empty tomb and the ascension its culmination and completion and crown. True—but not the whole truth. For while the Gospel is securely and solidly rooted in history, the Christ of the Gospel is more than a mere figure of history. It was no historical reminiscence which got hold of Saul of Tarsus and flung him violently to the ground from his horse and revolutionized his life. It was no old, remembered story which sent the Christian message flaming like a prairie fire across the Earth. And it was more than the recollection of a noble example that ignited the modern missionary movement.

Yes, Christ is alive. To thousands upon thousands in this present hour this is no mere theory or vague, uncertain rumor, but their proven, inviolable experience. And if they are facing life victoriously now where once they were defeated, it is because they have found the same risen Lord Who walked among the flowers of the garden on that first Easter morning. Amen!