

## **“Jesus Died”**

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We’ve been examining the life of Jesus for over three months, and now we’ve come to the climax of his time on earth. Tonight, we gather to remember his death, and on Sunday, we’ll talk about his resurrection.

My goal for tonight is very simple. I want to show that Jesus died, why he died, and what it means for us. I will be reading, for the most part, from the Gospel of Mark.

Before we start to look at Mark 14 and 15, I have to give us some context. On Sunday, what we call Palm Sunday, Jesus came to Jerusalem. He lived about a three days’ journey north of Jerusalem by the Sea of Galilee, but he came to the big city to observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread and the Passover. His real purpose in coming to the city, however, was to die. In Luke 9:51, in the English Standard Version, it says, “When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.” “Taken up” is a reference to the cross, resurrection, and ascension.

After arriving in Jerusalem, he had a series of conflicts with the powers that be. More specifically, he had conflict with the religious powers of the day, different groups of Jewish religious leaders called Pharisees, Sadducees, and scribes. He went to the temple, the center of religious activity, and said that it was corrupt. It had become “a den of robbers,” a place of commerce, not of worship. When he did that, these religious leaders decided that he had to die. Mark says, in chapter 11, verse 18, “The chief priests and the teachers of the law heard this and began looking for a way to kill him, for they feared him, because the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching.”<sup>1</sup> That’s stunning. The religious leaders feared Jesus because his teaching was superior. They were clearly jealous.

They also wanted to kill Jesus because he made claims to be God. I talked about this on Sunday. When Jesus said that his work was essentially the God the Father’s work, the Jewish leaders wanted to kill him. John 5:18 says, “For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.” Apparently they had already wanted to kill Jesus, but when they heard he was claiming to be God, they wanted to kill him all the more.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, the Scripture quoted herein is taken from the New International Version (1984).

The same thing happens in John 8. Jesus has another confrontation with these religious leaders in Jerusalem. He tells them some harsh truths. He said they didn't know God (v. 19). He said that if they didn't believe in him, they would die in their sins (v. 24). Jesus said that they wanted to kill him because they couldn't bear what he had to say, and because they belonged to their father, the devil (vv. 37, 40-41, 44). And again, Jesus said things that made it clear he thought he was God. They were ready to kill him, but he escaped (vv. 58-59).

This happens one more time in John. In John 10:30, Jesus says, "I and the Father are one." Jesus claimed to be equal to God. So Jesus' opponents again pick up stones to hurl at him (v. 31). Clearly, the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem wanted to kill Jesus. They thought he was saying outrageous, blasphemous things by claiming to be God. They didn't believe the truth, that Jesus is God. And they were jealous. Jesus was drawing crowds, which meant they might lose their power.

In Mark 12, Jesus tells a parable: a man planted a vineyard, put a wall around it, made a winepress, and a watchtower, and then rented it out to some farmers. The owner then went away on a journey. At harvest time, he sent his servants to collect some of the fruit, but the tenants killed the owner's servants. So the owner eventually sent his son, and the tenants killed him, too. Eventually, the owner himself comes and kills all the tenants and gives the vineyard to others. The religious leaders who heard this story knew it was about them. They were those greedy tenants, and the owner represented God. The son, of course, is Jesus, the Son of God, God in the flesh. They would kill the son, but God would come in judgment.

Therefore, we read this, in Mark 12:12: "Then they looked for a way to arrest him because they knew he had spoken the parable against them. But they were afraid of the crowd; so they left him and went away." Jesus' end would come soon, but so would the establishment in Jerusalem. Jesus predicted the temple there would be destroyed (see Mark 13). Jesus had come to fulfill all the elements of Jewish worship. He had come to fulfill it and therefore to replace it. No wonder the leaders in Jerusalem felt threatened. Since they were not God's people, they didn't realize what God was doing.

That brings us to Mark 14. I want to read as much of Mark 14 and 15 as I can, because I think it's best that we let God do the talking. So let's turn to Mark 14:1-2:

<sup>1</sup> Now the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread were only two days away, and the chief priests and the teachers of the law were looking for some sly way to

arrest Jesus and kill him. <sup>2</sup> “But not during the Feast,” they said, “or the people may riot.”

The chief priests and the teachers of the law wanted to arrest Jesus and have him killed, but they didn't want to do this in front of a crowd. They feared a riot. Jerusalem and the region it was in, Judea, were under the control of the Roman Empire. If the Jewish people were rioting over religious issues, the Roman soldiers would restore order violently. The Passover had to be celebrated by Jews in Jerusalem, which meant that the city had a much larger population than usual. All of this made the Romans a bit nervous, so they took precautions to provide greater security during the festivals. If the chief priests and teachers of the law were to have Jesus killed, he had to be arrested away from the crowds, put on trial at a time when larger crowds wouldn't be around, and he would have to be put to death by the Roman Empire's authorities, because at that time, Jews didn't have the authority to carry out capital punishment.

Let's continue by reading Mark 14:3-11.

<sup>3</sup> While he was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of a man known as Simon the Leper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head. <sup>4</sup> Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, “Why this waste of perfume? <sup>5</sup> It could have been sold for more than a year's wages and the money given to the poor.” And they rebuked her harshly. <sup>6</sup> “Leave her alone,” said Jesus. “Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. <sup>7</sup> The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me. <sup>8</sup> She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial. <sup>9</sup> I tell you the truth, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.”

There are a lot of interesting things here, but I want to focus on what this woman did. She took very expensive perfume, an ointment, and poured it on Jesus' head. What does this mean? Jesus says that she did this “to prepare for my burial.” It was a Jewish custom to anoint dead bodies with a mixture of various spices, to keep the corpse from smelling as it decomposed. But here, Jesus says this woman anoints his body before he is dead. I don't think the woman knew exactly what she was doing—she may have thought she was simply honoring a great man. But Jesus knew that he was about to die.

Earlier in Mark, Jesus predicted three times that he would die. The first time is Mark 8:31, which says, “He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and

be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again.”<sup>2</sup> That first prediction shocked the disciples, because they knew Jesus was the Messiah, the special anointed one of God. They knew the Messiah was a powerful ruler. But they didn’t also realize that he had to suffer. I’ll explain more about the meaning of his suffering as we continue. But it’s important to point out that Jesus knew what was coming.

Then we come to Mark 14:10-11. Not only did the Jewish leaders want to kill Jesus, but one of his own followers wanted to betray him.

<sup>10</sup> Then Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve, went to the chief priests to betray Jesus to them. <sup>11</sup> They were delighted to hear this and promised to give him money. So he watched for an opportunity to hand him over.

Judas was the treasurer of the disciples. In John’s Gospel, we find out that Judas wanted the ointment that the woman poured out on Jesus to be sold so the money could be given to the poor. Well, that’s what he said, but John also tells us that Judas was a thief and used to take from the money that the disciples had (John 12:4-6). Judas obviously did not trust Jesus. He didn’t love Jesus. So, when he had the opportunity, he sold Jesus out for money. He would tell the Jewish leaders where they could arrest Jesus away from the crowds.

This shows us that Jesus was killed because of the evil intent of others. Of course, the Jewish leaders had an evil intent. But so did Judas. Yet there is a greater evil than mere men. We read this in Luke 22:3-6:

<sup>3</sup> Then Satan entered Judas, called Iscariot, one of the Twelve. <sup>4</sup> And Judas went to the chief priests and the officers of the temple guard and discussed with them how he might betray Jesus. <sup>5</sup> They were delighted and agreed to give him money. <sup>6</sup> He consented, and watched for an opportunity to hand Jesus over to them when no crowd was present.

Satan, a mysterious and powerful evil being, an angel who rebelled against God, influenced Judas. Satan entered into Judas to make him do his bidding. Satan is the father of lies and a murderer (John 8:44). All lies and murders can trace their origin back to him.<sup>3</sup> So Satan wanted to kill Jesus, too. Satan must have thought that killing Jesus would destroy God’s plans. Little did he know that Jesus would rise from the grave.

In Mark 14:12-16, we find that Jesus prepares to eat a Passover meal with his disciples.

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<sup>2</sup> He makes similar predictions in Mark 8:31; 9:30-32; 10:32-34.

<sup>3</sup> See also John 13:2, 27.

<sup>12</sup> On the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, when it was customary to sacrifice the Passover lamb, Jesus' disciples asked him, "Where do you want us to go and make preparations for you to eat the Passover?" <sup>13</sup> So he sent two of his disciples, telling them, "Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him. <sup>14</sup> Say to the owner of the house he enters, 'The Teacher asks: Where is my guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?' <sup>15</sup> He will show you a large upper room, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there." <sup>16</sup> The disciples left, went into the city and found things just as Jesus had told them. So they prepared the Passover.

The Passover meal remembered the meal the Israelites ate right before they were delivered out of slavery in Egypt. Almost fifteen hundred years prior to Jesus' day, the Israelites were slaves in Egypt. God heard the cries of the Israelites and he used his servant Moses to deliver the people out of the land. However, Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, refused to let the people go. So God sent plagues on Egypt. The first nine plagues were devastating, but they didn't cause Pharaoh to let the Israelites go. So God sent one last plague. This time, God would go throughout Egypt and kill all the firstborn, humans and animals, everyone who didn't have blood of lambs on their door. This would include the Israelites, too. Everyone needed to have blood covering their door frames or they would be destroyed.<sup>4</sup>

Why did God do such a thing? Well, God did it for two reasons, I suppose. One, that story shows that all of us, without distinction, deserve to die. I know that may sound extreme, but it's the truth. In fact, we all do die. Why do we die? Because we have rebelled against God. We are sinners by nature and by choice. At best, we ignore God and at worst we do what we know is against his will. We were made to worship God and serve him, and instead we spend a lot of time worshiping lesser things. So, our punishment is death.

But the Passover story also shows something else: God made a way for us to be saved from death, at least the ultimate death of being separated from God forever. In the Old Testament, God told his people to sacrifice animals. The logic is simple: someone deserved to die for sins. The guilt of the people could be symbolically transferred to the animals that were sacrificed. The lesson is that everyone's sins will be punished, whether directly, through death, or through the death of another, a substitute.

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<sup>4</sup> To read about the final plague and the original Passover meal, see Exodus 11 and 12.

So it was fitting that the Passover would be Jesus' last meal with his disciples before his death. At that meal, Jesus would tell them the real meaning of the Passover. But first, Jesus has something else to tell his disciples. Let's read Mark 14:17-21.

<sup>17</sup> When evening came, Jesus arrived with the Twelve. <sup>18</sup> While they were reclining at the table eating, he said, "I tell you the truth, one of you will betray me—one who is eating with me." <sup>19</sup> They were saddened, and one by one they said to him, "Surely not I?" <sup>20</sup> "It is one of the Twelve," he replied, "one who dips bread into the bowl with me. <sup>21</sup> The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born."

When we read about Jesus' last days, one thing seems pretty clear: Jesus is in complete control. He knows what was going to happen. Nothing took him by surprise. He knew he would die and he knew he would be betrayed. Sometimes, people make it seem as if it were not Jesus' plan to die. But Jesus told us otherwise. He made it clear that it was also his decision to die. In John 10:14-18, Jesus says,

<sup>14</sup> "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me— <sup>15</sup> just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. <sup>16</sup> I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. <sup>17</sup> The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. <sup>18</sup> No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father."

Jesus refers to his people as his sheep. He is their shepherd, their leader and protector. And Jesus lays down his life willingly for his people. Jesus' death was his own plan, and it was also the will of the Father. In Mark 14:21, Jesus says it is necessary that he, the Son of Man, die. The disciples also make this clear in their preaching, which we find in the book of Acts.<sup>5</sup> Why Jesus had to die becomes clearer when he celebrates the Passover with his disciples. We read about that in the next passage, Mark 14:22-25:

<sup>22</sup> While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take it; this is my body." <sup>23</sup> Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, and they all drank from it. <sup>24</sup> "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many," he said to them. <sup>25</sup> "I tell you the

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<sup>5</sup> See Acts 2:23; 4:27-28.

truth, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it anew in the kingdom of God.”

At the original Passover, the Israelites ate unleavened bread, roasted lamb, and bitter herbs. The bread was unleavened because they would leave Egypt in haste and didn't have time to wait for the dough to rise. They ate lamb because it was the blood of the lamb that kept them from being destroyed. And the bitter herbs were to remind them of their years of bitter slavery in Egypt. The Jews also celebrated the Passover meal with glasses of wine. In his last supper, Jesus takes two elements, the bread and the wine, and gives them new meaning. He says that the bread, which he breaks, represents his body. The wine represents his blood, the “blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many.” What does this mean?

It seems that Jesus is referring to a passage in Isaiah 53:4-12.

- 4 Surely he took up our infirmities  
and carried our sorrows,  
yet we considered him stricken by God,  
smitten by him, and afflicted.
- 5 But he was pierced for our transgressions,  
he was crushed for our iniquities;  
the punishment that brought us peace was upon him,  
and by his wounds we are healed.
- 6 We all, like sheep, have gone astray,  
each of us has turned to his own way;  
and the LORD has laid on him  
the iniquity of us all.
- 7 He was oppressed and afflicted,  
yet he did not open his mouth;  
he was led like a lamb to the slaughter,  
and as a sheep before her shearers is silent,  
so he did not open his mouth.
- 8 By oppression and judgment he was taken away.  
And who can speak of his descendants?  
For he was cut off from the land of the living;  
for the transgression of my people he was stricken.
- 9 He was assigned a grave with the wicked,  
and with the rich in his death,  
though he had done no violence,  
nor was any deceit in his mouth.
- 10 Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer,  
and though the LORD makes his life a guilt offering,  
he will see his offspring and prolong his days,

- and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand.
- 11 After the suffering of his soul,  
 he will see the light of life and be satisfied;  
 by his knowledge my righteous  
 servant will justify many,  
 and he will bear their iniquities.
- 12 Therefore I will give him a portion among the great,  
 and he will divide the spoils with the strong,  
 because he poured out his life unto death,  
 and was numbered with the transgressors.  
 For he bore the sin of many,  
 and made intercession for the transgressors.

In this passage in Isaiah, a suffering servant would die for the sins of his people. He would take their infirmities and sorrows (v. 4). He would be pierced for their transgressions and his punishment would bring them peace and his wounds would bring them healing (v. 5). He would be like a lamb led to the slaughter (v. 7). He would be cut off from the land of the living (v. 8). He would die with the wicked and be buried with the rich, though he had done nothing wrong (v. 9). This was the Lord's will to crush him, to cause him to suffer (v. 10). He would be raised from the dead and he would make many righteous (v. 11). He would pour out his life, even unto death, so that he could bear the sins of many (v.12).

That passage in Isaiah was written over seven hundred years before Jesus died, and yet many of the details describe exactly what Jesus did in his death, burial, and resurrection. Jesus knew that he was fulfilling the role of this suffering servant. His body, like bread, would be broken, crushed (Isa. 53:5, 10). His blood, representing his life, would be poured out like wine (Isa. 53:12).

And his blood would inaugurate a new covenant, a binding agreement between God and his people, which promised a true knowledge of God, new hearts to obey God, and forgiveness of sins.<sup>6</sup> Jesus' death would pay for the sins of his people. It would make them right with God. It would cover up any violation of God's law. It would cover all their wrongdoing. And it would seal a new covenant between God and his people, one that could never be broken.

Earlier in Mark, Jesus told his disciples why he came to earth. In Mark 10:45, he said, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Jesus uses that title, "Son of Man," to refer to himself. It shows that he is

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<sup>6</sup> Two passages that describe this new covenant are found in Jer. 31:31-34 and Ezek.

God.<sup>7</sup> And he came not to be served, but to serve. How did Jesus serve? By giving his life as a ransom for many. He bought us from the death and sin.

I don't have time to read the next few verses from Mark 14, but they show that Jesus knew he would be deserted by the rest of his disciples at the time of his death. I'll pick up the story in Mark 14:32-42.

<sup>32</sup> They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray."<sup>33</sup> He took Peter, James and John along with him, and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled. <sup>34</sup> "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death," he said to them. "Stay here and keep watch."<sup>35</sup> Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him. <sup>36</sup> "Abba, Father," he said, "everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will."<sup>37</sup> Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Simon," he said to Peter, "are you asleep? Could you not keep watch for one hour?"<sup>38</sup> Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak."<sup>39</sup> Once more he went away and prayed the same thing. <sup>40</sup> When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. They did not know what to say to him. <sup>41</sup> Returning the third time, he said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Enough! The hour has come. Look, the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. <sup>42</sup> Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!"

Here, Jesus prays to God the Father. Jesus knew that he had to die, but as he approached the time of his death, he was full of sorrow. He was bothered. How can this be, if he is God? Well, he's also man. Also, though God knows all propositions, all statements of truth, that's different from experiencing something firsthand. Now, Jesus was about to experience something he had never experienced before, the wrath of God. He had always felt the Father's love, but at the cross, he wouldn't feel it. He would feel forsaken.

Let's continue by reading Mark 14:43-50.

<sup>43</sup> Just as he was speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, appeared. With him was a crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the elders. <sup>44</sup> Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: "The one I kiss is the man; arrest him and lead him away under guard."<sup>45</sup> Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, "Rabbi!" and kissed him. <sup>46</sup> The men seized Jesus and arrested him. <sup>47</sup> Then one of those standing near drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear. <sup>48</sup> "Am I leading a rebellion," said Jesus, "that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me?"<sup>49</sup> Every day

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<sup>7</sup> It's a reference to Dan. 7:13-14. The passage shows that the Son of Man has all authority and is worshiped. Such things can only be true of God.

I was with you, teaching in the temple courts, and you did not arrest me. But the Scriptures must be fulfilled.”<sup>50</sup> Then everyone deserted him and fled.

This passage shows how Jesus was arrested. He was arrested away from the city, in the night, so crowds wouldn't object. Judas betrayed Jesus, but Jesus wasn't surprised. And Jesus didn't want to defend himself. He knew that the Scriptures, God's word, had to be fulfilled.

The next couple of verses are so strange that I have to read them. This is Mark 14:51-52:

<sup>51</sup> A young man, wearing nothing but a linen garment, was following Jesus. When they seized him,<sup>52</sup> he fled naked, leaving his garment behind.

Who is this young man? Some people think that it's Mark, and it's his own way of saying that he witnessed what happened. It's possible, but it's hard to say. But I read it to show that it's one of those details that would never appear if this story was fabricated. Perhaps the man who ran away represents all the followers who deserted Jesus. They were so eager to avoid arrest and possible death that they would rather run away naked than be caught.

The next passage, Mark 14:53-65, shows Jesus on trial.

<sup>53</sup> They took Jesus to the high priest, and all the chief priests, elders and teachers of the law came together. <sup>54</sup> Peter followed him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest. There he sat with the guards and warmed himself at the fire. <sup>55</sup> The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death, but they did not find any. <sup>56</sup> Many testified falsely against him, but their statements did not agree. <sup>57</sup> Then some stood up and gave this false testimony against him: <sup>58</sup> “We heard him say, ‘I will destroy this man-made temple and in three days will build another, not made by man.’” <sup>59</sup> Yet even then their testimony did not agree. <sup>60</sup> Then the high priest stood up before them and asked Jesus, “Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?” <sup>61</sup> But Jesus remained silent and gave no answer. Again the high priest asked him, “Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?” <sup>62</sup> “I am,” said Jesus. “And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.” <sup>63</sup> The high priest tore his clothes. “Why do we need any more witnesses?” he asked. <sup>64</sup> “You have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?” They all condemned him as worthy of death. <sup>65</sup> Then some began to spit at him; they blindfolded him, struck him with their fists, and said, “Prophecy!” And the guards took him and beat him.

Jesus is brought before the Sanhedrin, the council of Jewish leaders. They need to have a reason for Jesus to die. They didn't have the power to kill Jesus,<sup>8</sup> but they needed to present him as

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<sup>8</sup> John 18:31.

guilty in order to have the Roman Empire kill him. Without going into the details now, it seems that this trial was held in the wee hours of the morning so that no one could object. It also appears that the Sanhedrin bypassed their usual rules of judging cases in order to have Jesus killed. We see there that they needed two witnesses to agree about what Jesus did wrong, but their witnesses couldn't agree. Jesus did say, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days" (John 2:19). But he didn't say that *he* would destroy the temple. However, Jesus agreed that he was the Son of God, the Christ, and since the Jews didn't think that he was truly God, they accused him of blasphemy.

I don't have time to read Mark 14:66-72, but it shows how Peter, one of Jesus' disciples, denied Jesus, fulfilling his prediction (in verses 27-31).

In Mark 15, Jesus is brought before Pontius Pilate, the Roman prefect, or governor, of Judea. The Sanhedrin needed Pilate's approval to have Jesus killed. We read this in Mark 15:1-5:

<sup>1</sup> Very early in the morning, the chief priests, with the elders, the teachers of the law and the whole Sanhedrin, reached a decision. They bound Jesus, led him away and handed him over to Pilate. <sup>2</sup> "Are you the king of the Jews?" asked Pilate. "Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied. <sup>3</sup> The chief priests accused him of many things. <sup>4</sup> So again Pilate asked him, "Aren't you going to answer? See how many things they are accusing you of." <sup>5</sup> But Jesus still made no reply, and Pilate was amazed.

Pilate gave Jesus an opportunity to defend himself, but Jesus hardly said anything, and Pilate was amazed. Pilate gave the people a chance to let Jesus go free, but they were not willing. We see this in the next passage, Mark 15:6-15:

<sup>6</sup> Now it was the custom at the Feast to release a prisoner whom the people requested. <sup>7</sup> A man called Barabbas was in prison with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the uprising. <sup>8</sup> The crowd came up and asked Pilate to do for them what he usually did. <sup>9</sup> "Do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews?" asked Pilate, <sup>10</sup> knowing it was out of envy that the chief priests had handed Jesus over to him. <sup>11</sup> But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have Pilate release Barabbas instead. <sup>12</sup> "What shall I do, then, with the one you call the king of the Jews?" Pilate asked them. <sup>13</sup> "Crucify him!" they shouted. <sup>14</sup> "Why? What crime has he committed?" asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder, "Crucify him!" <sup>15</sup> Wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. He had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.

Earlier, the Jews brought false witnesses forward to testify against Jesus, a righteous man who did nothing wrong. Now, when Pilate asks, "What crime has he committed?" the people can't

even answer. They have no reason and they're not willing to be reasonable. Pilate didn't care, either. He just wanted to make sure he kept order in Jerusalem. So instead of releasing Jesus, Pilate released Barabbas, a murderer. Jesus died so a criminal could go free. That is the core of the Christian message.

So who is responsible for Jesus' death? The unbelieving Jewish leaders, Judas, Satan, Pontius Pilate, and you and me, because of our sin. We are the sheep that went astray (Isa. 53:6). Yet all of this was God's plan.

In the next passage, Mark 15:16-20, we see that Jesus is mocked.

<sup>16</sup> The soldiers led Jesus away into the palace (that is, the Praetorium) and called together the whole company of soldiers. <sup>17</sup> They put a purple robe on him, then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on him. <sup>18</sup> And they began to call out to him, "Hail, king of the Jews!" <sup>19</sup> Again and again they struck him on the head with a staff and spit on him. Falling on their knees, they paid homage to him. <sup>20</sup> And when they had mocked him, they took off the purple robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.

Crucifixion was one of the most brutal ways to kill a person that has ever been devised. Generally, this method of killing people was reserved for people who were criminals, of lower classes, and not Roman citizens. These people were usually beaten, made to carry a cross beam to the point of crucifixion, and then impaled on a cross until they died. Often it took a long time for people to die in that position, though sometimes people would die just from the flogging they received.

Crucifixion was atrocious. Consider how it was described by Seneca (c. 4 B.C. - A.D. 65), a Roman philosopher and statesman: "I see crosses there, not just of one kind but made in many different ways: some have their victims with head down to the ground; some impale their private parts; others stretch out their arms on the gibbet."<sup>9</sup> People wouldn't even mention the word "cross" in polite society, because it was so shocking. And that's how Jesus died.

In Mark 15:21-32, we read about his crucifixion.

<sup>21</sup> A certain man from Cyrene, Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by on his way in from the country, and they forced him to carry the cross.

<sup>22</sup> They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means The Place of the

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<sup>9</sup> Seneca, *Dialogue 6 (De consolatione ad Marciam)* 20.3, quoted in Martin Hengel, *Crucifixion: In the Ancient World and the Folly of the Message of the Cross*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 25.

Skull).<sup>23</sup> Then they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it.<sup>24</sup> And they crucified him. Dividing up his clothes, they cast lots to see what each would get.<sup>25</sup> It was the third hour when they crucified him.<sup>26</sup> The written notice of the charge against him read: THE KING OF THE JEWS.<sup>27</sup> They crucified two robbers with him, one on his right and one on his left.<sup>29</sup> Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, “So! You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days,<sup>30</sup> come down from the cross and save yourself!”<sup>31</sup> In the same way the chief priests and the teachers of the law mocked him among themselves. “He saved others,” they said, “but he can’t save himself!”<sup>32</sup> Let this Christ, this King of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe.” Those crucified with him also heaped insults on him.

Once again, Jesus is mocked. Jesus could have saved himself, but if he did, he couldn’t have saved us. He needed to die in our place. That is why Jesus came.

Now we come to our final passage, Mark 15:33-39, which shows how Jesus died.

<sup>33</sup> At the sixth hour darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour.<sup>34</sup> And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?*”—which means, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”<sup>35</sup> When some of those standing near heard this, they said, “Listen, he’s calling Elijah.”<sup>36</sup> One man ran, filled a sponge with wine vinegar, put it on a stick, and offered it to Jesus to drink. “Now leave him alone. Let’s see if Elijah comes to take him down,” he said.<sup>37</sup> With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last.<sup>38</sup> The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.<sup>39</sup> And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, heard his cry and saw how he died, he said, “Surely this man was the Son of God!”

Jesus was crucified around 9 a.m. At noon, in the middle of the day, the sky became dark. Usually, when we read about the sky growing black in the Bible, we’re reading about judgment. When Jesus died, he was being judged, not for his sins, but for the sins of his people. As he was dying, he quoted Psalm 22:1 in Aramaic. I think Jesus was referring to the whole of Psalm 22, which starts out with words of abandonment, but ends with words of hope.<sup>10</sup> Still, on the cross, Jesus must have felt abandoned by everyone: by his disciples and, more importantly, by his Father. At that moment, he couldn’t feel the Father’s love, something he had always felt. Instead, he felt God’s wrath, so that we might be saved.

When he died, the curtain of the temple was torn in two. This meant that his sacrifice achieved all that the sacrifices at the temple could not. Also, the temple represented the presence of God. Only priests could go into the temple, and only the high priest could go into the inner

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<sup>10</sup> See Ps. 22:22-31.

sanctum, the Most Holy Place, and he could only do that one day a year. But when Jesus died, he paid for all our sins. He was the once-and-for-all sacrifice. He opened up the way to God's presence. All who believe in Jesus have the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, dwelling in them. There is no need to go to a special building to worship. We can and should worship God at all times.

Jesus died for sins. Even the Roman soldier who saw him die knew that he was special. In Mark's Gospel, he is the first person to say that Jesus is the Son of God. Do you know who Jesus is? I don't mean to ask if you know facts about Jesus. Rather, do you know him personally? Have you repented of your sins and put your faith in him?

Jesus died to reconcile sinners to God. He died so we who are criminals could go free. He went through hell on the cross so we could enter into heaven. He endured darkness so we could enter into the light.