

The Life of Jesus



Dedication

This book is dedicated to

My wife Ruth, who personifies the love of Jesus

My mom Doris, who pointed Dad to Jesus

My dad Charles, who told me the story

My brother Charles Jr., who made this work possible

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Introduction

I thank God for parents who raised me in righteousness. I was raised by a godly man, my dad, a Baptist preacher who brought me up on Bible stories, not fairy tales (I never knew I was deprived until someone told me I was). The stories I heard were exciting, simple, and best of all, true. They became ingrained in me.

Of the stories Dad told, the one which became most meaningful to me was the story of Jesus' death on the cross. I would repeatedly ask Dad to tell it to me. As he would tell the story, my heart would break. It saddened me to hear of people being cruel to Jesus.

I asked, "Why did they do that to Jesus?"

Dad would answer, "They were evil men who did not love God," and then Dad would say the main reason Jesus suffered and died was because He loved us.

To complement this story, Dad taught me my favorite Bible verse, John 3:16, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life." Since preschool days I have known this verse from memory. It was instrumental in my conversion at the age of six.

Years later, on a Sunday morning during a revival at South Side Baptist Church in Cape Girardeau, Missouri, Rev. Grady Etheridge preached from my dad's pulpit, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." I was 15, and sitting in my regular pew, the back row. My devotion to the Lord was not very strong. I listened to Bro. Grady tell of the love of God, with all its beauty, depth, and richness. The message touched my heart and, as a song writer penned, "stirred the slumbering chords again." Something was called forth from my childhood, an inner tug I could not resist. That morning I made my life right with God, and surrendered to be and do whatever God called me to.

I often preach in churches at least a portion of this message from John 3:16, the verse of my life, the verse which changed my life. This passage has for years been the text of my Easter Sunday morning messages. I pray God will use my thoughts

on this blessed verse to influence your life and to draw you nearer to our precious Savior.

CHAPTER 1

"They shall call his name Immanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us." (MT 1:23)



There has never been a life equal, or even comparable, to the one lived by Jesus 2,000 years ago. If I had to pick one word to describe Jesus in comparison to all others, I would choose the word "different." Whatever you think about Jesus, you must agree He was different. Never has anyone been like Him.

From the first of His life, Jesus was different. A young virgin in the town of Nazareth was visited by an angel who said, "You shall bring forth a son, and call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest." The same angel appeared to her husband-to-be and said, "Fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost."

Joseph and Mary, because of a census, went to Bethlehem, where the virgin gave birth to her firstborn child. Since there was no room for them in the inn, they stayed in a shelter for animals and laid their baby in a manger, a feed trough.

Jesus' birth was different from any other birth. Wise men from afar came to Jerusalem saying, "Where is He that is born King of the Jews? We have seen His star in the east, and are come to worship Him."

At His birth, angels rejoiced in Heaven. A group of them spilled over onto a hillside near Bethlehem. When I was born in Sikeston, Missouri, on December 22, 1951, no angels appeared on a hillside. In the heavens, there was no fanfare. Jesus' birth was different.

Angels did not appear to Herod or Caesar in their palaces, or to the High Priest, but to lowly, common shepherds. The angels said, "Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord." Suddenly a whole host of angels appeared, praising God, and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

There never had been, and never will be, a birth like this. Jesus was different. He was a unique person, coming into this world from a previous eternal existence. Jesus was God taking on human flesh. Why did He come? "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

His childhood was different. There has never been a child like Jesus. When He was twelve, Mary and Joseph took Him to Jerusalem for the Passover. Men usually traveled in one caravan, women and children in another. Joseph and Mary left Jerusalem, each evidently thinking the other had Jesus. When they discovered He was missing, they returned to Jerusalem, and found Him in the Temple, talking with religious leaders. Some of these men would years later condemn this same Jesus to a cross, but on this occasion, they marveled at the wisdom of the child. Jesus was different.

After this childhood experience in the Temple, a curtain falls on the account of Jesus' life. We know almost nothing about His life for the next several years.

LK 1:26-32; MT 1:20-21; MT 2:1-2; LK 2:8-14; JN 1:1,14; LK 2:42-50

CHAPTER 2

"REPENT YE: FOR THE
KINGDOM OF HEAVEN
IS AT HAND."

MT 3:2



As Jesus approached the age of 30, John the Baptist began preaching at the Jordan River. I like John for a personal reason: I was named for him. When I was born, my dad, who had just started preaching, was in the father's waiting room and heard me cry loudly. Then and there he decided, "I will name him John after John the Baptist, the one crying in the wilderness." Years later, at my ordination, Dad preached from the text, "There was a man sent from God whose name was John," and presented John's ministry as a model for me to follow.

John was a mighty preacher, with one basic message: "Repent, you sinners, for the Kingdom of God is at hand!" John the Baptist was a novelty. There had not been a prophet in Israel for 400 years, since Malachi. John was such a popular preacher that all of Jerusalem came to hear him. They closed down the town and went to hear this strange, rough-shod preacher.

John saw himself as merely the forerunner of Another. Preparing the way for someone else, he testified, "One mightier than I is coming. I am not even worthy to tie His shoelatches." John considered himself unworthy to do for this Coming One what a slave was expected to do for a master.

One day John the Baptist, looking toward the shore of the Jordan River, fastened his gaze on a face different from any he had ever seen. John beheld a majesty unlike any other. The countenance before him was unique.

No one walked by, tapped John on the shoulder, and whispered, "This is the One you have been talking about." John the Baptist, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, knew immediately this was the Christ, and proclaimed, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!"

When Jesus asked to be baptized, John objected, "I need to be baptized by You." After Jesus insisted, John complied. What an honor it was, to be the one who immersed Jesus, the Lamb of God.

As Jesus came from the water, the Spirit of God, descending in the form of a dove, landed on His shoulder. A voice from Heaven declared, "This is my beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased." Jesus was different.

After Jesus left the Jordan, He went out into a wilderness, where He fasted forty days, and was tempted. The Devil tried in vain to win Jesus' allegiance. Finally the Lord commanded Satan to leave, and the tempter left Him for a season. After this time of fasting and temptation, angels came and ministered to Jesus.

After the wilderness temptation, Jesus chose twelve followers. Among these disciples, or learners, were fishermen, a tax collector, a radical political zealot, and others; Jesus said one was a devil. In those days many teachers surrounded themselves with disciples, but it soon became apparent Jesus was different.

MT 3:1-17; JN 1:6,29; MT 4:1-11; JN 6:70

CHAPTER 3

"[JESUS] WENT ABOUT
DOING GOOD."

AC 10:38



The next three years were the greatest this old tired world has ever seen. Jesus went about doing good. Everywhere He walked became holy ground; everything He touched became sacred.

Word spread. A man was traveling from town to town teaching new doctrines and healing the sick. In one town, He was sought by a lady who had suffered from a blood issue for twelve years. Unable to find any relief, she had lost all her money to physicians. While Jesus was in the middle of a crowd, being pressed on every side, she touched the hem of His garment and was healed. Perceiving this, Jesus said, "Power has gone out from me. Who touched me?"

The disciples replied, "Everybody!"

Jesus said, "No, someone has touched Me and received power." The lady stepped from the crowd and fell at His feet in fear. He said to her, "Your faith has made you whole; go in peace."

Once, ten lepers cried, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." Jesus, requiring an act of faith, told them to go show themselves to the priests, who alone had authority to declare them clean. While on their way, all were healed. Only one returned to give thanks. Ingratitude is a sin of which we are all too often guilty.

Outside Jericho, Jesus met and healed blind Bartimaeus. Imagine the first face you ever saw being that of Jesus! Amen! A glorious sight.

One day 5,000 men plus women and children around Him were hungry, but the only food available were five barley loaves and two small fish. Jesus took this little amount, blessed it, and distributed it to the crowd. After everyone had eaten, twelve baskets of food remained. Jesus took a little, and fed the multitude. He can still do this. Do we sometimes feel we have little to contribute? Do we feel our talents are limited? Just give what we have to Jesus. He will take it, multiply it, and use it to bless the multitudes.

Jesus healed a man born blind. It was history's first recorded instance of anyone born blind being healed. This miracle angered the Pharisees, for it was done on the Sabbath day. Since healing made God work, it was not to be done on God's day of rest.

Jesus, however, declaring Himself to be Lord even of the Sabbath Day, said it was lawful to do good on the seventh day. The Pharisees had made Sabbath observance a heavy burden to bear, but Jesus said, "The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath."

At Nain, a funeral procession passed by Jesus. A weeping mother, a widow, had lost her only son. Jesus, moved with compassion, told her not to weep. He stopped the procession, touched the coffin, and said, "Young man, I say unto thee,

Arise." The Bible says, "He that was dead sat up, and began to speak."

In a synagogue, Jesus saw a man with a withered right hand, and said, "Stretch it forth." Suddenly, fingers began to move, the hand was released, and it stretched forth! His right hand became as whole as his left. The world had never seen anything like this.

Four men brought a paralyzed friend to Jesus. Unable to enter the building because it was too crowded, they decided to cut a hole in the roof and lower the man to Jesus. Christ was pleased, and said, "Your faith has made you whole." The man was not only made well enough to walk, but was also able to carry his bed.

Never had there been a man like this! There never will be another. Jesus Christ was different in every way. People who could not walk, walked. People who could not speak, spoke. The deaf heard, the blind saw, the dead lived.

No wonder the common people heard Him gladly and considered Him a great man. They came from near and far to hear, and be healed by, Him. Jesus became so popular that He had to avoid the cities and stay in unpopulated areas.

Unfortunately, the religious leaders were dismayed at Jesus' success. The common people loved Him, and the disciples were convinced Jesus was the Son of God, but the religious leaders called Him the son of Beelzebub, the prince of demons. They were jealous because Jesus was stealing their

popularity. They recognized His power over the masses. Fearing people might rally behind Jesus and cause a suicidal revolution against Rome, the leaders plotted to destroy Him.

On the way to Jerusalem for Passover, Jesus stopped at Bethany, where His friend Lazarus had recently died. Lazarus' sisters grieved, "Lord, if you had been here, Lazarus would not have died."

Jesus replied, "I am the resurrection and the life," and commanded that the stone be rolled away from the tomb.

Martha objected, "Lord, by this time he stinks, for he has been dead four days." Jesus insisted, and the stone was rolled away. There was something special about Jesus. When He told people to act, they did. He was different.

At the tomb, before the leaders of Jerusalem and a large crowd, He prayed aloud, "Father, I thank You that You hear Me always: but because of the people which stand by I say it, that they may believe that You have sent Me."

Then Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth!"

Bound hand and foot with grave clothes, Lazarus immediately came forth. He did not scoot out one step at a time, nor did anyone enter the grave and carry him out. The power which resurrected him also lifted Lazarus off the slab of rock and stood him on his feet. He flew out of the sepulchre!

AC 10:38; LK 8:40-48; LK 17:11-19; MK 10:46-52; JN 6:1-13;

JN 9:1-16; MT 12:8,12; MK 2:27; LK 7:11-17; LK 11:15; LK
6:6-11;

MK 2:1-12; MK 1:45; JN 11:1-44; MK 12:37

CHAPTER 4

**"WHEN HE WAS COME
INTO JERUSALEM, ALL
THE CITY WAS MOVED."
MT 21:10**



When Jesus arrived at Jerusalem for the Passover, the crowds were beside themselves with joy. They shouted, "Hosanna! Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord!" Many spread their garments before Him; others cut down branches and strewed them in the path.

Unfortunately, the people misunderstood what kind of king Jesus would be. They thought His kingdom would be a political one. By week's end, their joy would disintegrate into disappointment and hatred, but on this day, they welcomed Him as King. The tumult was so wild that the Pharisees asked Jesus to rebuke the crowd. He replied, "If these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out."

Jesus was disappointed by what He saw at Jerusalem. He found the Temple area filled with money-changers, and with men selling sacrificial animals at exorbitant prices. This commercial enterprise, operated under the jurisdiction of the High Priest, was conducted in the only part of the Temple area where Gentiles were allowed to worship. As a result, Gentiles were being excluded from the worship of God. Jesus, outraged at this, drove the merchants from the Temple, and said, "My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer. But ye have made it a den of thieves."

This expression of love toward the Gentiles surely infuriated the High Priest because it disrupted one of his main sources of income. It was only a matter of time before the priests would seek their revenge.

LK 19:37-40; MK 11:8,15-17

CHAPTER 5

"JESUS, THE SAME
NIGHT IN WHICH HE
WAS BETRAYED, TOOK
BREAD."

1 COR 11:23



The Jewish leaders plotted to find Jesus away from the crowd. They wanted to take Him at night, but had to discover where He was spending His evenings. Needing an insider, they found it in Judas Iscariot, who volunteered his services to them without solicitation. He initiated the betrayal himself.

It is interesting we never find a child named Judas. Many are named John, David, Peter, Abraham, or Paul, but Judas is rare. The name has become a synonym for treachery.

On Thursday night, Jesus ate the Passover Meal with His disciples. During the meal, He shocked them by saying, "One of you shall betray me."

Astonished, they began to asking, "Is it I? Is it I?"

Is it you? Is it me? Will we betray the Master today with unclean lips or an unholy life? We all need to ask the Lord occasionally, "Is it I?"

Finally, Judas Iscariot asked, "Master, is it I?"

Jesus replied, "Thou hast said."

The disciples evidently did not grasp the Lord's statement to Judas, for Peter prompted John, who was leaning on Jesus' bosom, to ask the betrayer's identity. The disciples were probably reclining on couches, leaning on their left elbow, and reaching to the table with their right hand. "On Jesus' bosom" meant John would have been reclining in front of Jesus.

Jesus said, "He it is, to whom I shall give a sop." He took a sop, a piece of bread, dipped it in gravy, and gave it to Judas Iscariot. This gesture was an expression of friendship. Jesus passed the sop to Judas as a sign of love. The Master felt no malice toward His betrayer.

Judas, being within reaching distance of the Master, was in a seat of honor. The Lord was always good to Judas, giving him many opportunities to repent. Even after the betrayal, Christ's first word to Judas was "Friend." Jesus always loved Judas.

After placing the sop on Judas' plate, Jesus said, "That thou doest, do quickly." The victim was in charge. The betrayed was commanding the betrayer! Jesus was different.

After Judas departed, Jesus began to share words of impending doom. Impetuous Peter bragged, "I will lay down my life for Thy sake."

Jesus replied, "Before the rooster crows, you will thrice deny you know me."

They prayed, sang a hymn, and departed to the Mount of Olives.

MK 14:10-11; MT 26:20-21,50; JN 13:23-30,37-38

CHAPTER 6

"THEY CAME TO A PLACE
WHICH WAS NAMED
GETHSEMANE."

MK 14:32



After the Last Supper, Jesus went to the Garden of Gethsemane, His private place for prayer. The Master chose His place of prayer as the location for His agony and betrayal. He wanted to meet the enemy's onslaught behind an embankment of prayer. This is always the best preparation for any coming trial.

Jesus took Peter, James, and John with Him to a secluded spot, where He soon "began to be sorrowful and very heavy." He told the three, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me."

He went a short distance, about a stone's throw away, and fell on the ground praying. Imagine the Creator of the universe, the Redeemer of the world, lying on the ground agonizing in prayer. On His face before the God of Heaven, He cried, "Father, all things are possible unto Thee; take away this cup from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what Thou wilt."

Returning to Peter, James, and John, the Master found them asleep, and asked, "Could ye not stay awake a little while?"

Jesus went back and prayed again. His agony was intense. He knew the next day He would become the incarnation of the very thing He hated most--sin.

Jesus again returned to the disciples and found them sleeping. A third time He returned to pray. The agony was so great, His

sweat was, as it were, great drops of blood. Our Savior finally prayed, "Not My will, but Thine, be done."

We sometimes wish we could pray like Daniel or Paul. I wish I could pray like Jesus prayed in the Garden, to agonize as He did, and yet honestly be able to say, "Not My will, but Thine, be done."

An angel came to minister to Him, and strengthen Him. There was little to say. The angel could only cradle in his bosom Jesus' head, which the next day would bear a crown of thorns, stroke Jesus' hair, which would become blood-soaked, and put his arms around the Master's shoulders, which would soon bear a cross. Comforted, Jesus returned to His disciples and said, "Continue your sleep. The hour has come."

Immediately they saw soldiers coming through the Kidron Valley toward the Mount of Olives. Judas was leading them to the garden. He knew the location. He had been there often with Jesus. Judas knew the place of prayer, but not the prayer of the place. Many still come to a house of prayer, hear sermons about prayer, and talk about the importance of prayer, but rarely pray.

The arresting party consisted of 600 Roman soldiers plus Levites who served as Temple policemen. Jesus' friends were few, His enemies many. This is still the case. Judas probably felt smug, being the leader of such a large group.

Jesus, unshaken by this large number of enemies, "went forth" to meet them. Our Master took the initiative. He did

not hide in the Garden, as Adam did; nor did He flee like Jonah. Rather, He openly offered Himself as ready to do or bear whatever was necessary for the world's ransom. He entered the fray as a hero.

Judas stepped forward to kiss Jesus. The betrayer had told the soldiers, "Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is He; hold Him fast."

Jesus, realizing the irony of using a kiss as an accomplice to cruelty, asked, "Judas, betrayest thou the Son of Man with a kiss?"

Even in the soldiers' presence, Jesus was in complete control. He not only directed the conversation, but had also initiated it by asking, "Whom seek ye?"

"Jesus of Nazareth," they replied.

When Jesus said, "I am He," the soldiers immediately fell to the ground.

Roman soldiers were trained to drop to one knee when in danger, but this does not seem to be what the Bible describes. It seems the soldiers fell prostrate on the ground. A force was seemingly emitted from Jesus' Person.

Have you ever become suddenly angry and wanted to lash out, but caught yourself at the last second? Maybe God in Heaven, realizing the mockery which was beginning, knowing the travesty of the next several hours, began to be angry. These were the first moments of an agonizing ordeal. The soldiers had

come to take His only Son, and God flinched in anger, but stopped the full venting of His wrath. Only a small bolt of His anger escaped Him and fell from Heaven. A little beam of majesty broke loose, and over 600 men fell before Jesus.

The soldiers were thunderstruck, but God mingled mercy with wrath. They were knocked only to the ground, rather than all the way to Hell.

We cannot know for sure what happened here, but it left a striking impression. Even in Jesus' time of humiliation, awe surrounded Him. This exhibition of power demonstrated He was yielding Himself up voluntarily to them. Had Jesus not consented to go, their feeble efforts would have been in vain.

Even after this display of power, the soldiers were still determined to arrest Jesus. Some hearts are so hardened that nothing can soften them to godliness. John Calvin said, "Wicked men care no more about rushing against God than if they only had to do with a fly." Sinners would often rather break than bend.

When the soldiers stood to their feet, Jesus said, "Whom seek ye?"

Again they said, "Jesus of Nazareth."

Jesus said, "I am He." Peter drew his sword, swung at the High Priest's servant, Malchus, and cut off his right ear. He probably meant to cut off his head, but missed. Impulsive Pe-

ter had let his zeal go beyond proper bounds. Anger is not the best base from which to launch our deeds for Christ.

Jesus stopped Peter, told him to put his sword away, and said, "All they that take the sword shall perish with the sword."

Jesus did not scold the soldiers, or rant and rave. He was different. Jesus reached down, picked up the severed ear, and put it back on Malchus' head. This is my Jesus. Our Master taught us what it means to forgive those who are cruel to us. We preach sermons about not offending others. All of us could use a lesson in not being easily offended. Jesus healed a servant of the man who sent troops to arrest Him. There has never been a man like Jesus. He was different.

Then Jesus commanded the soldiers, "Let these others go." He was always thinking of others. Even in Gethsemane, Jesus was the Good Shepherd.

They let the disciples go, but took Jesus, whom they bound and led away. Having dirty work to do, they carried out their task with extreme precision. History's worst miscarriage of justice had begun.

MT 26:36-39; MK 14:36-42; LK 22:43-44; MT 26:47-52; LK 22:48-50; JN 18:1-11

CHAPTER 7

**"THEY LED JESUS AWAY
TO THE HIGH PRIEST."
MK 14:53**



The soldiers took Christ to the house of the High Priest, whose servant Jesus had just healed. It was illegal to have a trial at night, but this did not deter the religious leaders. Murderers don't bother with protocol.

While Jesus underwent questioning in the High Priest's house, Peter stood nearby, warming himself beside a fire in the outer courtyard. Three times he denied being a follower of Jesus. Simon accented his final denial with an oath. He cursed. Peter knew if he cursed, no one would ever accuse him of being a friend to Jesus. The same is still true today.

After Peter's third denial, the eyes of the Master met the eyes of the disciple. No words were needed; the look said it all. Peter went out and wept bitterly.

Don't judge Peter harshly. At least he was there. Except for John, the others were gone. It is easy to laugh at people who try to live a godly life, but fall short. Those who never try aren't ridiculed as often. At least Peter tried. This may partially explain why he received the honor of being chosen to preach the message at Pentecost.

While the drama of Peter's denials unfolded near the trial site, a much worse tragedy occurred farther away. Judas, in grief, had returned the thirty pieces of silver. Deciding to take his own life, he hanged himself. Evidently his body broke loose, for he fell headlong, "burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out." At the last supper, Jesus had already spoken Judas' epitaph: "It had been good for that man if he had not been born."

The Jewish leaders could not get false witnesses to agree in their testimony against Jesus. Finally Caiaphas the High Priest demanded, "I adjure thee by the living God, art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?"

Under Old Testament Law, to adjure someone placed the person under oath before God to tell the truth. Hence, Jesus had to respond, and answered, "I am."

Caiaphas tore his clothes and said, "We have no need of further witnesses. He has spoken blasphemy. He is guilty of death."

Caiaphas, by ripping his garment, unwittingly symbolized the end of the Aaronic priesthood in God's eyes. The Old Testament forbade the High Priest to tear his garments. Clothes are torn only when there is no more use for them. Caiaphas stripped himself of his authority, and symbolically gave up the priesthood.

Henceforth, Jesus would be High Priest. The Bible is careful to note Jesus' robe fit the Old Testament description of the High Priest's robe: woven, of one piece without a seam (JN 19:23). Scripture is also careful to point out the robe remained intact and was not torn at the crucifixion.

Immediately following Caiaphas' outburst, the religious leaders spat on Jesus' face, mocked Him, and slapped Him. They put a mask over His face, struck Him repeatedly, and said, "Tell us, O Christ, who struck thee."

The religious leaders sentenced Jesus to die. Being under Roman control, the leaders had to receive permission from the Roman authorities before carrying out capital punishment. Thus, they took Jesus to the Roman Governor, Pilate.

MT 14:66-72; LK 22:61-62; MT 26:24; MT 27:5; AC 1:18; MK 14:55-65; MT 26:63-67; EX 39:22; LV 21:10

CHAPTER 8

"I FIND NO FAULT IN
THIS MAN."

LK 23:4



The leaders accused Jesus of claiming to be a king, a treasonous crime. Pilate quickly rendered his first verdict, a judgment he never changed: "I find no fault in this man." Neither can you. Fault can be found in His people and His preachers, but you will never find fault in Jesus.

The crowd was adamant, and accused Him of stirring up all Jewry, beginning in Galilee. When Pilate heard "Galilee," he asked if Jesus were a Galilean. Discovering this was the case, Pilate sent Jesus to Herod, ruler of Galilee, who had come to Jerusalem for the Passover celebration.

Herod was delighted to see Jesus. The ruler had heard many stories about this man's miracles, and hoped Jesus would perform a few magic tricks. Christ did not comply. In fact, Jesus even refused to speak. He had nothing to say to this murderer of John the Baptist.

On this occasion, Herod was the judge and Jesus was on trial. But some day, at the judgment bar, Herod and Christ shall meet again with their roles reversed. On that day, Jesus will have plenty to say to Herod.

Herod's soldiers mocked Jesus, made sport of Him, and put a gorgeous robe on Him to taunt "the King." However, even Herod had to confess he could find nothing worthy of death in Jesus. After rendering this verdict, Herod returned the prisoner to Pilate.

LK 23:1-15

CHAPTER 9

"I HAVE FOUND NO
CAUSE OF DEATH IN
HIM."

LK 23:22



Since Passover was a celebration by the Jews of their release from bondage, the Romans recognized the holiday by granting freedom to a Jewish prisoner. Pilate offered the people a choice: Jesus or Barabbas. Barabbas was a notorious criminal: murderer, thief, insurrectionist. Pilate expected the crowd to seek the release of Jesus, but unknown to the Governor, chief priests had circulated among the people, urging them to ask for Barabbas rather than Jesus. To Pilate's amazement the people demanded, "Give us Barabbas."

It is true to say Jesus died in the place of Barabbas. It is also true to say Jesus died as much in the place of you and me as He did in the place of Barabbas. Our sins crucified Him.

Near this point in the proceedings, Pilate received a message from his wife, "Have nothing to do with that righteous man: I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of Him." Even Pilate's wife sensed Jesus was different.

Pilate decided to scourge Jesus, thinking this might appease the crowd. Many died at a Roman whipping post. Its purpose was to help reduce the number of crucifixions, or at least to reduce the amount of time one could live on a cross.

The Roman whip was a short stick from which proceeded several leather straps. In these straps were tied bits of bone, metal, and rock. If these bits caught a man's side just right, disembowelment resulted when the whip was pulled back.

Why did Jesus endure this horror? "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

The question was, how far would His love extend? To what degree would Jesus go to show His love for you and me? Never take His scourging for granted. Every drop of Jesus' blood was more precious than all the world's gold. When you read about it, pause and reflect on the price Jesus had to pay. Always remember it was for you and me.

As a form of mockery, the soldiers made Jesus a crown of thorns and scoffed, "Hail, King of the Jews!" Thorns--do you remember their origin? They were the result of sin in the Garden of Eden. After the first sin, God said the earth would bring forth thorns. Had Adam and Eve not sinned, there would have been no thorns. Hence, this crown pictured Jesus bearing our sin.

The soldiers placed a crown of sharp, painful thorns on the blessed brow of Jesus Christ. Blood flowed from His brow, over His eyes, down His face, and to the ground. Each drop of it bought us a million years in Heaven, a crown of glory, and everything that is good. Jesus was covering all the sin of the world.

The soldiers stripped Him of His robe, replacing it with a purple one. They spat on Him, blindfolded Him, and slapped Him. They put a reed in His hand as a mocking symbol of a king's scepter. They took the reed from Him and used it to beat His thorn-crowned brow.

This story is so familiar to us that we are almost insensitive to it. We take it for granted. If we can hear it without our hearts being stirred, we should ask God to forgive us. Never cease being amazed that the very Son of God allowed His blood to be shed for lost sinners.

MT 15:11; LK 23:17-19; JN 18:40; MT 27:19; JN 19:1; GN 3:17-18; JN 19:2-3; MT 27:27-31

CHAPTER 10

"I AM INNOCENT OF THE
BLOOD OF THIS JUST
PERSON."

MT 27:24



Jesus, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe, was presented to the crowd by Pilate, "Behold the man. . . I find no fault in Him." Jesus had been scourged, mocked, thorn-crowned, slapped, spat on--surely this would satisfy the crowd. No, it was not enough. The sight of blood made the crowd thirsty for more blood. The rabble had gone crazy. In a mad frenzy, they began to chant one word repeatedly, "Crucify! Crucify! Crucify!"

Knowing Jesus was innocent, Pilate asked, "Why, what evil has He done?"

Someone yelled, "He claimed to be the Son of God."

This scared Pilate. The Romans were very superstitious and believed the gods did sometimes visit earth in human form.

Pilate immediately rushed back into the Judgment Hall with Jesus, question-ing Him again, "Whence art Thou?" In other words, "Where are you from?" The Governor wanted to know the origin of Jesus.

Christ made no response. Frustrated, Pilate challenged Jesus, "Knowest Thou not that I have power to crucify Thee, and have power to release Thee?"

Jesus answered, "Thou couldst have no power at all against Me, except it were given thee from above."

Pilate could sense something different about Jesus. The Roman Governor had never encountered a man like this, and wanted to release the prisoner.

At this crucial point in the proceedings, someone in the crowd touched Pilate's "Achilles' heel." Historians tell us Pilate was an inept administrator already in trouble with Rome. He could ill afford any more trouble with his superiors. The crowd knew this and finally won their case by taunting Pilate, "If you let this man go, you are not Caesar's friend."

Pilate, knowing his job was already in jeopardy, did not have the backbone to risk his position for a Galilean peasant. Hence, he capitulated to the crowd. Pilate had a bowl of water brought to him, washed his hands, and said, "I am innocent of the blood of this just person; see ye to it." I have a feeling if God opened up Hell right now, we would see a man there wringing his hands in anguish and moaning, "I washed my hands; I washed my hands." Unfortunately, this is the one thing no one can do. You cannot wash yourself of the blood of Jesus. Your only hope is to be covered by it through forgiveness.

Every one of us is responsible for the death of Jesus. He died for the sin of the world, and since we are all sinners, we all contributed to His death. Therefore, none of us can wash our hands of His blood. You cannot say, "I do not want to worry about Jesus; He is no problem of mine." He is your "problem." You are guilty of His death, and must seek His forgiveness. Your everlasting destiny will be determined by what you do with Jesus.

Jesus' death explains why there has to be a Hell. What else can there be for those who reject such redemption? To refuse

God's offer of salvation is equivalent to trampling under foot the blood of Christ. Rather than denying your guilt regarding Jesus' blood, humble yourself and be cleansed by that same blood.

As Pilate washed his hands, the crowd cried out, "His blood be on us and on our children." This is one of the saddest statements in Scripture. Israel rejected its God-sent Prince of Peace.

LK 23:22; JN 19:4-16; MT 27:24-25

CHAPTER 11

"HE BEARING HIS CROSS
WENT FORTH."

JN 19:17



Pilate delivered his prisoner to the crowd for crucifixion. Jesus was tired, hungry, thirsty, and had not slept the night before; yet they placed on His back His own cross. Escorted by soldiers, He began the trek to Calvary, the place of execution. Unable to sustain Himself, Jesus collapsed in exhaustion beneath the weight of the cross.

A man passing nearby was enlisted to carry Jesus' cross. This man was Simon of Cyrene, a town in Northern Africa. We have reason to believe maybe he was later saved. If Simon did become a believer, it will be a blessing to meet him someday in glory.

When I get to Heaven, I first want to worship my Lord. I look forward to putting a face to the One with Whom I now commune in Spirit. After that, I plan to seek out this man named Simon. Once we find a secluded place, I will ask, "Simon, what was it like to meet Jesus in the darkest hour of His life, and be there to offer help? How did it feel to lift the cross of Jesus from His back and carry it for Him? When friends had forsaken Him, and enemies surrounded Him, what was it like to help the Savior?"

When reading of Jesus' falling beneath the cross, I want to crawl into my Bible, break through the crowd, throw the cross to the ground, grab up Jesus in my arms, and run. I want to carry Him away, for that was my Friend under the cross. I want to tell the soldiers, "There has been a mistake! This is a miscarriage of justice. This man has done nothing but good.

He is the One who gave me my life, my parents, my wife, my children. He is the dearest friend I have ever had."

I can not imagine people doing this to Jesus. He is my first thought in the morning, the essence of every day to me. I commune with Him as friend with friend in my spirit. The thought people would hurt Him in such a way is incomprehensible.

Why did Jesus suffer this? Why did all this happen? "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

MK 15:21; RM 16:13

CHAPTER 12

"THERE THEY
CRUCIFIED HIM."
LK 22:33



At Calvary Jesus was stripped naked, and placed on a cross. They nailed His hands to the cross-beam; crossed His feet and drove one huge spike through them. The cross was then lifted up and dropped in the ground. The Son of God was suspended between Heaven and Earth, as if forsaken by both and worthy of neither. Even in this degrading position, Jesus was still the Good Shepherd. His first words were kind: "Father, forgive them, for they know what they do." If we hold grudges, we need to look at Jesus on the cross. He neither reviled His persecutors nor tried to gain revenge. Instead, He prayed, "Father, forgive them."

Jesus was crucified between two malefactors. One railed on Jesus and joined in the mocking by the crowd, but the other dying thief recognized Jesus was different. Sensing something special about the man on the middle cross, the malefactor said, "Lord, remember me when thou comest into Thy kingdom." Jesus was so different that a thief saw Him dying on a cross and yet knew He was going to have a kingdom. Jesus gave off the aura of a King even in death.

Jesus answered the dying thief, "Today shalt thou be with me in Paradise." Even on the cross, Christ cared for others. Our Master took time in His dying moments to save a malefactor. Even in death, His love shone. He was different, gloriously different.

Looking down, Jesus saw His mother and said, "Woman, behold your son." To His beloved disciple, Jesus said, "Behold your mother." Jesus took care of His mother. He set an exam-

ple all of us should follow. We have a responsibility to care for our parents.

LK 23:32-34,39-43; JN 19:26-27

CHAPTER 13

"THERE WAS A
DARKNESS OVER ALL
THE EARTH."

LK 23:44



At noon, darkness covered the earth. This could not have been an eclipse for two reasons. One, it lasted too long (three hours). Two, this was Passover, which means there was a full moon. At such times, solar eclipses are impossible. This was an absolute miracle. The sun itself refused to look on this travesty. It seemed all nature was weeping.

God the Father did not want people to be watching when His Son bore the worst agony of sin. This was a private moment, ordained before the foundation of the Earth.

During this darkness, Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, Lama Sabachthani," meaning, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" Christ sensed He was dying all alone. Angels had come to help Him in the wilderness temptation and in the Garden of Gethsemane. But now, He was alone. Jesus was having to drink the cup of sin's wrath by Himself.

I wonder what the angels were thinking. It must have been a hard time for them, because angels do not understand grace. When we sing in Heaven, "Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me," the angels will have to be silent, for it is a concept they do not understand. They will have to fold their wings and listen. This whole scene at Calvary must have baffled them.

Michael, the great angelic warrior who fought the Devil for the body of Moses, surely wanted to come and do battle for His Lord. As archangel, commander of the armies of Heaven, Michael probably dashed to his chariot and steeds of fire, and

begged permission to lead his troops into battle. As the horses pulled at the reins, surely he cried, "God, let me go. This is your Son, Who abode with us in eternity. You can't let them to do this to Him. How can You allow the Holy One to die, while letting sinners live?"

In the momentary pause which followed, all that could be heard was the snorting of horses straining to leave. Finally, God turned to His archangel, and said, "No, Michael, you cannot go." We can almost sense the crushing disappointment of Michael as he slumps to the ground and grieves, "Lord, it would take only a moment. Why can't we go?"

There is only one satisfactory explanation: "For God so loved the world, that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life."

Near three o'clock in the afternoon, Jesus said, "I thirst." He received vinegar to moisten His lips that He might cry loudly, "It is finished!" This translates one Greek word, "Tetelestai!", meaning "mission accomplished." It was a victory cry. Jesus had accomplished what He had been sent to do. He knew when He had suffered exactly enough to pay the sin debt for us. The battle was over and won. Jesus drank our cup of condemnation dry. He drained it entirely.

Jesus paid the sin debt. Thus, people do not go to Heaven because they are good, or go to Hell because they are bad. Jesus paid the sin debt, and thereby became the ultimate issue of eternity. If people receive Jesus, they go to Heaven when they

die. If they reject Jesus, they will spend eternity apart from Him.

At 3 p.m. Jesus said, "Father, into thy hands I commend My spirit." My Grandpa Marshall said these were the most majestic words Jesus ever spoke. He held power over not only His life, but also His death. The releasing of Jesus' life was a conscious act of His own free will. We did not kill Jesus; He died voluntarily. Even in death, Christ was still in control. No person had the power to take the life of Jesus from Him. He could have lived on the cross forever had He so desired. The old song is right, "He could have called ten thousand angels."

As Jesus died, He bowed His head. The same verb was used when it was said the Lord had no place to lay (bow) His head. The world provided Him nowhere to lay His head, but when He committed Himself to His Father, He was able to find such a place. The same verb is also used of Mary laying her baby in a manger. It is as if the Bible wanted to picture the fact Jesus was laying His head in the bosom of the Father. Jesus' rest had finally come.

MK 15:33-34; JN 19:28-30; LK 23:46

CHAPTER 14

"THEY TOOK THE BODY OF JESUS."

JN 19:40



Immediately following Jesus' death, an earthquake struck, rocks split open, and people fled in terror. A centurion, recognizing Jesus was different, confessed, "Truly this was the Son of God."

The curtain which divided the Temple into its two sections was torn in two from top to bottom. This Temple veil, which shielded the Holy of Holies from men, had been the ultimate reminder people are separated from God. Its being torn in two pictured that the way to God is now freely open to all who come through Christ. This rending of the curtain was an act of God, for it was torn from top to bottom, not bottom to top. Such tearing could not have been done by humans.

Josephus said the veil of the Temple was four inches thick. People bragged that wild horses tied to each end of the veil could not tear it apart. But God, needing it to teach a lesson, used it one last time to demonstrate people can now enter into the Holy of Holies with boldness.

Joseph of Arimathea asked Pontius Pilate for the body of Jesus. Pilate granted the body to Joseph and another religious leader, Nicodemus. These two men had been secret admirers of Jesus due to a fear of the consequences, but Jesus' brought them out of hiding. What Jesus did at Calvary should make all of us bolder in His cause.

To anoint the body of Jesus, Joseph and Nicodemus brought a hundred pounds of spices, an amount usually reserved for the burial of a king. They also honored Jesus by placing His body in a tomb which had never been used before.

The religious leaders felt they had won a tremendous victory. They smugly believed this Galilean carpenter was finished, but God had other plans.

MT 27:51,54; JN 19:38-41

CHAPTER 15

"[THEY] FOUND NOT
THE BODY OF THE LORD
JESUS."
LK 24:3



Follow me in your imagination to Sunday morning. In the portals of glory, there must have been a heavy silence maybe the quietest Heaven had ever been. Jesus was dead. Grief could be sensed everywhere.

As the sun began to dawn, Michael was slumped in his chariot, weeping, still not understanding. All Heaven had seen the death. Stunned aftershock lingered among them.

Two angels, passing by the throne, paused to speak in loving tones to the Father. They were surprised when He suddenly said, "You two, go immediately to the tomb."

"Why, Lord? Jesus is dead."

"Go! You will know what to do when you arrive."

Now let us fly in fancy with these two angels as they enter the tomb. Try to imagine what happened there that Sunday morning.

The angels found the bruised, blood-stained body of Jesus wrapped like a mummy in linen cloths. They soon heard breathing and a quiet groan. The napkin on the Master's face was stirring. Suddenly it dawned on the angels. Jesus was alive! One of them rushed to grab the napkin, lifted it from Jesus' face, folded it neatly, and placed it nearby. He was alive!

Imagine the excitement of the angels as they began to unwrap His body.

A dead thumb began to move, blood-stained fingers stirred, a dead hand stretched out, a dead arm flexed, and a corpse sat up. God forbid we should ever take this story for granted! He who was dead lived! May we lose our complacency!

One of the angels stroked Jesus' hair and asked, "Master, are you all right?"

Jesus slowly responded, "Yes, I am fine now."

The other angel moved toward the tomb entrance and asked, "Lord, are you ready for us to roll away the stone now?"

"Yes," came the Master's reply.

But the first angel objected, "Wait! Lord, You can't leave yet. The scars on Your hands, side, and feet need to be removed."

Jesus calmly responded, "No, the scars will remain forever to serve as everlasting reminders of how the saints receive Heaven."

Jesus kept the scars. When John the Revelator looked into Heaven sixty years later, one of his first sights was "a lamb as it had been slain." He saw the Lamb of God, Jesus, with death marks in His body. The scars are still there. Christ is the only marred thing in Heaven. Because His robe is red, ours will be white.

When we arrive in Heaven, every time Jesus raises His hands to bless us, we will be reminded why we are there. Each time we see Jesus' feet beneath His robe, we will be reminded His

grace, not our works, brought us to glory. Because of what Christ did in our place, Heaven was made possible for us.

Finally, it was time to open the tomb. There was a terrible earthquake. The entrance stone jumped out of its socket and rolled away. The soldiers fell down as dead men; God would not allow unbelievers to be the first to see the Risen Lord. Lost people still cannot see our risen Savior in all His glory.

Death attempted in vain to hold its grip on Jesus. The Devil and every demon of Hell tried to retain Christ. Satan's forces knew if Jesus escaped, they would be ruined. Jesus burst from their clutches and came crashing forth like a roaring lion.

The mighty hand of God smashed into the realm of death, wrought havoc there, and brought Jesus out. He who had inhabited the tomb came out alive, crashing through the gates of death with such force that others were drawn through with Him! Other dead saints came forth from their graves. Jesus' resurrection gave physical life to a few on that day, and now grants spiritual life to all who receive Him.

Soon after the resurrection, ladies came to finish anointing the body of Jesus. They did not know heavenly visitors had already been to the tomb that morning. When the women arrived at the sepulchre, the angels asked, "Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen."

This is still the essential message of Christianity: A dead man lives. By His death He paid the price for sin; by His resurrection He can live in a person's heart.

Jesus, seated now at the right hand of the Father, wants to come live in your heart by means of the Holy Spirit. If you will confess your sin, repent, and call on Jesus, you shall be saved.

JN 20:7; RV 5:6; MT 27:52-53; MT 28:2,4; LK 24:1-6

Conclusion

If God decided to send one more message to Earth, I have no doubt what it would be. Heaven would open, and Gabriel himself would declare, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."