

Last 24 Hours of Christ

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Twenty centuries separate us in time from the events that occurred when Jesus was crucified. It would do us well to retrace his steps, especially the final steps of the Savior that led him to Calvary. In so doing I believe we would have a greater appreciation for what he did for us the day he died. Come with me in your thinking tonight and walk with me where Jesus walked. Let's live again, if we might, the last 24 hours of his life.

It began on Thursday afternoon, the first day of the feast of unleavened bread, better known as Passover. As was the custom, the Passover meal would be eaten in the evening with family or close friends so that on Thursday afternoon Jesus' disciples began to ask Jesus where they could prepare the Passover so that they could eat together.

The Lord Jesus told them to go into the city where they would meet a man bearing a pitcher of water. They were to follow that man to his home and say to the good man or the butler of the house, "The master saith, 'My time is at hand. I will keep the Passover at thy house. Where is the guest chamber that I may eat the Passover with my disciples?'"

Jesus assured them that they would be shown a large upper room that was already furnished. "There make ready for us," he told the disciples.

They went and did as he commanded and finding the man and the house and the room they made ready the Passover meal.

By Thursday evening the meal had been prepared and Jesus was gathered into the upper room with the 12 disciples to eat the last supper. Sitting at the table with Jesus the disciples he said, "With desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer."

Taking bread, Jesus blessed it and break it and gave to the disciples saying, "Take, eat, this is my body which is given for you. This do in remembrance of me."

Next, taking the cup he gave thanks again and then passing it to them said, "This cup is the New Testament in my blood which is shed for you."

In those words the Lord Jesus instituted the Lord's supper which New Testament churches everywhere have been commanded to keep until he comes again.

Rising from the table Jesus took a towel and a basin of water and began to wash the feet of his disciples.

Peter protested, but Jesus overruled his protests declaring, "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me."

Peter then asked the Lord to wash not his feet only, but his hands and his head also. The spiritual meaning of this very act Jesus then revealed by assuring the disciples that he who had been washed spiritually, that is saved, need never again to be washed all over or saved again, but he only needed to be cleansed or restored to fellowship through confession of sin. And this restoration or cleansing was represented by the washing of the feet of the disciples by Jesus.

It was at that moment, the Lord, knowing that his betrayer was still with them, became troubled in spirit and announced to his disciples that one of them would betray him and that it was one whose hand was at that very moment on the table.

Consternation swept through the room and sorrow and amazement. The disciples began to look one at another wondering which one of them would dare do such a dark deed.

Peter motioned to John who sat next to Jesus asking him to enquire of John who the betrayer would be.

Jesus replied, "He is he to whom I shall give this morsel of bread when I have dipped it."

Then dipping the sop, Jesus gave it to Judas Iscariot with the command, "What thou doest, do quickly."

Judas abruptly got up and went out into the night to seek those with whom he would conspire.

The devil having departed, Jesus was left alone with the 11 in the upper room. In the few hours that followed, the master shut the world out and drew to himself those 11 men who would form the foundation of the Church that would bear his name and in which he would become the chief cornerstone.

He taught them that night many precious truths concerning the Holy Spirit whom he would send to be with them after he departed.

"I will not leave you comfortless," he said. "I will come again to you," he promised. And again he said, "Nevertheless, I tell you. It is expedient for you that I go away, for if I go not away the Comforter will not come unto you. But if I depart, I will send him unto you."

Precious moments of learning and loving were spent in the upper room that night and just

before Jesus was to conclude his famous discourse he turned his eyes toward heaven and prayed what is now called the great intercessory prayer of Jesus. "Father, the hour is come. Glorify thy Son that thy Son may glorify thee. I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world. Thine they were and thou gavest them me and they have kept thy Word. I pray for them. I pray not for the world, but for them which thou has given me, for they are thine. Holy Father, keep through thine name those whom thou hast given me that they may be one as we are one. Father, I will that they also which thou hast given me be with me where I am that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me for thou lovest me before the foundation of the world. Oh righteous Father, the world has not known thee. But I have known thee and these have known that thou hast sent me."

Having finished that great prayer Matthew says, "When they had sung an hymn they went out into the Mount of Olives."

Making their way to the Mount of Olives, nearing the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus startled the 11 when he announced, "All of you shall be offended because of me tonight."

He then went on and predicted his death and his subsequent resurrection. When he had finished it was Peter who broke the long silence.

"Though all men be offended because of thee, I shall not be offended."

And lovingly Jesus said to the well meaning Peter, "Simon, Simon, Satan hath desired to sift you as wheat, but I have prayed for you that thy faith fail not."

"Lord," Peter said with fervor, "I am ready to go with you to prison and to death."

Just before they reached the garden Jesus turned to Peter and said, "Peter, before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice."

"No, Lord. Though I should die with thee, yet I shall never deny thee."

Ten other disciples in a chorus of assent affirmed that they like Peter would never deny their Lord.

Coming now to the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus said to his followers, "Sit here while I go yonder to pray." Then, beckoning Peter, James and John, Jesus went on ahead as Matthew tells us and became very sorrowful and heavy.

"My soul is exceeding sorrowful even to death. Tarry ye here with me and watch."

Going about a stone's cast farther Jesus fell upon his face and prayed, "Oh, my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done."

Coming back he found the three disciples sound asleep. He wakened them and asked them again to watch and pray. And again Jesus went back to the place of prayer.

Luke, the beloved physician, tells us that an angel came from heaven and strengthened Jesus for he was in great agony of spirit. And as he prayed his sweat was, as it were, great drops of blood falling to the ground.

Three times Jesus returned to his select inner circle of three disciples only to find them asleep each time in spite of his warning to watch and pray lest they fall into temptation. On finding them sleeping the third time Jesus said, "Rise up. Let us go. Lo, he that betrayeth me is at hand."

A noise and lights appeared in the dark distance and soon the clanging of swords and flames of torches and lanterns was heard and seen. A band of men and officers sent from the chief priests with lanterns and torches, swords and staves led by Judas Iscariot was coming to the place where Jesus and the disciples were concluding their early morning prayer meeting.

As they approached Jesus said, "Whom do you seek?"

To which they replied, "Jesus of Nazareth."

Jesus said, "I am he."

And when he said those words the soldiers fell to the ground.

Again Jesus said, "Whom do you seek?"

And again they replied, "Jesus of Nazareth."

As was pre-planned, Judas, seeing Jesus ran up and greeted him with, "Master, Master," and kissed him on the cheek.

Jesus looked at Judas and said, "Judas, betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss?"

The soldiers who had fallen to the ground were still stunned. They regained their composure. Peter pulled his sword from its sheath and cut off the ear of one of the soldiers. He was immediately rebuked by Jesus and told to put his sword up. The Lord then restored the ear of Malchus, servant of the high priest and then returning to the band who had taken him to the high priest he said, "Are you come out as against a thief with swords and with staves to take me? I sat daily with you teaching in the temple and you laid no hand upon me."

With those words the soldiers took Jesus and bound him and led him away to Annas, father-in-law of Caiaphas the then high priest.

All the disciples, Mark's gospel notes in Mark chapter 14 verse 50, forsook Jesus at that point and fled.

Peter also fled, but soon turned back with John to follow afar to see what would become of their Lord.

It was before dawn early Friday, the day of Jesus' death. Soldiers led the peaceful prisoner first to Annas, and Jesus was led into the presence of the former high priest while most of the soldiers who had taken him captive waited in the hall outside where a fire had been kindled so that the pre dawn chill could be broken.

It was at that fire that Peter stood warming his hands when a young maid saw him and recognized him as a follower of Jesus, asking him if he were not with him in the garden. Peter flatly denied it.

Going out to the adjoining porch Peter heard almost unconsciously the cock crow.

A short while later another maiden said, "This is one of them," as she pointed out Peter. And again he denied it vehemently.

About an hour later others of the soldiers said to Peter, "Surely you are one of the Galileans and a follower of Jesus. Your speech gives you away."

At that Peter said, "I swear I do not know this man."

And the words had hardly fallen from his lips before the cock crew the second time and instantly the fisherman follower remembered the prediction of his master a few hours earlier. "Peter, before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice."

Peter when he had thought upon it went out and wept bitterly.

While Peter was denying Jesus outside Annas' house the former high priest and father-in-law of the then ruling high priest Caiaphas was questioning Jesus concerning his disciples and his doctrines. Jesus' reply was straightforward.

"I spake openly in the world. I taught in the synagogues and in the temple. In secret have I said nothing. Why do you ask me? Ask them which heard me what I have said to them. They know what I said."

An officer of the high priest, thinking Jesus' reply to be disrespectful struck the Savior with the palm of his hand and said, "Dare you talk so to the high priest?"

Jesus said, "If I have spoken evil, then bear witness of the evil, but if well, why do you smite me?"

Jesus was then taken from Annas to Caiaphas the high priest where he was further interrogated. False witnesses were sought and two were finally found who came and accused Jesus by saying that he had said, "I will destroy the temple that is made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands."

Jesus made no reply and Caiaphas pressing him to answer said, "I adjure thee by the living God that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God."

"Thou hast said," Jesus replied.

Caiaphas, upon hearing these words, rent his clothes and exclaimed, "He hath spoken blasphemy. What further need have we of witnesses? What do you think?" he asked his hastily convened counsel.

They said, "He is guilty of death."

Those standing by began to spit upon the blindfolded face and slap him saying, "Prophecy unto us, thou Christ. Who is he that smote thee?"

It was early Friday morning just after dawn when Caiaphas ordered Jesus to be taken down to Pontius Pilate. Officers of the high priest led Jesus to Pilate's judgment hall. Judas Iscariot, having had second thoughts about what he had done in betraying Jesus, hastened in the mean time to the council with the 30 pieces of silver that they had given him.

"I have sinned," he said, "in that I have betrayed innocent blood."

The chief priests were not interested in either his confession or his money and they bade him leave.

Matthew tells us that he went out and hanged himself.

It was in Pilate's judgment hall that Jesus was first asked by the Roman governor, "Art thou the King of the Jews?"

The Savior did not deny it, but said simply, "Thou sayest."

Pilates initial response was that he could find no fault in Jesus and so he ordered him to be taken to Herod for Jesus was from Galilee and Herod had jurisdiction over all of Galilee.

Herod was glad for the opportunity to interrogate Jesus for he had heard much about him and he had hoped to see one of his famous miracles. This was not to be, though, and silence was the only response that Herod received from each of his questions to Jesus.

Distraught, he and his soldiers began to mock Jesus, putting on him a gorgeous robe and calling him, in jest, a king. Their sport ended, they sent him back to Pontius Pilate.

Bringing Jesus back to the Roman governor Pilate was ready with his first question of those who led the prisoner.

“What accusation bring ye against this man?”

They who would settle for nothing less than Jesus’ death assured Pilate that this man was, indeed, a malefactor and that since the Jews could not lawfully put any man to death he would have to give the order.

Pilate went back into the judgment hall and calling for Jesus asked him, “Art thou the King of the Jews?”

Jesus said, “Thou sayest I am a king. To this end I was born and for this cause came I into the world that I should be witness to the truth. Everyone that is of the truth hears my voice.”

Pilate said, “What is truth?”

Having said that, Pontius Pilate again went out and addressed the crowd.

“I find no fault in him. You have a custom that I shall release unto you at the Passover one. Will you therefore that I should release to you the King of the Jews?”

“No, not this man, but Barabbas. Release Barabbas the robber,” the crowd clamored.

A hand written note hurriedly scrawled by Pilate’s wife was then delivered to the governor about this time on which she had written these words. “Have nothing to do with this just man. I have this day suffered many things in a dream because of him.”

The crowd, spurred by the chief priests, continued to cry for the release of Barabbas. Seeing that they would settle for no less, Pilate had Jesus scourged with a Roman cat of nine tails. Soldiers made a crown of thorns and pressed it upon his brow and a purple robe was wrapped around his body and they jeered him with, “Hail, king of the Jews.”

Some slapped him with their hands thinking the crowd’s thirst for blood would then be appeased.

Pilate brought Jesus before the mob in his purple robe and crown of thorns, his face bloody and his back both bloody and bruised from the beating and said, “Behold the man.”

“Crucify him. Crucify him,” was their response.

Disgusted and desperate Pontius Pilate sent for a basin of water to be brought and he dipped his hands into the water before the chief priest declaring that he would not be responsible further for what would happen to this innocent man.

“I find no fault in him.”

“His blood be upon us and our people,” the Jews shouted.

Once more Pilate questioned Jesus. “Whence art thou?”

No answer came forth.

Pilate: “Why aren’t you answering me? Don’t you know that I have power to crucify you or to release you?”

Jesus: “You would have no power except it be given from above.”

Pilate tried again to persuade the mob that he should release to them Jesus. But, again, they cried for his blood.

Finally, at about 6 AM he delivered Jesus over to the mob and they took him and led him away to be crucified.

Immediately upon his release from Pilate, soldiers seized our Savior, stripped him, put on him a scarlet robe and pressed into his forehead, again, the crown of thorns and they put into his right hand a reed or a mock scepter. Then they began to say, “Hail, King of the Jews.”

Spitting upon him they took the reed from his hand and smote him on the head. They mocked him more. They took off his scarlet robe and replaced it with Jesus’ own garment and then led him to Calvary.

To the place of the skull he was then led followed by a great company of people.

Already weakened by the scourging Jesus fell under the heavy load of the cross that he bore and one Simon, a Cyrenian, was conscripted by the soldiers to carry the cross up the hill to Calvary.

Golgotha was the site of the crucifixion. Shortly before 9 AM on Friday the sinless Son of God was stretched out upon a rough hewn cross. Nails were driven through the palms of each hand. One long spike secured both his feet to the upright stake and the Roman cross of crucifixion was raised by wicked hands high above the earth, then dropped with a sickening thud into a hole upon a hill while every bone in Jesus’ body was torn and twisted.

Malefactors were put on crosses on either side of the Savior and from nine to noon the hill was crowned with three bodies, two thieves and on the middle cross the Son of God, the God man.

Pilate's title, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews" was written in three languages and fastened to the stake. And while the crowd jeered and joked Roman soldiers divided his garment four ways and cast lots to see who would get the seamless coat of the now naked Son of God.

Earlier all the disciples had fled and forsook their master, but by now word was out that he was on the cross and one by one many had made their way to Calvary to watch and to weep.

Mary, his mother, stood by the cross as did Mary the wife of Cleopas and Mary Magdalene. John, the beloved disciple, stood beside Mary the mother of Jesus.

From nine till noon Jesus spake three times from his place above the earth. First his prayer was for forgiveness. "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do."

Next to the thief who was dying, who in his dying breath asked for mercy, Jesus said, "This day thou shalt be with me in paradise."

And, finally, gazing upon the sorrowing heart of a sad mother he said, "Woman, behold thy son." And to John he said, "Son, behold thy mother."

While the hot sun beat upon Jesus for three hours, he spoke only three times and each time not for himself, but on behalf of someone else.

At noon the sun became dark and for three hours the heavens hid their faces, as it were, from the shameful scene at Calvary.

About 3 PM Jesus' words pierced through and broke the silence as he cried, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani," which being interpreted is, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

Shortly following that, Jesus again said, "I thirst."

A vinegar soaked sponge was held to his mouth on a stick and when he had received it he cried with a loud voice, "It is finished," and then, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit."

With those words Jesus gave up the ghost and died.

It was Matthew who recorded that at that precise moment the veil in the temple was rent from the top to the bottom and the earth quaked, the rocks were rent in two, the graves of

many of the bodies of the Old Testament saints that had died were opened and they were seen walking through the streets of Jerusalem.

The darkest deed of history was done. Jesus had died, had died a criminals death and the heavens blushed and the earth convulsed.

One of the Roman soldiers who had cast lots for his garments got on his knees and confessed Jesus as the Son of God while his faithful followers, including Mary Magdalene, came to minister to his body. Joseph of Arimathaea, a disciple of Jesus, had received permission from Pilate to bury the body of Jesus and the body was taken from the cross by Pilate's orders, wrapped in a clean spice laden linen burial cloth, placed into Joseph's tomb, a tomb which had been hewn out of a rock.

Nicodemus, the ruler of the Pharisees who had come to Jesus by night anointed Jesus' body with spices and perfumes. A great stone was rolled to the door of the sepulcher and Mary Magdalene and other women sat by the door to keep watch.

Saturday, the day after his burial, the vile chief priest went back to Pilate and begged of him a detachment of Roman soldiers to guard the tomb for as they remembered and reminded Pilate he had said, "After three days I will rise again."

Afraid that Jesus' disciples would secretly steal his body away they sought the Roman watch and secured it from Pilate.

It was early, about dawn, yet still dark on Sunday morning, the first day of the week that Mary Magdalene and another Mary stole secretly to the tomb with sweet spices with which to anoint their master's body. Wondering who would roll away the stone for them, their question was soon forgotten as they came and saw the stone was already rolled away.

What the women did not know at that time was that in the wee hours of the morning, a good while before daylight God had shook the tomb with an earthquake and the angel of the Lord had descended to roll back the great stone. The Roman soldiers fell to the ground and were as dead men and the angel of the Lord sat down upon the stone and Jesus arose from his burial place triumphant over death and hell.

And the two angels from heaven came and folded neatly the linen cloth that had been wrapped around his body and the napkin that had been wrapped around his head.

Mary Magdalene and the other Mary could not in the pre dawn darkness see the bodies of the soldiers and by the time they arrived at the tomb angels had momentarily disappeared. They saw only the huge rock had been rolled away and they saw an empty tomb. Immediately they ran back to tell John and Peter. And these two disciples had a foot race to the grave.

John was the first to find the empty tomb and Peter confirmed his findings. The assumption was at that point that someone had come during the night and stolen the body of Jesus.

As John and Peter left to go home, Mary Magdalene made her way back to the sepulcher and standing in its entrance she began to weep. Through her tears she got the nerve to again peek into the grave and she could hardly believe what she saw, two angels sitting where Jesus' body had lain, one at the head and the other at the foot. They asked Mary why she was weeping and she told them that someone had taken away the body of the master.

"I know not where they have laid him," she lamented.

Turning away from the tomb's entrance Mary began to leave when her attention was caught by a man who at first appeared to her to be the gardener. The man also asked her why she was weeping and Mary replied, "Sir, if thou has borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him and I will take him away."

At those words the supposed gardener looked at the weeping woman and said, "Mary."

"Rabboni," Mary exclaimed. And she fell at the feet of the resurrected body of Jesus and began to worship him.

Thus, the last 24 hours of Jesus' life upon the earth and his subsequent resurrection from the tomb. All of these events, to be sure, are historical. But they are more than historical. They have a spiritual significance that puts them in a category all by themselves. They were, indeed, the most significant events of any 24 hour period in all of history.

Jesus, God's Son, Israel's king came to the world for one reason. Perhaps his testimony to Pilate as expressed in his own words says it best.

"To this end I was born. For this cause came I into the world that I should bear witness unto the truth. Everyone that is of the truth hears my voice."

Are you one of the truth today, tonight? Are you listening to his voice?

"I am the way, the truth and the life. No man comes to the Father, but by me."

Father, thank you for the events that we have just rehearsed. They are from the pages of your holy Word. They are not a story. They are historical data. And we believe them as they were written, as we have rehearsed them this evening. And we believe that Jesus died and was buried and rose again the third day according to the Scriptures. And that is the good news, the gospel. And it is a fact that has been verified by history and certified by witnesses. We thank you, Lord, for a more sure Word of prophecy that we cling to tonight and a Word of promise that you will come again even as you did come, you will come. And this next time for the Church and then with the Church in power and in great

glory. And as we move from today through the days ahead to Easter Sunday and we contemplate, again, the awful cost to God that our salvation was, I pray that you would give us a new appreciation for yourself, for our salvation, for your Son and for what happened on Calvary.

He was man. He was fully man. He suffered loneliness. He suffered loss. He suffered pain. He suffered death for us. We cannot fathom that, but we praise you for it. Help us to be witnesses of this fact in this world in which we live.

Dismiss us tonight with rejoicing though we are saddened in a way to see what happened to Jesus. It hurts our hearts to think of how he suffered, but yet we are glad. We are happy that death could not hold him. He rose triumphant. He is alive. We are glad for that empty tomb. Thank you that you gave me the opportunity a few months ago to walk into what is verily believed by serious student of history the very place that Jesus' body was placed and now there is nothing there, just an empty place, just an empty place. Thank you for that.

We love you tonight and we thank you and praise you in Jesus' name. Amen.