

THE
PASSION
AND THE
GLORY

MIKE MAZZALONGO

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14998 E. Reno

Choctaw, Oklahoma 73020

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INTRODUCTION

Many biblical scholars use the term “passion” (from the Latin *pati* – to endure or suffer) to describe in one word the psychological and physical suffering that Jesus experienced beginning in the Garden of Gethsemane and ending with His death on the cross. This study will examine the five key events that occurred during the Lord’s passion which culminated in His glorious resurrection.

1. HIS LAST SUPPER

I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes...

- Romans 1:16

The "gospel" that Paul refers to in this passage, that has the power to save men, is the story of Jesus; it is the passion of His death and the glory of His resurrection. It describes how God took on the form of humanity in the person of Jesus Christ, lived among men, and men were so blinded by their own evil that they:

- Plotted to destroy Him
- Lied in order to convict Him
- Tortured Him, humiliated Him
- Murdered Him and then tried to forget Him

However, three days after these horrible events, Jesus rose from the dead leaving His tomb empty. He then appeared to over 500 people in different places and times for over a period of a month. Then, in full view of His Apostles, He was taken into heaven leaving them with the promise that one day He would return unexpectedly in order to bring to heaven all those who believed and served Him and punish all those who did evil as well as those who knew of Him but refused to believe in Him.

This "gospel" that Paul talks about, which I have described in brief form, is contained in the Bible books of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Each writer tells us this same story from his own unique perspective, but all of them climax their witness of Jesus' life with His death, burial, and resurrection.

In this book I want to focus on the climactic final moments of Jesus' life where the greatest drama of human history was played out:

- I want us to be with Him at His last supper
- I want us to hear His last words
- I want us to see His last miracle
- I want us to know His last command
- I want us to receive His last gift

Today, in a time when religion is often used as a vehicle for politics or entertainment, I want to share with you the scenes that the Apostles experienced; the story that Luke says, "...turned the world upside down," when it was told (Acts 17:6).

I want to tell you about the Passion and the Glory of Jesus Christ. Let us, therefore, begin with...

HIS LAST SUPPER

The final week of Jesus' life was the week of Passover culminating in the Passover meal. To understand properly the significance of the events surrounding Jesus' last days we need to understand the history of the Jewish Passover.

HISTORY OF THE JEWISH PASSOVER

Some 2000 years before Christ, God chose and promised to Abraham (who lived in modern day Iraq), that He would protect him, give his descendants a special land in which to live, and one day send the Savior through his people.

Abraham's descendants were the Israelites and through a series of circumstances found themselves in Egyptian slavery for several centuries. God remembered His promises to Abraham and called Moses to lead the Jewish people out of Egyptian slavery and into the land that He had promised to them long before. The Egyptian king refused to allow Moses to bring the people out of Egypt, so God sent many plagues and catastrophes on Egypt in order to change his mind. The king stubbornly refused despite all the calamities happening in his country. The final plague sent by God was that the first-born child and animal of every family would be killed by God's angel on a particular night.

In order to save the Israelites from this disaster, God instructed Moses to tell the people that they were to:

- Sacrifice a young lamb without blemish
- Sprinkle its blood on the door posts of their homes
- Stay inside and eat the lamb that night

The Israelites did this and when the 'Angel of Death' came to seek out the "first born" of every house, he passed over those homes where the blood was on the posts (frames) of the door. The Egyptians allowed the Israelites to leave when they discovered the terrible thing that had happened to them that night.

God instructed Moses to tell the people that every year thereafter, in the spring, they were to keep the Passover meal as a remembrance of their liberation from bondage in Egypt. This occurred between 1500-1400 BC.

1500 years later, by the time of Jesus, the Passover meal had grown into a week of festival that included the Passover meal followed by the seven day Feast of Unleavened Bread.

- Originally these were two separate feasts: Passover (sharing the Passover meal on one day) and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, a separate seven day feast that followed.
- By the time of Jesus, these two feasts had merged into one as writers referred to them together as the Passover.

During this time Jews living in different countries would come to Jerusalem in order to sacrifice a lamb at the Temple and share a Passover meal with friends and family.

- Each family or group would purchase a lamb and bring it to the Temple to be sacrificed.

The meal itself consisted of:

- Roasted lamb
- Unleavened bread
- Bitter herbs (escarade, parsley, cucumber)
- Wine:
 - Four cups were drunk in ceremonial fashion accompanied by praise, Scripture reading and prayer.
 - Since it was Passover and no leaven was permitted it seems that they drank new wine, fruit of the vine or unfermented wine.

THE PROCEDURE OF THE MEAL WAS AS FOLLOWS:

1. The family would gather and the father or leader would conduct the meal. Everyone would wash their hands (ritual) and would have their feet washed if visiting someone's home.
2. The first cup of wine was shared and they gave a blessing (grace).
3. The father dipped the herbs into the meats and would pronounce a benediction, he then would eat and the others followed.
4. The second cup of wine was prepared and a son would then ask the father to explain the feast and this would provide an occasion to teach the family the significance of what they were doing, as well as tell the story of the Passover in Jewish history. Each element of the meal had a particular significance:

1. **The lamb** = sacrificial lamb and the blood covering as protection.
2. **Unleavened bread** = purity, holiness of God's people, the rush to leave bondage (no time to allow the bread dough to rise).
3. **Bitter herbs** = difficult experience in Egypt.
4. **Wine** = blessing and abundance when they settled in Canaan
5. After this they sang Psalms (113-114) and drank a second cup with prayer and thanksgiving.
6. At this point the father would wash his hands and take two portions of bread. One piece he would eat along with the meat and salad, the others would do the same until the father would eat the last piece of lamb and this would signify the end of the meal.
7. After this there was a third and fourth cup with songs and blessings: Psalms 115-118 (Hallel).

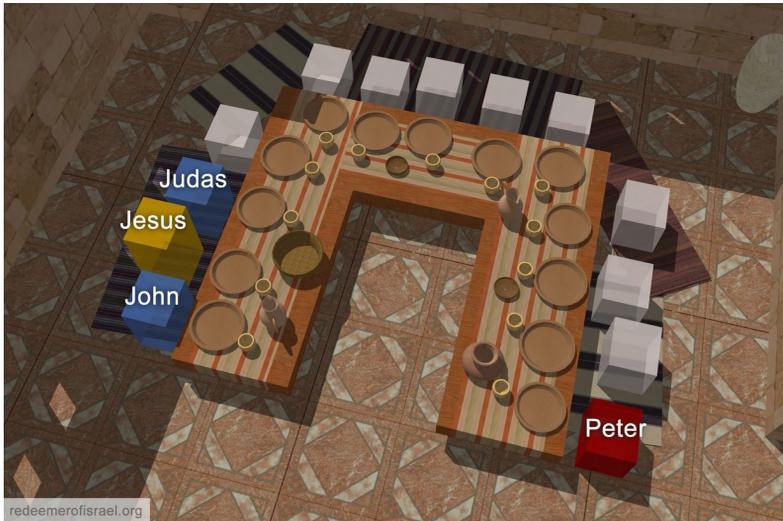
It was the traditional Passover meal that Jesus ate, and it was this meal that the Lord had sent Peter and John to prepare for Himself and the other Apostles (Luke 22:7-13). This particular Passover meal was to be special, however, because it would be Jesus' last meal before His death on the cross.

PASSOVER WITH JESUS

PETER AND JOHN HAVE PREPARED THE ROOM

The meal was set at a private upper room furnished with a low table in a "U" shape with cushions surrounding it where the guests would recline. In those days, the host (John) had the first place on the left so that he could see to the needs of the leader or honored guest who sat next to him, and then the rest were placed in order of age or importance.

Judas sat to the left of Jesus (we know this because Jesus offered him a sop of bread to indicate who the traitor was - (John 13:21, 25-26). We know John chose the first/host position next to Jesus because he leaned on Jesus' breast at some point during the meal (John 13:23-25). According to John (John 13:4-6) Jesus either started or finished washing the Apostles' feet with Peter so either way, Peter was in the last place on the right. The owner of the house had also left a basin of water and a towel in order to allow the guests, who had travelled on foot, to wash their feet before they entered the house to eat.



They prepared the table by laying out the roasted lamb and other sacrificial meats, the bitter herbs, unleavened bread, as well as the wine with the cups for the blessings.

JESUS AND THE OTHER APOSTLES ARRIVE FOR THE PASSOVER MEAL

Luke records that there was a dispute among them concerning who was to be regarded as the greatest.

24 And there arose also a dispute among them as to which one of them was regarded to be greatest. 25 And He said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who have authority over them are called 'Benefactors.' 26 But it is

not this way with you, but the one who is the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like the servant. ²⁷ For who is greater, the one who reclines at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at the table? But I am among you as the one who serves.
- Luke 22:24-27

Perhaps John and Judas in having taken the places closest to Jesus at the table caused the others to be jealous thus an argument began. Jesus tells them that in His kingdom the youngest was the greatest and the one who served was the most important.

John (John 13:2-5) describes how Jesus underscores this lesson by rising from His honored position at the head of the supper table and taking the basin and towel, proceeded to wash the Apostles' feet. Usually a slave was present at feasts and this service was done by him as a gesture of hospitality by the host. Each Apostle had entered, saw the basin, knew what it was for, but did not wash his own feet and did not offer it to the others probably thinking that this task was for slaves, not for those interested in 'position.'

JESUS REVEALS THE TRAITOR

After the foot washing, the Passover meal continued in the usual manner with Jesus serving as leader, distributing the food.

All four gospel writers indicate that while they ate Jesus revealed to that there was a traitor among their number (Matthew 26:21).

They were, to be sure, mortified and begin to question themselves and Jesus as to whom it might be:

- **Mark** (14:18-31) tells us that Jesus said this, they all asked Him saying, "Surely not I?" and Jesus answered nothing.
- **Luke** (22:23) says that they also discussed among themselves, "... which one of them it might be who was going to do this thing."
- **Matthew** (26:25) records that when Judas asked the question, "Surely it is not I, Rabbi?" Jesus answered him, "You have said it

yourself." This was the Hebrew way of saying: What you say is what you are.

- It is left to John, who is seated next to Jesus, to describe what happened at this point.

²¹ When Jesus had said this, He became troubled in spirit, and testified and said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, that one of you will betray Me." ²² The disciples began looking at one another, at a loss to know of which one He was speaking. ²³ There was reclining on Jesus' bosom one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved. ²⁴ Simon Peter gestured to him, and said to him, "Tell us who it is of whom He is speaking." ²⁵ He, leaning back thus on Jesus' bosom, said to Him, "Lord, who is it?" ²⁶ Jesus then answered, "That is the one for whom I shall dip the morsel and give it to him." So when He had dipped the morsel, He took and gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot ²⁷ After the morsel, Satan then entered into him. Therefore Jesus said to him, "What you do, do quickly." ²⁸ Now no one of those reclining at the table knew for what purpose He had said this to him. ²⁹ For some were supposing, because Judas had the money box, that Jesus was saying to him, "Buy the things we have need of for the feast"; or else, that he should give something to the poor ³⁰ So after receiving the morsel he went out immediately; and it was night.

- John 13:21-30

The Apostles knew Judas was a thief (John 12:6 says that he used to steal the money from the money box), and now they knew him to be a traitor, but they are not aware of his plans as he left and went into the night.

THE LORD'S SUPPER

There remains only a piece of unleavened bread to be eaten and the final cup of blessing for which offered a prayer of thanksgiving in remembrance of the freedom God gave the Israelites from Egyptian bondage long years before.

However, Jesus changes the focus here from the past to the future.

²⁶ While they were eating, Jesus took some bread, and after a blessing, He broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is My body."²⁷ And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you;²⁸ for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins.²⁹ But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom."
- Matthew 26:26-29

The bread without leaven will no longer representing the holiness and purity the people should have, but will now represent His holy and pure body given for them as a sacrifice for sin.

The wine will no longer represent the blessing and abundance of the promised land, but will now represent His blood and His life freely given to purify all men from sin and guarantee the promise of an abundant eternal life.

There will be no more lamb to kill and sacrifice because He is the Lamb of God whose blood will cover and protect His people forever. There will no longer be bitter herbs as a memory of suffering because the memory of His suffering will be eclipsed by the glory of His resurrection from the dead.

This is His last Passover, but it will also be their last Passover. From now on they will remember this night and share the bread and wine to remind them of their freedom from sin and death to life and glory through the body and blood of Jesus Christ.

It was a custom to end the meal with songs of praise and thanksgiving, and so Matthew and Mark write that, "after singing a hymn they went out to the Mount of Olives." (Matthew 26:30). They probably sang Psalms 113-115, known as the Hallel, meaning joyous praise in song.

THE PRAYER AND CLOSE

The lamb of the Passover had been sacrificed and eaten, but now as Jesus and the Apostles left the solitude of the upper room, the true Lamb of God was being prepared for sacrifice. After supper, the writers each

describe how Jesus prepared the Apostles for what was to come by telling them plainly that very soon He would be tortured and killed, and they would all run away. Matthew and Mark write that the Apostles insist that they were ready to die with Jesus, and Peter says he would never deny Him. Jesus responds by telling him that even before the cock crows Peter will deny Him three times. Luke tells us that Jesus prayed for Peter at this point so that Satan would not overpower him, and that Peter would have the strength to encourage the others. Luke says that in a panic the Apostles took two swords with them.

John gives the longest description of this scene where Jesus not only warns them, but prays for the Apostles (John 14:1-17:26):

- That they might love one another, as the true sign of authentic discipleship.
- That He will prepare a place in heaven for them.
- That the Holy Spirit will be given to strengthen and give them power.
- To remember that He is the true vine and so long as they remain faithful, they will be very fruitful.
- That God sanctify and purify them in truth, and keep them united with each other, Himself and God.

After this, they make their way to the Mount of Olives, bringing their swords with them.

THE GARDEN

The Mount of Olives was outside of the city, a place frequented by those who wished for solitude and prayer. The eleven follow Him to the edge of the garden and He brings Peter, James and John further in, asking them to pray with Him because He is becoming sad and heavy with pain. Matthew and Mark describe how Jesus wrestled in prayer asking God to take away the cup of violence He faced.

Three times He returned to the Apostles for their encouragement and prayer support and three times He found them asleep, heavy with fear and sorrow. Luke tells us (Luke 22:43-44) that He was in such agony, He

sweat blood (a medical condition called hematidrosis caused by severe stress and mental anguish) and an angel came to strengthen Him.

In the end, the battle to bring His human will under complete control of the Heavenly Father is won as Jesus accepts the cross with the words, "... My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may Your will be done."

He went away again a second time and prayed, saying, "My Father, if this cannot pass away unless I drink it, Your will be done."

- Matthew 26:42

After returning to the eleven at the edge of the Garden, they hear the sound of a crowd, the clanging of swords and see the light of torches in the night. Judas had agreed to identify Jesus to the crowd by greeting Him with a kiss. John tells us (18:3) that he has Roman soldiers, guards from the Temple of the priests and the Pharisees with him. Jesus receives the kiss and tells them to leave the Apostles alone; when they hear His voice they fall to the ground.

Peter seizes the opportunity and uses one of the swords to cut off the ear of one of the High Priest's servants (Malchus). Luke tells us that Jesus healed the man's ear and stops Peter from further violence (Luke 22:51).

John (John 18:11) writes that Jesus accepted to be taken in order to fulfill the will of God when He said, "Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?" Mark closes this chapter simply by saying, "And they all left Him and fled." (Mark 14:50).

Like a lamb for the Passover sacrifice, Jesus was bound and led away into His night of suffering.

2. HIS LAST WORDS

Since the invention of audio and video recordings we have witnessed some amazing things:

- Last words and reactions of pilots before a plane crash when rescuers find the "black box."
- Footage of wars being fought shown in real time on TV news.
- Crimes and gun battles captured on cell phones and broadcast across the internet for millions to see.

There was no such technology in Jesus' day, but nevertheless I would like to describe as best I can the last images and words experienced by the Lord before His death. These were recorded by eyewitnesses whose accounts have been preserved in their written records. The Bible is our "black box" for these events that took place so long ago.

THE LAST THINGS THAT JESUS SAW AND EXPERIENCED

Mark 14:53-65 – Jewish Trial (First Scene)

Jesus has been arrested by temple and Roman guards after being betrayed by Judas in the Garden. The Apostles have run away and He is all alone.

He is brought first to Annas, the former High Priest and father-in-law to the current High Priest, Caiaphas. This was probably done to formulate some kind of charge against Jesus which would then justify a trial. Jesus is then brought before the Jewish court (Sanhedrin) of the High Priest, Caiaphas, who has convened a 'special' inquiry in the early hours of the morning.

It was illegal to call such an assembly at night in order to prosecute a capital case, but their mission to provide some sort of due process in order to condemn and execute Jesus was urgent, and a charge against Him needed to be formulated. And so, one accuser after another is brought forth, without success, because each one contradicts the other.

Finally, in utter frustration, Caiaphas himself addresses Jesus and simply asks Him if He believes that He is the Messiah, to which Jesus answers in the affirmative because He cannot lie, even to protect His own life, and He cannot avoid confessing the truth concerning His actual identity. Mark tells us that Jesus is then condemned to death based on His own declaration. What all the false accusers could not produce with their lies, Jesus accomplishes by telling the truth about Himself.

While Peter denies Jesus in the dark and cold courtyard outside, Jesus accepts His sentence of death while standing bound before the Jewish leadership inside the High Priest's house. Once the charge against Him is set, the night of horror begins as His tormentors spit, beat, mock and slap the Son of God; and the words of Isaiah are fulfilled,

I gave My back to those who strike Me,
And My cheeks to those who pluck out the beard;
I did not cover My face from humiliation and spitting.
- Isaiah 50:6

Matthew 27:26-31 – The Roman Trial (Second Scene)

After having falsely accused and tortured Him, the Jewish leaders bring Jesus to the Roman governor, Pilate, because although they had sentenced Him to death, only a Roman official could carry out an execution.

¹¹ Now Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor questioned Him, saying, "Are You the King of the Jews?" And Jesus said to him, "It is as you say." ¹² And while He was being accused by the chief priests and elders, He did not answer.

¹³ Then Pilate said to Him, "Do You not hear how many things they testify against You?" ¹⁴ And He did not answer him with regard to even a single charge, so the governor was quite amazed. ¹⁵ Now at the feast the governor was accustomed to release for the people any one prisoner whom they wanted.

¹⁶ At that time they were holding a notorious prisoner, called Barabbas. ¹⁷ So when the people gathered together, Pilate said to them, "Whom do you want me to release for you? Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?" ¹⁸ For he knew that because of envy they had handed Him over.

¹⁹ While he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent him a message, saying, "Have nothing to do with that righteous Man; for last night I suffered greatly in a dream because of Him." ²⁰ But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and to put Jesus to death. ²¹ But the governor said to them, "Which of the two do you want me to release for you?" And they said, "Barabbas." ²² Pilate said to them, "Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" They all said, "Crucify Him!" ²³ And he said, "Why, what evil has He done?" But they kept shouting all the more, saying, "Crucify Him!"

²⁴ When Pilate saw that he was accomplishing nothing, but rather that a riot was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this Man's blood; see to that yourselves." ²⁵ And all the people said, "His blood shall be on us and on our children!"

- Matthew 27:11-25

Pilate, after questioning Jesus, realizes that there is no evidence or crime deserving the death penalty. He vainly tries to free the Lord but is unsuccessful because the cries of the Jewish mob, incited by the Priests and other Jewish leaders complicit in the effort to have Jesus put to death, threaten to spill over into a riot. Pilate, in an effort to appease them, turns Jesus over to the Roman guards where His ordeal of suffering is about to continue:

- Verse 26: The scourging - Roman soldiers used short whips made up of leather strips to which were attached bones or lead bits at the tips for maximum injury. The whipping was applied from both sides with the objective being the ripping of the flesh into open wounds.
- Verse 27: A cohort - A group of about 600-1000 men. All were present to watch since the torture was conducted as a cruel spectacle appealing to bloodlust.
- Verses 28-29: They dressed Him in a robe, put a reed in His hand, plunged a crown of thorns down on His head and mockingly addressed Him as a king, even kneeling before Him in order to humiliate the subject of their torture.
- Verses 30-31: They then spat on Him, took the reed away (as a sign of His powerlessness) and beat Him on the head driving the thorns further into His skull, while laughing at Him. They then led Him away to His death.
- The purpose of this unnecessary torture and cruelty by the Roman soldiers was to destroy the prisoner's spirit before destroying his body with crucifixion. It also served as a visual object lesson to any other Jew who might have plans to undermine Roman rule and law.

If we could see through the eyes of Jesus at this point, what we would notice most of all was that there was not a single drop of human pity or compassion in their attitude. As I said, their goal was to completely destroy Him psychologically before they destroyed Him physically.

Luke 23:26-27 – The Crucifixion (Final Scene)

Once the beatings and mockery were over He was led out of the city to be crucified.

²⁶ When they led Him away, they seized a man, Simon of Cyrene, coming in from the country, and placed on him the cross to carry behind Jesus. ²⁷ And following Him was a large crowd of the people, and of women who were mourning and lamenting Him.

- Luke 23:26-27

He was too weak to carry His own cross (the cross formation was about eight feet high) and so Simon from Cyrene (modern day Libya) was pressed into service as the large noisy crowd made its way outside the walls of the city to Golgotha (the place of the skull) for the actual execution.

³³ And when they came to a place called Golgotha, which means Place of a Skull, ³⁴ they gave Him wine to drink mixed with gall; and after tasting it, He was unwilling to drink.

- Matthew 27:33-34

Prisoners were given wine mixed with myrrh to calm them down. This was not an act of mercy but was done so the condemned would not resist and move about while the nails were being driven through their hands and feet. Jesus refused to drink wanting His mind clear to the end. He still had things to do.

And when they had crucified Him,

- Matthew 27:35a

They crucified Him, one large nail per hand and foot. In most cases death came slowly from thirst, pain, exhaustion and asphyxiation. This agony would go on for three or four days before the prisoner would finally expire.

..they divided up His garments among themselves by casting lots.

- Matthew 27:35b

As was their custom, the soldiers who were responsible for the execution shared any clothing or valuables left by the ones crucified. In Jesus' case they gambled for His robe, not wanting to divide it among themselves, and waited for Him to die.

³⁷ And above His head they put up the charge against Him which read, "THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS." ³⁸ At that time two robbers were crucified with Him, one on the right and one on the left. ³⁹ And those passing by were hurling abuse at Him, wagging their heads ⁴⁰ and saying, "You who are going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross." ⁴¹ In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking Him and saying, ⁴² "He saved others; He cannot save Himself. He is the King of Israel; let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe in Him. ⁴³ He trusts in God; let God rescue Him now, if He delights in Him; for He said, 'I am the Son of God.'"

- Matthew 27:37-43

Once crucified, the people not yet satisfied with His suffering, continued to hurl insults at Jesus while He hung on the cross suffering and dying in the most humiliating fashion.

The robbers who had been crucified with Him were also insulting Him with the same words.

- Matthew 27:44

Even the two thieves hung on either side of Jesus were insulting Him as well.

Beaten, bleeding, degraded and in terrible pain, Jesus looks out over the scene before Him and sees the cruelty of the guards, the hatred of the crowd, the mocking of the religious leaders, the abandonment of His

disciples and He finds the strength to say seven things before He dies on the cross.

THE LAST SEVEN THINGS THAT JESUS SAID FROM THE CROSS:

1. "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." (Luke 23:34)

The very first words from His mouth while He hung on the cross were not concerning His own pain, the injustice of it all, a cry for help or a curse on His tormentors, but rather a plea to God on behalf of His murderers.

2. "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise." (Luke 23:43)

The second thing He says is a response to one of the thieves next to Him.

³⁹ One of the criminals who were hanged there was hurling abuse at Him, saying, "Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!" ⁴⁰ But the other answered, and rebuking him said, "Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?" ⁴¹ And we indeed are suffering justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong." ⁴² And he was saying, "Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!" ⁴³ And He said to him, "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise."
- Luke 23:39-43

Notice that in Matthew 27:44 it says that both thieves were cursing Him. What do you think finally convinced one of them to believe: miracles, doctrine? No, the thief witnessed the power of forgiveness working in love. He heard from Jesus the words of forgiveness towards His enemies, and he was moved to seek forgiveness for himself.

The lesson of the thief on the cross is not that it is never too late to be saved, or that baptism is not necessary for salvation, but rather the power of salvation is love - love unto death if necessary. This is what draws all men to Christ: His great love.

3. "Woman, behold, your Son!.. Behold, your mother!" (John 19:26-27)

After He is crucified, Jesus' mother and John approach the cross, and the Lord puts her into the care of the Apostle that He loved.

We know that Jesus is divine not only because of His great miracles, but while the greatest battle for humanity is being waged at Calvary, He has His eyes on all the details and needs of everyone there, even the care of His earthly mother when He will no longer be there to look after her Himself.

4. "My God, My God, why has Thou forsaken Me?" (Mathew 27:46)

Jesus deals with those furthest away from Himself first (enemies, thieves, mother, disciple) and, finally, Self. The Lord now grapples with His own suffering. He bears the final crushing punishment for the sins of all men: separation from God.

It was not the physical abuse and pain that atoned for sin, these were natural consequences of men's sin, ignorance and hatred of God. Jesus experienced these in one way or another throughout His life and ministry with its culmination here at Calvary. The suffering that paid the price for sin was paid on the cross, but it was not the cross itself, it was the separation that Christ experienced from His Father while on the cross. This terrible agony caused even the Son of God to cry out; this was the punishment reserved for guilty sinners. This burden Jesus willingly took upon Himself on behalf of all sinners - on behalf of you and me!

5. "I am Thirsty." (John 19:28)

Jesus asked for a drink. Why? It seems that after having suffered so heroically He would make it to the end without any physical assistance.

I believe that He asked for a drink because He was human and in doing so demonstrated that He suffered as a human, unprotected by some supernatural armor against pain. The life He lived was perfect because He was God; the life He offered in suffering was human because He was man.

6. "It is finished!" (John 19:30)

From the beginning, God's plan was to send His Son to live a perfect life and offer that life in death in order to pay the moral debt of sin accumulated by all men which in turn condemned everyone to separation from God eternally. The history of the Jewish nation and the life of Jesus all led to this act, and now it was accomplished once for all.

When we believe, repent and are baptized we need to understand that we lay hold of the finished work of atonement that Christ has made on our behalf. All sin has been dealt with, forever. The payment for your sins and mine has been made in full. When Jesus said, "It is finished!" He meant that nothing else needed to be done in order to make restitution for the sins of all of mankind.

7. "Father, into Thy hands I commit My spirit." (Luke 23:46)

These are the last words of Jesus before He dies. Notice that He does not die struggling to hang on to life as most men do, but willingly offers His spirit in death to His Father. Why? Because Jesus knew He had the power to both lay it down and pick it up again.

¹⁷ For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again. ¹⁸ No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father."
- John 10:17-18

Christians do not have the power to lay down their lives and then pick them back up again. They do, however, have the assurance from the One who does have this power, that when their lives are over He will raise them up once again. We know that if He has the power to pick up His own life, He certainly has the power to raise up others as well.

EXHORTATION

We often ask ourselves, "What would we have done if we were there, if we were transported back to that time?" If we were there on that terrible day as Jesus surveyed the view from the cross, where would He have seen us?

It's not really necessary to go back in time in order to answer that question. We can judge what our position would have been back then simply by looking at our position here today. For example:

1. **The Romans:** They were unbelievers, unwittingly opposing God and crucifying the Savior. Today we have many who do not believe and are in the darkness manipulated by Satan through their ignorance and opposing God and Christ without even knowing it.
2. **The Jews:** Believed in God but refused to accept God's word made flesh. Today, how many claim to know and believe in God but refuse to obey His word and follow Jesus instead of traditions and doctrines not based on the Bible. We reject God when we reject Christ; we reject Christ when we reject His word.
3. **The Disciples:** They believed in Jesus but refused to stand with Him when under pressure. Jesus said that many would receive the word, but when persecutions came would quickly fall away. Among our own members today we have many who have confessed Christ and have been baptized, but when it comes time to choose between Christ or a bad habit, a sexual sin, worldly friends, the pressure of family or jobs, they, like the early disciples, run away and watch from a distance the mob who killed their Lord.
4. **Those on the cross with Jesus:** Only Jesus went to the cross, no one else went with Him. There could have been 12 crosses on Calvary that day (if the soldiers would have caught the disciples and they confessed Christ, they would have also been crucified with Him). However, we know that only one was willing to go. Today, all those who confess His name, sincerely

repent of their sins, are baptized and follow Christ until He returns, these are the ones on the cross with Jesus.

³ Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death?

⁴ Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. ⁵ For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection,

- Romans 6:3-5

There was only one place to be back there and there is only one place to be today: on the cross with Christ.

In various locations around the world people have built crosses on high hills that overlook their principal cities. Places like Rio de Janeiro in Brazil, and Montreal in Quebec. These are wonderful gestures done to pay homage to the Christian heritage of these places, but Christ does not want the cross on a hill or mountain somewhere, He wants the cross within us and He wants us on the cross with Him.

You have seen the video and black box of the "View From the Cross" that I have presented to you based on the writings of the Apostles and early disciples. Based on what you have seen, ask yourselves this question: "What group would you have been standing with on that day?" The unbelieving Romans, the disobedient Jews, the cowardly disciples or are you on that cross with your Savior, Jesus Christ? If you have never been there with Him before and you would like to join Him on the cross, then repent and be baptized today and make His cross your own.

If you have left that position and would like to rejoin the Lord and His cross then pray for forgiveness as you repent and return.

Wherever you are, the Lord calls out to you from His cross.

3. HIS LAST MIRACLE

The Apostles record that Jesus performed many miracles. John says that if everything Jesus did was recorded, the world could not contain all the books these would fill (John 21:25). The greatest miracle in Jesus' ministry was His last, and that was His resurrection from the dead. Feeding the 5000 and walking on water would be meaningless if He had not been raised from the dead, His final and triumphal miracle.

In this chapter, I want to describe the details surrounding the greatest event in history: the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

THE TOMB

A stone (3-4' circular) lays over a space cut in the side of a mountain where Jesus rests after His suffering and death on the cross. A seal is on the stone so no tampering will take place. The body is wrapped using several layers of bandages. When the process was complete, these bandages would be tightly enfolded with spices placed in between each layer. His head is covered with a napkin.

Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus have laid Him here on Friday afternoon after receiving permission to remove the body from the scene of His death.

Several guards have been set in place to prevent anyone from stealing the body.

THE RESURRECTION

On Sunday morning at about 5 AM an earthquake shakes the ground and an angel in bright white appears and rolls away the stone. The Lord, however, has already left the tomb. The angel's action merely announces what has previously taken place. The pagan soldiers guarding the area fall to the ground in fear. Their reaction is due to the appearance of the angel and not the resurrection of Jesus which, as pagans, they were not privileged to see.

Eventually they run to the high priest and report what has taken place. They are then bribed to say that the disciples stole the body while they slept.

Soon after, Mary Magdalene and some other women arrive at the tomb with the hope of finishing the burial process that had begun on the body but had to be stopped because of the approaching Sabbath. The women see the stone rolled away and the empty tomb. Mary Magdalene leaves immediately to tell the Apostles that Jesus' body is no longer in its place. The other women, however, remain at the tomb. Angels then appear to these women and announce that Jesus has in fact risen from the dead. At this point, they also leave to tell the Apostles what they have seen and heard from the angel.

Mary returns with Peter and John and they look inside the tomb. The bandages that had been wrapped around His body are still intact and not cut, loosened or unwrapped suggesting that Jesus simply rose through them. The form is still there but the bandages are empty. Neatly folded in the corner of the tomb they see the napkin that had covered His face.

Peter and John depart from that place and return home leaving Mary Magdalene alone, crying and confused. The angels then appear to Mary asking her why she is crying, and she answers that someone has taken away the body of her Lord.

At this point, the Bible describes the first of Jesus' 12 recorded appearances.

**First Appearance:
Mary Magdalene (John 20:11-18)**

While still weeping, Mary hears Jesus calling her name. She turns thinking it is one of the gardeners, but recognizing Jesus she cries out, "Rabboni" (teacher) and clings to Him. He gently pushes her away, reassuring her that she will not lose Him. Jesus then tells her to go announce the good news to the others. She responds by quickly returning to where the Apostles are located and reports what she has seen. Unfortunately, they do not believe her.

**Second Appearance:
The Women (Matthew 28:8-10)**

In the meantime, the other women are still on their way to tell the Apostles what the angel has told them when Jesus suddenly appears to them at which point they recognize and worship Him. He instructs them to tell the Apostles that He will meet them in Galilee.

**Third Appearance:
Peter (Luke 24:34, I Corinthians 15:5)**

After the women have reported the news to Peter and he refuses to believe them, Jesus appears to Peter alone. We have no details of this meeting, only that it took place.

**Fourth Appearance:
Two Men (Mark 16:12, Luke 24:13-17)**

Two men leaving Jerusalem and traveling to the town of Emmaus (7 miles) meet a stranger and begin discussing the events of the past week along with the story of female disciples seeing an angel at Jesus' tomb. They are confused and so the stranger explains to them how the resurrection of the Messiah was in accord with Old Testament prophecy. They invite the stranger to their home and as they share a meal together, they recognize that the stranger is actually Jesus, at which point He disappears from their midst. The two men quickly return to Jerusalem that same night and report this amazing encounter with the Lord to the Apostles.

Fifth Appearance: The Apostles (Luke 24:35-49)

While these men are explaining their experience, Jesus appears among them and says, "Peace be with you." They are all afraid thinking they have seen a ghost, but Jesus then shows them His hands and feet. He even asks for some food and they give Him a fish to eat. All of this done to demonstrate that He was physically in their presence and not some ghostly appearance. The Lord then teaches them about the resurrection and how this was happening according to the prophecies about Him in the Old Testament. He opens their minds and gives them understanding of the Scriptures concerning Himself and His work. He also tells the Apostles that they will have to go and proclaim His resurrection, but to wait until they receive power from the Holy Spirit before beginning this task.

These first five appearances happen on the day of His resurrection.

Sixth Appearance: Thomas (John 20:24-29)

The Apostles tell Thomas (who was not present when Jesus first appeared to them) that the Lord is risen and has appeared to them, but he does not believe. One week later Jesus again appears to the Apostles and this time Thomas is among them. He is invited by the Lord to touch the holes in His hands and side. Thomas responds by falling down and worshipping Jesus saying, "My Lord and my God!"

Seventh Appearance: The Apostles by the Shore (John 21:1-24)

The Apostles are restless, still waiting for the Spirit and power. Peter decides to return home and go fishing. They set out in their boat but catch nothing all night. Jesus appears on the shore and tells them to try casting their nets on the other side of the boat which results in a great catch. Once ashore they eat with Him by the fire and the Lord tells Peter to feed His lambs, then asks if the Apostle truly loves Him and repeats the question three times. On the night preceding Jesus' death Peter denied knowing the Lord three times. Now, after Jesus' resurrection, the

Apostle is asked to confirm his love for the Lord three times, one confession of love for each previous denial.

**Eighth Appearance:
The Apostles on the Mountain
(Matthew 28:18-20, Mark 16:15-16)**

The Apostles were gathered at a designated place in Galilee. Jesus comes to them there and gives them instructions concerning:

1. His authority: He possesses all authority in heaven and on earth.
2. Their ministry: Preach the gospel, baptize repentant believers, teach the disciples to know and obey all that Jesus commanded.
3. Their power: The Holy Spirit will empower them to do miracles in order to confirm their ministry.

**Ninth Appearance:
500 Brethren (I Corinthians 15:6)**

Jesus appears to over 500 Christians at one time during a special gathering.

**Tenth Appearance:
James (I Corinthians 15:7)**

He appears to James (the writer of the epistle) who was His earthly brother. James did not believe in Him while Jesus was alive and preaching before His crucifixion.

**Eleventh Appearance:
The Apostles before Jesus' Ascension (Acts 1:9-11)**

A final appearance to the Apostles before His return to heaven which they witnessed.

Over 500 people of all kinds (women, men, old, young, educated and not, disciples) saw Jesus in the daytime and at night, indoors as well as

outdoors. For over a period of a month He ate and talked with, touched and comforted His disciples in preparation for His return to heaven.

Twelfth Appearance: Jesus appears to Saul (Paul) (Acts 9:1-19)

Saul, the Pharisee sent by the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem to arrest and imprison Christians in a bid to destroy the young church, is blinded and called by Jesus to reverse course and devote himself to establishing the church among the Gentiles. After receiving his sight and hearing the gospel message, Saul is baptized and begins his preaching ministry that will eventually send him to a Roman prison and execution for a cause he so violently opposed before Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus.

I have said that the resurrection of Jesus was His final and greatest miracle. It was also His most necessary miracle because through the resurrection Jesus accomplished three things:

THE PURPOSE OF THE RESURRECTION

1. The Resurrection Establishes Jesus as the Divine Messiah

Many say they believe in reincarnation, even that they once were alive in another form - but Jesus claims to have returned as Himself. This accomplishment entitles Him to be considered Lord and Christ. Paul points this out in Romans 1:1-4:

¹ Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, ² which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures, ³ concerning His Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh, ⁴ who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord,
- Romans 1:1-4

Resurrection matters because it provides Scriptural and historical confirmation of Jesus' true identity.

2. Resurrection is Important Because it Produces Faith

We can demonstrate that the Bible is an inspired book/revelation of God in different ways:

- The accuracy of prophecy (no other book contains fulfilled prophecy as does the Bible).
- The harmony of complex material (the Bible is composed of 66 individual books, written by 40 plus authors, produced over a 1500-year time span and tells a single story without confusion or contradiction). No other book resembles or compares to it.
- The superiority of thought (no other book contains the theological, philosophical, social, ethical, moral and historical information at this level that has survived examination and criticism for nearly 2000 years without destruction or being relegated to irrelevance).

Note, however, that Jesus did not send His Apostles out to convince men according to the accuracy, harmony or superiority of the Scriptures, but rather by their personal eyewitness of His resurrection. You see, doubters and disbelievers are not persuaded by logical arguments about God's word, but by God's power as seen in the resurrection of Jesus.

Prophecy, accuracy of Scripture, superiority of thought may convince you to believe that the Bible is a special book, but that in itself will not save your soul (lots of people believe that the Bible is special). It is faith in Jesus as the Son of God, produced by the witness of the resurrection recorded in the Bible that saves men from hell, not the belief that the Bible comes from God. Without the resurrection, faith is not possible.

3. The Resurrection is Important Because it Eliminates Mankind's Greatest Fear: Death

¹⁴ Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, ¹⁵ and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives.

- Hebrews 2:14-15

From the fall of Adam, death has been man's greatest fear.

People give themselves over to this world, to sin and are discouraged in the doing of good because they believe in death's final power. They think that this life is all there is so they act without considering that they will be judged by a righteous God who has the power of heaven or hell over all souls.

Paul describes the final victory of the Christian, the victory over death made possible by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

⁵⁴ But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, "Death is swallowed up in victory. ⁵⁵ O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" ⁵⁶ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; ⁵⁷ but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

- I Corinthians 15:54-57

Someone may ask, "How does the resurrection of Jesus 2000 years ago give us resurrection in the future?" Jesus answers them in John 6:39-40:

³⁹ This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day. ⁴⁰ For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day."

- John 6:39-40

The resurrection is necessary to destroy the fear of death. To show that death is not final, that it can and has been defeated, and the one who defeated it also has the power to give that victory to others.

- The greatest promise of the gospel is that for all who believe in Jesus Christ, personal resurrection from the dead will be a reality for them in the same way that it was a reality for Jesus.

God requires faith, but not blind faith. He promises us that there is life after this life and He has provided the resurrection of Jesus Christ as the "once for all" proof that this is so.

SUMMARY

The resurrection was the final miracle and the most important one for us because:

1. It is what separates Jesus Christ from every other religious prophet or leader in history. None of them have ever claimed personal resurrection - only Jesus. Through His resurrection, God established Jesus as His only divine Son, Lord of all creation and Savior of all the world, according to His Word.
2. The resurrection is important because it is the spark by which the flame of our faith is lit. Skeptics and doubters are not convinced by the love of God, but by the power of God as seen in the resurrection. I can believe what Jesus said and obey what He has commanded me to do because of this unmistakable sign.
3. The resurrection gives me real hope for my own resurrection. Prophets, astrologers and spiritualists can write all they want about the "tunnel" or "light" they have experienced in near-death situations; only Jesus, however, dies and comes back three days later, and promises me the same experience.

¹⁷ For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again. ¹⁸ No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up

again. This commandment I received from My Father."
- John 10:17-18

Jesus has the ability to promise me this thing because He has the power over life and death, and His resurrection is the proof.

EXHORTATION

Before the final miracle of resurrection occurred in Jesus' life, He had to bear the cross. First there was the death and burial, then there was the glorious resurrection.

This sets a pattern for our own lives. The final miracle will be our own glorious resurrection from physical death to be with God forever in heaven. But before this can happen we also must undergo a death, burial and resurrection.

³ Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death?
⁴ Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. ⁵ For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection.
- Romans 6:3-5

Paul tells us that this re-creation takes place in the waters of baptism: we die to sin in repentance, we are buried in the waters of baptism, and then resurrected by faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus' final miracle is available to all who come to Him in this manner.

4. HIS LAST COMMAND

After His resurrection, the Apostles record at least 12 separate occasions where Jesus appeared to His Apostles and different disciples in small groups, and at one occasion to a crowd of over 500 people. During this time, He ate with them, taught them, encouraged them and prayed with them.

On the 40th day, Luke tells us that He gathered His Apostles and took them for a walk (Luke 24:50; Acts 1:9-11). They left Jerusalem and headed towards Bethany on the same road that goes through the Mount of Olives where He had prayed on the night before His Passion. Luke mentions that they had gone about a Sabbath day's distance (Jews were only allowed to walk 2000 paces on the Sabbath day) which would put them where the road branches out in two different directions, one side to Jericho and the other to Bethany.

As they walked and talked, He reminded them to stay in Jerusalem until they received power from the Holy Spirit. He told them that after they had received this power they were to become witnesses of everything that they had seen and heard, and tell it to all the world: His life, His miracles, His teachings, His death and His resurrection.

He then stopped walking, faced them and lifted up His hands; He prayed a blessing upon them, and as they listened to His prayer, He began to rise up into the sky until He was taken completely into the clouds out of their sight. There was something very different about this departure. Every other time in the last 40 days, He had merely appeared and then disappeared. This time, however, He visibly ascended into the sky until they could see Him no longer.

Luke tells us (Acts 1:10-11) that as they looked, two men in white (angels?) told them to return to Jerusalem and wait for the power promised by Jesus who would one day return from the heavens in the same way that He had ascended.

¹⁰ And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them.

¹¹ They also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven."

- Acts 1:10-11

They went away amazed and while they waited ten more days in Jerusalem for the power of the Holy Spirit to descend upon them, they had time to ponder the incredible final command that He had given during His last few moments with them.

HIS LAST COMMAND

Both Matthew and Mark record different occasions when Jesus gave His Apostles their final instructions.

¹⁶ But the eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had designated. ¹⁷ When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some were doubtful. ¹⁸ And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to

observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

- Matthew 28:16-20

¹⁶ He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned. ¹⁷ These signs will accompany those who have believed: in My name they will cast out demons, they will speak with new tongues; ¹⁸ they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover."

- Mark 16:16-18

Basically, the command could be broken down into three parts:

1. They were to tell the good news of Jesus, who died to pay for the sins of all men and rose from the dead to prove His divinity, to every person in the world.
2. They were to baptize (immerse in water) those who believed their witness about Jesus.
3. They were to teach the converts to know and obey everything that Jesus commanded so that they would become faithful disciples as well.

This command and its execution was critical because in carrying it out, the Apostles would create a turning point for mankind in its relationship with God.

THE THREE THINGS THAT CHANGED

When they began preaching the gospel, baptizing repentant believers and teaching them the way and the words of Christ, three things happened that had never taken place before. For the first time in the history of mankind:

1. There was Absolute Exclusivity in Religion

Until this time, religion was very much a cultural or tribal thing. Each country had its religion and gods, and when countries merged through wars and alliances, so did their gods and religions. There was strength in numbers and so the more "gods" you had, the better off you were.

Jesus told them to preach only Him. "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given unto Me." (Matthew 28:18)

Peter boldly declared this fact to the religious leaders of his day:

And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.
- Acts 4:12

This is the reason that the Apostles were tortured and killed, not that they preached about a mere religion (they had thousands of gods and religions in their day) they were martyred because they dared to say that Jesus Christ was the only way a person could come to God.

Nothing has changed today. People may not like it, may disagree with it, or even reject it, but no one can deny that Jesus Christ demands exclusive loyalty to Himself and that the Bible teaches that a person cannot be saved from hell by any other person or religion. People still hate this idea and anyone who preaches it.

In our society, we are at the point in history where only two concepts in religion remain: one is inclusive which is represented by those who espouse religious pluralism. This concept includes as valid all disciplines and religions for the common good. Most churches and religions are going in this direction as well as most educational systems. The other concept of religion is exclusivity, which is represented by New Testament Christianity. It declares that there is only one way: Jesus Christ.

After His resurrection, Jesus commanded His Apostles to preach that He and only He could save men to the exclusion of every other god or religion, philosophy or prophet. Much tension and conflict concerning

religion throughout history has been caused by Christianity's demand for exclusivity and will continue until He returns to vindicate those who believe and depend on Him.

This is a hard idea to accept, especially in the U.S.A. where we pride ourselves on being tolerant of every religion and point of view. We must remember, however, that salvation is not based on democracy but on the blood of Jesus shed on the cross and His subsequent resurrection. This makes Him the final arbiter in matters of religion, especially on the question of personal salvation.

2. There was a Final Solution to Life's Major Problems - Sin and Death

In Mark 16:15, Jesus commands the Apostles to go preach the good news to all nations.

What is the good news? Not that "only" Jesus is Lord of all. Not that people could now go to church and pray and read their Bibles. These are good things but not the good news.

The good news was that God had successfully dealt with man's two oldest problem: sin and death.

Until Jesus, there was no solution to:

- **Sin:** People kept sinning, and even when they knew what was right or wrong they still did not have the ability to consistently do what was right, even if they wanted to. It is the same today; we continue to sin even when we don't want to.
- **Death:** No matter how great, strong or holy the people were, they still died. And no one knew for sure what happened afterwards. There were many rituals and theories, but death remained the terrible mystery and destiny of every person. Things have not changed today, even with modern medicine's many advancements, everyone still dies at some point.

3000 years ago, the psalmist said that the average lifespan of man was about 80 years and this has not changed much to this day (average life-span is 79.5 years, Fortune Magazine).

As for the days of our life, they contain seventy years,
Or if due to strength, eighty years,
Yet their pride is but labor and sorrow;
For soon it is gone and we fly away.
- Psalm 90:10

However, in Acts 2:38, Peter announces the good news, and the heart of this good news is the solution to the problem of sin:

Peter said to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."
- Acts 2:38

- **Forgiveness:** By His death on the cross, Jesus has paid the moral debt for man's sins. Because of this, God can now offer all men forgiveness for sin. The final solution to man's imperfections, to his mistakes and to his disobedience is God's loving forgiveness. And with that forgiveness comes freedom from guilt, freedom from fear, freedom from the need to perfect self by self and freedom from condemnation to a joyful and peaceful conscience before God. In addition to this, the Holy Spirit gives the disciple of Christ the power to overcome sin.

¹³ for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. ¹⁴ For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.
- Romans 8:13-14

In John 6:39-40, Jesus clearly announces the final solution to the problem of death which every man had to suffer:

³⁹ This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day. ⁴⁰ For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day."

- **Resurrection:** Man could now see that death was real, but not final, there was life after death, even eternal life.

In His final command, a resurrected man is telling His disciples to go and tell the entire world how God will forgive their sins and give them resurrection and eternal life after death. This was a message never heard or even imagined before!

This was a message that offered a real solution to man's two greatest problems: sin and death. Forgiveness for sin and resurrection from death, both through Jesus Christ.

Now, that is "good news" for a guilty sinner who is condemned to die!

3. The Entire World was Made to Choose

The problems of sin and death were solved by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus' appearance after His death confirmed His divine nature, His complete authority and His claim to exclusive loyalty. Jesus now sends out His Apostles to confront the world with these facts and force them to choose, before He returns one last time to judge all men.

Mark writes very plainly concerning the choice:

He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned.
- Mark 16:16

The entire issue of life and death is reduced to one choice. Those who believe and are baptized will be saved (meaning that forgiveness, resurrection and eternal life belong to the one who believes and is baptized - immersed in water). Those who disbelieve (and consequently

refuse baptism) will be condemned (found guilty of sin and punished to an eternity suffering in hell away from God). The choice:

- Is exclusive, it's one or another.
- Is terrifying when considering the options.
- Attacks my privacy and sense of independence.
- Is demanding, urgent and offensive because it judges me.
- Weighs a million tons on my conscience until I answer it.
- Makes me angry because now that I know what the choice is, I want to say, "Why do you make me choose? Being neutral is more comfortable."

Through the gospel, God brings us face to face with reality. For the first time in history men could come to the edge, look into eternity and face the incredible responsibility of choosing to live or die. For most, pride and attachment to sin cause them to actually throw away the opportunity to live forever in exchange for the momentary sinful pleasures of this world.

But Luke tells us of the thousands who, after being given the choice, gladly responded to God's gracious offer of forgiveness and life after death (Acts 2:37-41).

So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.
- Acts 2:41

SUMMARY/EXHORTATION

Jesus' final command to tell the world about God's solution to sin and death through His death and resurrection was truly a turning point in the history of mankind:

- With it God established Jesus as the only Lord and Savior - no one could please God or come to God except through Him.

- With it He also revealed God's solution to sin and death - forgiveness and a promise of resurrection.
- With it He also presented a clear choice to all men - believe in Him and be baptized for salvation or perish in your sins. The choice was painfully clear and simple.

That final command was first preached by the Apostles and then handed on to every generation of Christians to present to their society. It also needs to be presented and passed on by the present generation until Jesus returns. It is no different for our generation - the final command stands before us in all its urgency and terror, promise and glory.

Every one of us must make a choice concerning our eternal destiny based on these words of Jesus: "Those who believe and are baptized will be saved..."

5. HIS LAST GIFT

¹ The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach, ² until the day when He was taken up to heaven, after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen. ³ To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God. ⁴ Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, "Which," He said, "you heard of from Me; ⁵ for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

⁶ So when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" ⁷ He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; ⁸ but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth."

⁹ And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. ¹⁰ And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them.

- Acts 1:1-10

Luke is summarizing the last exchange between the Apostles and Jesus after His resurrection and just before His ascension into heaven. There were 40 exciting days with Jesus appearing to many disciples, teaching and making final preparations before His departure. He instructed them concerning the kingdom. He told them not to begin their ministry in Jerusalem until they were baptized with (verse 5) or received power from (verse 8) the Holy Spirit.

During his three years with them, Jesus had given them many precious gifts:

- The words of the heavenly Father (John 17:7-8) to enlighten them.
- The proof of His divinity in miracles (John 14:11) to reassure them and build their faith.
- The sacrifice of His body and blood (Matthew 26:26) to pay the debt for their sins.
- The witness of His resurrection in order to confirm all of His promises (Matthew 28:18-20).

Now, as He leaves them, He promises one last gift: the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit that would give them not only the ability to carry out their mission, but also completely transform them.

BACKGROUND

Before we can grasp the meaning of this gift for ourselves, we need to first understand what the Jews themselves believed concerning the Holy Spirit.

1. Although it is never expressed as explicitly in the Old Testament as in the New, the Jews understood that God was one but that there was diversity in the Divine Being. For example, Genesis begins with a reference to God and the Spirit of God (Genesis 1:26). The reference to God here is in the plural, suggesting this diversity, and God's name is in the plural also.

With time and further revelation, the Jews understood that the Godhead manifested itself to man in different persons. For example:

By the time of David (approximately 1050 BC) the Jews grew to understand that the Holy Spirit was God and part of the One God they worshiped, but a separate being.

¹¹ Do not cast me away from Your presence
And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.

¹² Restore to me the joy of Your salvation
And sustain me with a willing spirit.

¹³ Then I will teach transgressors Your ways,
And sinners will be converted to You.

- Psalm 51:11-13

With time they were taught that it was the Holy Spirit that gave power to their prophets and leaders who did great miracles, saved them from their enemies and enabled them to prophecy about the Messiah to come.

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me,
Because the Lord has anointed me
To bring good news to the afflicted;
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
To proclaim liberty to captives
And freedom to prisoners;

- Isaiah 61:1

Still other prophets confirmed both ideas that the Holy Spirit was God and that the Holy Spirit gave power to men, but also declared that when the Messiah would come, it would be with the power of the Holy Spirit.

It will come about after this
That I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind;
And your sons and daughters will prophesy,
Your old men will dream dreams,
Your young men will see visions.

- Joel 2:28

By the time of Jesus, the Jews anticipated that when the Messiah came the Holy Spirit would be with the people in a mighty way. In other words, He would not only be with the prophets and leaders, but with the entire nation in a dynamic way.

For the Jews of that time, the Savior would bring with Him the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit would empower the people to become a great and strong nation as it once was in the glory days of Solomon (i.e. free from Roman domination and humiliation that it was experiencing in the first century).

2. John the Baptist: God sends a prophet, John the Baptist, who is very influential and he points to Jesus and says to the people, "I baptize you with water; but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit" (Mark 1:8). This prophecy suggests to people that the time for the Messiah to come, according to prophecy, is very near and they are quite excited by this prospect.

3. Jesus Christ: Jesus' appearance causes great excitement. John declares that He will bring the Holy Spirit. Jesus tells the people that He is the one sent from God, the one they are expecting. His miracles are further proof that what they were expecting was about to be realized.

The golden age where the Spirit was to empower the entire nation seemed to be at hand - and it was, but not in the way the people thought.

THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

When we read what happened after Jesus returned to heaven, we learn that He did indeed send the Holy Spirit for two reasons:

1. To empower the Apostles and early disciples to do miracles in the establishment of the church in the first century.
2. To indwell every believer who obeyed the gospel.

We understand that Jesus did this and it fulfills Scripture, however, both these things are very different experiences.

A. Empower

The Holy Spirit has always been the person in the Godhead that has worked in creation and man to accomplish God's the Father's will.

Isaiah 61:1 - By the power of the Spirit the prophet spoke

²⁰For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you ²¹who through Him are believers in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

- I Peter 1:20-21

By the power of the Spirit, Jesus performed His miracles.

But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.

- Matthew 12:28

Jesus promised His Apostles that He would give them this same power from the Holy Spirit. The same power that worked for the prophets and leaders as well as Jesus would now be there for them. Why?

- To help them remember accurately all of Jesus' teachings (John 14:26) because they had to teach others everything.
- To preach the gospel with power (John 16:7-8).
- To do miracles in order to confirm their preaching (Mark 16:20, Acts 1:8).
 - Speaking in foreign languages (tongues - Acts 2:4-6) to preach to all creation.
 - Healings (Acts 3:1-10), Peter heals the lame man in the name of Jesus.
 - Raising the dead (Acts 20:8-12).

- Bestow on others the ability to do these kinds of miraculous acts (Acts 19:6). They were only 12 men, but through the power of the Holy Spirit they bestowed gifts on other disciples to help spread the gospel, build the church and confirm the truthfulness of God's word.

This kind of power was given by Christ through the Holy Spirit, but only to very few people for a short time and for specific reasons:

1. To confirm that the Apostles and early disciples who preached the gospel were indeed telling the truth. If people doubted the messengers who spoke of a resurrected Jesus, they were reassured of their sincerity when they saw the miracles and signs.
2. To help the early church establish and organize itself. There was no written record of Jesus' life and teaching in the early part of the first century, and so God provided the young church with people who had special powers to protect and guide it until every member had access to the complete teachings of Christ. By the end of the first century, the New Testament was written and was being circulated in various forms. The death of the Apostles ended the age where the Holy Spirit was given to empower people with miraculous abilities. This, however, did not mean that He left man completely alone, which brings us to the second manifestation of the Holy Spirit.

⁸ Love never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away. ⁹ For we know in part and we prophesy in part; ¹⁰ but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away.

- I Corinthians 13:8-10

B. Indwelling

Not everyone was to be miraculously empowered by the Holy Spirit, only those that God had selected to carry out special ministries (i.e. healing, tongues, prophecy, etc.). However, everyone could receive the

indwelling of the Holy Spirit and this phenomenon was the true fulfillment of the prophecies about Him in the Old Testament.

In his first sermon on the day of Pentecost, Peter offers this to all those who believe and respond to the gospel in repentance and baptism (Acts 2:38). Note that all who did this were promised the Holy Spirit, but none who were baptized on Pentecost Sunday did any miracles, only the Apostles did these and, later on, those upon whom they (the Apostles) laid hands (Acts 8:18).

Peter said to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

- Acts 2:38

Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was bestowed through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money,

- Acts 8:18

The gift of the Holy Spirit is God living within the heart of every believer, the actual presence of God within the individual in the person of the Holy Spirit.

But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

- Romans 8:11

Paul does not explain the mechanics of how a divine being can inhabit a mortal body, only that it does. Faith is taking God at His word even when we do not understand how things are done.

By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible.

- Hebrews 11:3

In the end, faith will be rewarded in resurrection.

Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?

- I Corinthians 3:16

Here, Paul explains the same event but using different imagery. The body is a temple, the Holy Spirit lives within the body.

Just as the empowering by the Spirit had been given to specific people at a specific time, so too was the indwelling of the Holy Spirit given to specific people at a specific time.

1. He was to indwell every person that believed in Jesus, repented of their sins and was baptized (Acts 2:38). The Holy Spirit was offered to everyone, not just Apostles and a few special disciples. This is how all nations would be blessed. The Holy Spirit would be available to all nations, not only the Jewish nation.
2. The people who received Him would not demonstrate miraculous powers, but that is not to say there would be no change in their lives on account of the Spirit's presence. One does not have to perform miracles to know that the Holy Spirit dwells in them. A believer can know He is there in other ways.

The Holy Spirit within a Christian motivates him to seek and experience the things of Christ. How do I know the Holy Spirit is within me? Here are a few examples:

1. Prayer: He is our prayer partner. He encourages us to pray with reassurance that our prayers will be heard. He moves us to pray and keeps our prayers before God's throne.

In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words;

- Romans 8:26

2. Righteousness (Galatians 5:22): Our flesh or human nature has no interest in seeking righteousness for Christ's sake, this is the work of the Spirit. The Spirit leads us into the desire for good, gives us a thirst for

God's righteousness and the kingdom's establishment. The Holy Spirit is behind every campaign to evangelize.

¹² So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh— ¹³ for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. ¹⁴ For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.

- Romans 8:12-14

3. The desire and ability to have intimacy with God (Ephesians 3:14-19): Without the Holy Spirit we can know doctrine but we cannot know God. The Holy Spirit acts as a facilitator between our spirit and the word of God to enable us to have a relationship with a being whose nature and scope our faculties (weakened by sin) have a hard time relating to. Without the Holy Spirit, we could not know God.

¹⁴ For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, ¹⁶ that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.

- Ephesians 3:14-19

4. Service in the Kingdom: In this passage Paul talks about both the miraculous abilities available in the first century and other abilities still experienced in the church today. In the New Testament we learn that every believer receives the Holy Spirit and that He enables every believer to minister in some way. If one preaches, he does so by the grace of God and the help of the Holy Spirit. If one sings, teaches, cleans, fixes, visits, organizes or gives, he does so through the grace of God and the help of the Holy Spirit.

⁴ Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. ⁵ And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. ⁶ There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. ⁷ But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ⁸ For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; ⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰ and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹ But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills.

- I Corinthians 12:4-11

I do not believe, however, that the Holy Spirit helps you to be a better teacher or sweeper than someone who is not a Christian. Being expert at something only comes by training, practice and natural ability. I do believe, however, that the Holy Spirit gives a believer the strength and faith to sweep and serve and give for something he cannot see, that is His work in so far as the Christian is concerned. People who do not possess the Spirit fix and serve and give for something they can see and touch and taste. The Holy Spirit, on the other hand, helps the believer to continue to do the best he can for something not yet seen, a promise not yet realized.

I know the Holy Spirit is in me because I am spending my life serving a Lord I cannot see, ministering for a kingdom I cannot touch.

I have tried to explain who receives Jesus' last gift, the Holy Spirit of God dwelling in the heart of the believer, and what are some of the things the Holy Spirit does for the person He indwells. I want to conclude by telling you that the offer of the Holy Spirit is still available. God no longer empowers us to do miracles today because we no longer need them to confirm the gospel or establish the church. We now have His complete word recorded to help us do this work. The sign that we are truly of God is not the power of miracles but the power of love.

By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

- John 13:35

But He does offer forgiveness because we are still sinners and need to be forgiven.

And He offers His Holy Spirit to live within us because we all desperately need:

- Help in prayer
- Help in doing what is right
- Help in knowing God
- Help in serving Him

SUMMARY AND EXHORTATION

Through the eyewitness records of Jesus' final days, I have tried to share with you His Passion and His Glory.

We have been in the private room and seen Him eat the final meal with the Apostles. We have heard His final words while He hung on the cross. We were there to see and hear Him as He appeared to the Apostles and others after His triumphal resurrection. All of us know that His final command is that all the world is to believe and be baptized, or perish forever. And finally, we have all received the offer of His final gift: the Holy Spirit living inside of every single person who will receive Christ through faith, expressed in repentance and baptism.

The Passion of Christ on the cross was for your sins, and the glory of His resurrection can be the glory of your own resurrection if you respond to His call.

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