

Dear Friends,

In a few days we will celebrate the greatest celebration day for Christians. I will be sending a simple, short daily devotion that I call "my brown bag Christian version" of the details of what occurred 2000 years ago.

I hope you will read it and the scriptures and think on what Christ did for you and me. I pray this Easter will be the most meaningful time you will experience in your life. May God richly bless you!

Zee

The Triumphal Entry

Scripture: Mt. 21:1-11; Mk. 11:1-11; Lk. 19:29-44; Jn. 12:12-19

This Sunday, we will celebrate Palm Sunday as we remember the triumphal entry of Jesus Christ into Jerusalem. Jesus' mission was predetermined from before the foundations of the world. His life conformed to fulfill the prophecies. There was an ordained hour for his birth and there was an ordained hour for his death. Central to the prophecies of his death was the literal fulfillment that He was to become the Lamb of God sacrificed for the sins of Israel. He would have to die at Passover.

Zechariah, wrote 480 years earlier,

"Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion!

Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem!

See, your king comes to you,
righteous and having salvation,

gentle and riding on a donkey,

on a colt, the foal of a donkey." Zechariah 9:9

Jesus enters on a donkey, considered an unclean animal needing a sacrifice of a lamb was needed to be acceptable by the Pharisees. When Solomon was anointed king, he rode into the city on a mule, to the shouts and praises of the people (1 Kings 1:43-45).

It was not considered an animal of warfare after the reign of King Solomon. Protection was prophesied in Zechariah 9:9 where God promised to protect Jerusalem on the condition of faithfulness. They did not and in 70AD Titus marched in and destroyed the temple.

Jesus comes in a way not expected. He humbly comes riding on a colt - a young donkey. The donkey could represent the ordinary Christian given a great commission to carry the Lord where he wants to go to bring the gospel to the ends of the earth. And being a donkey he is looked down upon in comparison to a horse. He is the poor man's horse. Jesus' disciples were ordinary men. They were not among the religious elite of Israel. Do you feel you're just an ordinary Christian? Do you feel that you're a donkey in the Christian community? Then be prepared to take Jesus where he wants to go. It's easy to follow the crowd. It's easy to go to Christian meetings and sing songs and publicly express one's

devotion to Christ. But it's quite a different matter when you are in a crowd that despises Christ. For this same crowd that praise him would also despise and abandon him, some of whom would even have him crucified, and that only a week later. Those who follow things that are popular do not necessarily reveal their true devotion. For it is in the midst of persecution that the depth of one's true convictions are revealed. When Jesus entered the people cried "Hosanna" which means, "save us now." They wanted to be saved from Roman oppression and they believed Jesus was the Messiah to do this. They were not looking for spiritual salvation from sin. The Jews wanted Jesus to change their world (make things better on the outside) but Jesus wanted to change their heart (make things right on the inside). They did not understand that it is man's heart that needs to be fixed. The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it? (Jeremiah 17:9.) That is why we need a Savior! At the request of some of you I have printed the complete Easter Messages. Please keep it for future reference and send it to someone who has questions about the last days of Jesus Christ.

The Cleansing of the Temple:

Matt. 21:12-17, Mark 11: 15-19, Luke 19: 45-48

Jesus' enemies, the chief priests, principal men of the city and scribes, heard of Jesus' cleansing the temple and sought how they might destroy him. (John 5:18)

They were afraid that His influence would undermine their positions and authority by leading the people away from His influence. Two things caused much of the uproar against them; Jesus had broken the Sabbath, and had said that the God was his Father, making himself equal with God.

Their leader Annas and his business associates became rich because they decreed that the only "authorized" sacrifices could be offered and these had to be bought at the temple from vendors controlled by Annas. They wanted to do away with Jesus but with the feast day looming and many people around him it was impossible.

Jesus took exception to this merchandising of the sacrificial system. Why? They sold inferior animals for exorbitant prices because of their selfish greed and the temple was no longer a house of prayer. The Tyrian coinage was the only acceptable means of payment. They were utilizing trickery, duress, and any means available to them to separate worshippers from their cash.

This was the second time that Jesus had cleansed the temple. Earlier at the beginning of his ministry he drove the money changers out with a whip which he had personally made. The first cleansing of the temple had changed nothing. Business went on as usual.

When Jesus arrived at the temple it was expected that he would cleanse the temple again. In Malachi 3: 1-4 the prophecy was made that “the Lord ... will come to his temple....who can endure the day of his coming? He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver.”

When Jesus entered Jerusalem he changed the world forever! When he enters our lives we will never again be the same. We must determine what is inherently sinful, and those things that detract us from our true service and hinder our ability to serve God with our bodies. He turns our lives upside down physically, spiritually, socially, and mentally. Our temple which includes both body and mind, is to be devoted in service to God. It is to be a living sacrifice. So, we cleanse ourselves, we pursue holiness, lay aside all filthiness, malice, put off former conduct, anger, blasphemy, and filthy language, The challenge: “Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy- meditate on these things.” Phil. 4:8-9

The Last Week of Jesus Christ's Life

Matthew 21: 14, 24: 1-2, 26: 1-2, Mark 14:1-12, John 14:12

After Jesus cleansed the temple, a miraculous event takes place. In Matthew 21:14

“The blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them.” Boy, that is really tender. That is really wonderful. Do you think that Jesus Christ knows that it is the last week of his life? You bet he does. Look how Jesus Christ is outward focused. He is other people focused. He knows that it is the last week of his life; yet he is not sitting in a room somewhere depressed. He is so focused on fulfilling his mission as the Passover Lamb, helping others, being the Messiah, being there for other people who needed him. This is so much to be our example. I cannot imagine the pressure that he was under these last days, and yet look how he cleans out the temple. He is not so set back by his confrontation with the priests and the leaders there that he cannot go right into ministering and helping others. He heals the people that day that came to him.

The next day Jesus begins teaching a bunch of life lessons as he sees his life ending soon. The dried fig tree he cursed the day before becomes a lesson on faith and how we can move mountains. As he travels to Bethany he talks about the Passover and how the Son of man will be handed over to be crucified.

When he arrives in Bethany, while reclining at the table in the home of a man known as Simon the Leper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very

expensive perfume, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head. Those present rebuked the women. "Leave her alone," said Jesus. "Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me."

Judas begins his plan to betray Jesus. It is just before the Passover Feast and Christ is telling his disciples, "let us go out, let us find a place, let us be prepared to eat the Passover meal." However, they will not eat the Passover meal because Jesus Christ was the Passover Lamb. He was slain exactly at the same time that the type of the Passover lamb was being slain in Jerusalem. The sacrifice that mattered that year was the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the real Passover Lamb. That meal is the Last Supper which occurred before the Passover.

Jesus challenged his disciples to have faith. The disciples have been walking around behind Jesus Christ, following him and watching him. Now, Christ is going to be killed; he is going to be resurrected and ascend up to heaven. Somebody has to be left to do the ministry. He is here in the Last Supper telling his disciples, "If you have faith in me, now you are going to do what I have been doing." Surely, this is the call for every Christian to step in and do the works of Jesus Christ.

The Last Supper

Matthew 26:17-30; Mark 14:12-25; Luke 22:7-20.

On the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread or Passover of which was a week-long celebration, Jesus sent two of his disciples ahead with very specific instructions on where to prepare the Passover meal. There is little in our own culture and experience that we can relate to this event. Preparations for the Passover meal began on Thursday morning with a diligent search for any leaven which might be in the house. Normally, this was a family gathering, with not less than ten, nor usually more than twenty at the table. The location and details of this supper was a closely guarded secret. Peter and John were sent since they were the most intimate with Jesus. Why the secrecy? To keep Judas from informing the temple guards. Judas left the supper early to disclose the location of this meal. At the beginning of the supper Jesus washed the feet of the disciples displaying His lesson on servanthood. We do know that there was a spirit of self-assertion and the disciples, at this very meal, disputed over who was regarded as the greatest. That evening Jesus sat down at the table with the

twelve apostles to eat his final meal before going to the cross. As they dined together, he told the twelve that one of them would soon betray him.

One by one they questioned, "I'm not the one, am I, Lord?" Jesus explained that even though he knew he would die as the Scriptures foretold, his betrayer's fate would be terrible: "Far better for him if he had never been born!" There was also a distinct mood of grief concerning our Lord's disclosure of the fact that He would die and that this would be achieved by a betrayer, who was one of the twelve.

Then Jesus took the bread and the wine and asked his Father to bless it. He broke the bread into pieces, giving it to his disciples and said, "This is my body, given for you. Do this in remembrance of me?" Judas had already determined that he would betray Jesus, yet still he shared in the communion of the Passover meal. In the Book of Luke, the twelve or disciples are referred to as "Apostles" which is significant for the Church as these men will become its foundation. This meal has significance for both the Jews and the Church. Jesus by becoming the Passover Lamb fulfilled the old covenant and set it aside. The Kingdom of God was going to be established by His death.

And then he took the cup of wine, sharing it with his disciples and said, "This wine is the token of God's new covenant to save you--an agreement sealed with the blood I will pour out for you. He told all of them, "I will not drink wine again until the day I drink it new with you in my Father's Kingdom."

As I understand Luke's account of the Last Supper, it is a subtle blending of two great symbolic remembrances, that of the Old Testament Passover and the New Testament ordinance of the Lord's Supper. As such, this is a unique event, never again to be repeated in the form or with the mood that was in that upper room hours before the death of the Savior. While the two events, the Passover and the Lord's Table, are related, they are not to be equated, nor to be remembered simultaneously, for the greater has made unnecessary the lesser. There is great simplicity and spirituality in the Last Supper. There are times in our walk of faith when we should stop and question, "How true is my commitment to the Lord?" Do I profess to love and follow Christ, yet deny him with my actions? Do I look for accolades for the work I do for the Lord? Is there anything in my life that looks like potential betrayal of my relationship with the Lord? These are great questions to ask oneself at this time of the year.

Prayer in the Garden

Scripture: Mt. 26:36-46, Mark 14:32-32, Lk. 22:39-46, Jn. 18:1

Jesus left the upper room and proceeded to the garden, identified as Gethsemane, which is located at the foot of the Mount of Olives. It was customary to sing after dinner and they most likely sang one of the Psalms. When they reached the Garden of Gethsemane they sat beneath the olive trees.

I was there in 1975, and was told that I was looking at the same trees that were there when Jesus sat beneath them! If only those trees could talk!

He instructed the 8 to sit while He would go and pray and then took Peter, James and John into the garden. He was sorrowful and troubled as undoubtedly the events that would be occurring, had begun to unveil before his eyes. This sorrow was internal. This was the first glimpse of what the prophet Isaiah spoke of 700 years previously-the suffering of His soul. Christ asked them to watch and pray. He asked them to not pray for Him but pray for themselves. He knew the tests that were to follow and the weakness of the flesh. After all, they had professed their willingness to die for Him!

Our Lord fell with His face to the ground, in complete submission, under the enormity of the events that lay ahead. What can we learn from this scene? That in life, trials will occur! It is then that we must submit and fall on our faces and pray with all our soul.

Then Jesus did something that theologians have argued over for centuries. He asked that this cup be taken from Him. What cup? Then added "yet not my will but your will." Again He offered the same petition. When He returned He found the 3 sleeping. He did not wake them but returned for the third time to pray. We see Jesus sweating blood from his skin. God dispatched an angel to minister and strengthen Him. The "cup" that Jesus wanted removed is still an interpretation challenge. Some believe it was his approaching death, but this did not line up with the scriptures that stated that He must shed His blood to save us. A second interpretation was that Jesus was praying that He would not die a premature death as Satan wanted. But Jesus had complete authority over His death, stated in scripture, "I lay down my life, to take it up again. " A third explanation was that Jesus was praying that he would be spared being made sin for us. The Holy One was drawing back from being made sin. He had an intimate relationship that had lasted for eternity and He was about to be separated. He knew He was going to die a spiritual and physical death and it overwhelmed Him. Jesus became obedient to death-even death on a cross!

He then came to the disciples and announced "that the hour has come." He knew the betrayer was coming and in complete submission to God He went to meet Judas and the soldiers. The arrest of Jesus was not going to be bungled this time. A great multitude was led to the garden by Judas. A Roman Cohort is 600 men, but scholars tend to downplay the actual numbers. They considered Jesus a formidable enemy. Jesus did not shrink from His captors. Before they could address Him, He asked, "Whom do you seek?" Then an amazing thing happened. When He identified himself, the guards all fell backwards! The account claims they were stunned by fear and responded by stepping backwards and fell over each other. I however believe that the Word of the Lord was so powerful it knocked them to the ground!

One truth stands out during this event. Jesus was in complete control of the circumstances. He was not the helpless victim of a cruel and unjust system! His life was not snatched from Him! He gave Himself up! In the words of our Lord, "For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. 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. Jesus' surrender to His captors was the will of the Father. And the ultimate irony ... the source of love was deceived by an act of love ... a holy kiss! What are the lessons we learn? Obedience, submission, prayer, courage, trust, love and so much more

The Arrest

Scripture: Mt. 26:46-56, Mark 14:43-52, Lk. 22:47-53, Jn. 18:2-12

The religious leaders had decided to kill Jesus. Judas entered the picture as the betrayer, and he kept watch over Jesus to choose the time of arrest. Jesus, omnipotent, revealed to Judas that He knew the arrangement with the priests. With Jesus at the last supper Jesus offered Judas forgiveness when He offered the bread to him. But sin stopped any chance for this opportunity.

Even today, Jesus offers this free gift but something stands between man and his eternity. The original plan was to execute Jesus after the Passover but now the plan escalated with each passing hour. A large cohort of 500-600 soldiers were available to arrest Jesus and his tired crew of 11 disciples. What were they expecting? Maybe a legion of angels! These soldiers were kept in the tower of Antonia as an emergency police force. They were expecting a tumult among the people. The arrangement was made between the Pharisees and temple police under their direct orders. Was there an attempt to hide this illegal activity after midnight? No, they came with torches, lanterns, and weapons. As this large crowd came to arrest Jesus He met them and asked "Who is it you want? They answered Jesus of Nazareth. Judas had not yet identified himself when Jesus said "I am He."

Then a remarkable event happened. The Bible states that the soldiers "drew back and fell to the ground." The Greek word for "fell" used here may refer to one overcome in battle by a superior or to fall down before a high ranking person or divine being. It is not clear whether they fell out of respect for Jesus or He exerted power over them. This is a foreshadowing of the future when all men will

bow down before the King of Kings. He then interceded for the eleven and said, "Let these men go." Then at this point Judas greeted Jesus as rabbi and kissed Him. The Greek compound word used here indicates that he kissed Jesus warmly or fervently. Jesus addressed Judas as a friend, and asked, "Friend, what do you come for?"

The volatile Peter, who vowed that Jesus would not die, stepped forward with a ceremonial dagger used in the Passover ceremony with the lamb and struck out at the high priest Malchus. Peter was prepared to sacrifice his life for Jesus as the Roman soldiers carried large heavy swords that they were adept at crushing the heads of their opponents. Jesus commanded Peter, "Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?" He had emerged from the garden with complete submission to God and He would not be diverted from it. Daily Jesus spoke in the temple and the cowards feared Him and waited under darkness to arrest Him. When it was clear that Jesus would not resist arrest, the disciples deserted Him and fled. One of the disciples Mark, leaving with such haste had his garment ripped off and fled naked.

Christ words were fulfilled, "You will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with Me" John 16:31 What do we learn from this episode? Standing for Jesus Christ will cost you everything you have. Even your friends will desert you. There is a cost associated with discipleship. Are you willing to pay the cost? I pray that you will pray about your commitment as we approach Easter.

The Trial:

Scripture: John 18:12-14, 19-23

Jesus was arrested and brought to Annas, father in law of Caiphas, the high priest that year. Jesus was first brought before religious authorities.

The Pharisees wanted the death of Jesus so much that they cooperated with their arch rivals the Sadducees. The Pharisees were so clever that not once was their name mentioned in the arrest, trial, or crucifixion of Christ. They were almost invisible, behind the scenes types who spread venomous accusations against Jesus.

Annas, was the most note worthy Jewish person of that age. He held the Pontificate (High Priest) for over six years, and wielded tremendous power. He promoted no less than five of his sons to this job. He enjoyed the dignity and influence of this office but he corrupted it severely. He was an Sadducean who was enormously wealthy, in partnership with the foreigner Romans, and collector of large revenues from the temple booths known as the Bazaar of Annas where

animals were sold for sacrifice. Jesus was brought to Annas to determine which route to take in his extermination. After Jesus assailed the temple twice, He was a marked person. They challenged the Messianic authority, followed Him, in an effort to entrap Him. Now, finally they had Him in their power. This preliminary hearing is the preparation for the mock trial that the Sanhedrin would meet at when they are aroused from their sleep.

Caiphas, the high priest from A.D. 18-36 seconded the opinion of Annas, who weeks ago had planned an assassination attempt on Jesus life. His finances were a concern as was as the political careers of these priests. This hearing took place in a small apartment of the high priests palace.

Annas questioned Jesus on two counts, His disciples and His doctrine. He was worried that Jesus had some order like the Essenes that was unknown to them or that His influence was in the higher circles of Jerusalem. We know of two members of the Sanhedrin that professed their allegiance. Jesus remained quiet and dignified regarding His followers. When the questions turned to doctrine He answered correctly. Jesus then is struck in the face when He answers truthfully. In the hall of judgment, this type of action would be considered barbaric. Such a violent turn with the silent approval of Annas met by such a calm and dignified reply, terminated the examination. Jesus is then sent over to Caiphas, but Annas becomes the prime mover in the subsequent trials.

Jesus shows His wisdom and deep love for His disciples. What incredible faith as this trial turns illegal as the religious leaders show their true colors. Have you experienced the attacks of evil people in your life? Then there is much to learn on how to handle adversity as we watch Jesus move towards the cross.

In His grip,
Zee

More Trials:

Scripture: Mt. 26:57,59-68, Mark 14:53,55-65, Luke 22:54,63-65, John 18:12-14, 24

Jesus was taken from the house of Annas to the house of Caiphas, the high priest. The teachers of the law and elders had assembled. This type of meeting was illegal, another example of the sinfulness of the religious leaders. There were many reasons for the illegality but some of the main ones were; the regular place for the meetings of the Sanhedrin was to be in the Temple. The illegal meetings was held at night, had undue haste, seeking and bribing witnesses, warning the witnesses solemnly before they gave evidence, forcing accused to testify against Himself, use of prisoners confession, release of prisoner when there was a failure of evidence between witnesses. The only statement supported by witnesses was the testimony when Jesus said, "I will destroy this man-made temple and in three days will build another, not made by man." Christ remained silent when asked to confirm these accusations and refused to incriminate Himself. The High priest then asked if He was the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus, then answered that "In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of the mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven." He

was confirming what He had earlier said. "Thou has said I am." To His declaration of what He claimed to be, He was adding predictive words of His resurrection, ascension, and the second advent. The tables would be turned and they would appear in judgment before Him, the Messianic judge, when He returns in the clouds. On hearing these things, the high priest tore his clothes, an act that is specifically forbidden to a priest in the law of Moses, (Lev. 21:10). Then he gave his judgment, "He has spoken blasphemy!" This alleged blasphemy was witnessed by the entire Sanhedrin. Then they were asked for a verdict. "He is worthy of death."

The truth was revealed by Jesus but they denied it and formed their own views according to their sins. We are the ones that deserved death but Jesus sacrificial death on the cross saved us from this fate. Our death penalty was removed!

Peter's Denials:

Scripture: Mt. 26:58,69-75, Mark 14:54,66-72, Luke 22:54-62, John 18:15-18,25-27

The Disciples had been warned about the dangers they faced. Jesus had told them, "pray so that you will not fall into temptation." He had specifically warned Peter of his forthcoming denial. In spite of Jesus' warnings, Peter did deny Christ. The predictions of his denial were taken from Zechariah 13:7. Quoting God the Father, "I will strike down the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered." Jesus added, "After I have been raised, I will go before you into Galilee."

Peter was so shocked by these predictions, that all he heard was that he would fall away. The Greek word for falling away is to stumble. In other words, Jesus was saying, "every one of you is going to turn against me, depart from me, leave me, that is, every one of you will." Why did Peter deny Christ? First, Peter had confidence in himself. He said, "I will not." He felt he could remain loyal to the end. Second, Peter separated himself from Christ, and followed him only from a distance. Jesus predicted that Peter would deny him on three occasions. The Lord even gave a deadline, before the Rooster crows twice. The night segments were termed watches. There were four all together. First watch was 6pm - 9pm. Second: 9pm-12am Third: 12am-3am and the Fourth 3am-6am. The third watch was the "cock crowing watch." The end of the third watch was signaled by the crowing of the cock... One commentary said the sound was not that of a rooster, but rather a trumpet called "rooster" which sounded twice from the officer of the guard. Twice in each direction. Jesus told his confident disciple that he would deny him 3 times before the 3am horn blasts would be heard.

Peter's weakness can be seen as early as the garden prayer time. Jesus found him asleep with the other two disciples. He addressed his reproof to the one disciple who confidently guaranteed him his loyalty. Instead of calling Peter by his new name "The ROCK" He called him by his former name "Simon" which meant, "the vacillating one." It was a sign of something bad about to happen. The first denial happens in the court yard. Jesus was led away to this particular place where his disgrace began. Surrounded by high priests, elders, and scribes. Peter observed Jesus being accused of blasphemy, being spit on, beaten, and having fists shoved into his flesh. Standing at the fire in the yard, and watching the horrible nightmare unfold, a priest servant girl approached him and said to him, " You too were with Jesus the Nazarene." Peter replied, "I neither know, or understand what you are talking about." Peter retreated to the adjacent porch, hoping to preserve his anonymity. The servant girl continued to probe at him. This is one of them again. The pressure mounted...when bystanders said to him, "You are a Galilean too." Peter then put himself under an oath, pronouncing judgment on himself, if what he declared was not true. He said, "I don't know what you are talking about." One commentary stated that his words of denial, were cursing and swearing as he resorted to the language of the street to mask his identity.

Then, at this moment, the third watch signal was heard. Peter remembers Christ's predictions, and he began to weep. His pain was so severe, for he knew he could not keep his word, and his true character was revealed. Nobody can sit in judgment of Peter. We have all denied Christ in our social life, on campus, on the job, at home, in the neighborhood. Many of us have betrayed him with silence alone, but God hasn't paraded people like Peter in front of us so we can point fingers with shame. Instead, he has given us an example, to force us to look in the mirror, and see who we really are. Peter was received back into fellowship by Jesus, and went on to become one of the greatest disciples, even to the point of also being crucified except in the upside down position. Possibly, the time has come for you to deal completely and absolutely with those things in your life that are presently crushing your testimony for Christ. Our Lord is a forgiving God and one of second and third chances.

Condemned by the Sanhedrin:

Scripture: Mt. 27:1, Mark 15:1 Luke 22:66-71

Daybreak arrived and the Sanhedrin reassembled. The number one concern was that any judgment on Jesus be legal. The Sanhedrin, Sadducean priest and Pharisaic scribes were all conspiring to put Jesus to death. A court is called for justice, but this one was formed specifically to work injustice. They led Jesus into

the council chamber, the hall of Hewn Stone, within the Temple area. It was all done before the city was awake and astir with news of this crime. The only charge against him was the constructive blasphemy charge. There were many other charges that could not be substantiated.

Jesus violations regarding Sabbaths, miracles, cleansing of the temple met with different views from the religious groups so that they must find a common reason for His death. They agreed on one point, Jesus claimed to, be the Messiah and Son of God. This confession was needed to condemn Him to death. Jesus answered them with this condemning statement, "But, from now on, the Son of Man shall be seated on the right hand of the power of God." This declaration they rapidly recognized as a declaration of the Messianic Psalm, a claim to Messiahship, and to the prophecy of Daniel, a claim to divinity. The question they asked rang out in the temple, "Art thou then the Son of God?" Jesus answered "Ye say that I am." Jesus clearly claimed to be the Messiah and the Son of God, to be human and divine Messiah, to be the Messiah, to be man and God. According to Levitical law blasphemy was a capital crime to be punished by death.

Thus the trial before the religious authorities was canceled. On the basis of His own testimony, Jesus was guilty of a capital crime of blasphemy against God; and so they sentenced Him to death. Is there any doubt who Jesus is? To those who claim that He was only a teacher, I say read the scriptures, to those who say He was a lunatic, I say what gain is there to commit oneself to death. Jesus is the MESSIAH, THE SON OF GOD!

The Death of Judas

Scripture: Mt. 27:3-10

As Judas watched in horror the course of events, he was seized with remorse. He quickly wanted to have himself absolved from the events that he had personally involved himself. He went to the chief priest with the thirty pieces of silver and probably thought they would forgive him only to find them blaming him for the arrest. He confessed, " I have sinned,...for I have betrayed innocent blood."

Judas left the money as an offering for the temple. Then he went out to commit suicide. He headed out of the city into the Valley of Hinnom, the Gehenna of the future. To the potters field of Jeremiah, where the jagged cliffs point skyward. On these cliffs stood a gnarled, bent, stunted tree. He climbed to the top of this tree and unwound his girdle that held his robe together. This same girdle held the thirty pieces of silver and now it would hold his life above the valley below. He swung out but then the knot gave way and before he could grab the tree, he plunged into eternal hell. Since it was unlawful to put blood money into the temple treasure, the priest used it to purchase a field as a burial spot for foreigners.

This was done in fulfillment of prophecy. (Zech. 11:12-13, Jer. 18:1-4, 19:1-3) Judas was offered forgiveness by Jesus but he chose instead to betray Him. The result is evident for all eternity for man and woman to observe. Was Judas ever repentant for his sins. No, he was only remorseful for his acts. He was more concerned with a selfish dread of the consequences of betraying Jesus. The Greek word used here was "metamelomai" to express a desire that what is done may be undone often accompanied by regret or even remorse but without a change of heart. True repentance comes through faith that only God can give us. Oh Lord, let us be truly repentant when we sin against you and heaven. Only then will we have peace and joy.

The Civil Trial

Scripture: Mt. 27:2, 11-14, Mark 15:1-5, Luke 23:1-5, John 18:28-38
Jesus was involved in 6 trials altogether. We have already been in 3 trials; Annas, Caiphas, and the Sanhedrin. The Jews could not execute one legally, for Rome retained that authority. To carry out the sentence, the Sanhedrin had to obtain the approval of the Roman authorities. The Jews led Jesus from Caiphas to the palace of the Roman governor. Since jurisdiction in capital cases belonged to Pilate, he was the one to make the decision on Jesus' death. He initially declined to hear the case because it was so vague. In accordance with Roman law he would hear Christ's case and then make his decision. Pilate did attempt to save Jesus' life from the cross. He offered scourging, chastisement and even to release Him as he did Barabbas. Pilate, however was on the hot seat, since a year earlier he had been rebuked by Emperor Tiberius concerning the shields that were set up in Herod's palace which had offended the Jews. The civil trial could not be held before sunrise. The Sanhedrin rose before 4AM and brought Jesus before Caiphas again. Since the Jews did not want to incur ceremonial defilement, they did not enter the palace. The despised Pontus Pilate now became a friend of the leaders who sought his approval of their judgment. He hated his subjects, but he also feared them. He was at their mercy, and they

knew it. Sensitive to the Jews fear of defilement Pilate came to the Sanhedrin assembled outside his palace and asked, "What charges are you bringing against this man?" Their answer was evasive. The crime of blasphemy was not enough to condemn Jesus to death. Therefore they asked Pilate to pass judgment on Jesus. Pilate sought to eliminate himself from this trial, and said, "take Him yourselves and judge Him by your own law." The Jews then made three accusations against Christ. They charged Him with plotting sedition. He forbade paying tribute to Caesar. And He claimed to be the Messiah, a King. Pilate then left the Sanhedrin and to the palace to question Jesus. "Are you King of the Jews?" Christ responded, "Is that your own idea?" Christ was asking whether He was accused of treason by Rome or by the Jews. The charge of treason brought up the question of Christ's person and kingdom. But we all know that Christ's kingdom was not of this earth and so Pilate emerged from the palace to announce, "I find no basis for a charge against Him." In announcing Christ's innocence, Pilate did not deny that Christ was a King. Pilate meant that His kingdom was no threat to Rome and therefore He could not be condemned on a charge of treason.

Why is so much said about Jesus trials? Each trial details clearly the claims of Jesus as the Messiah and the Son of God. No one will be able to stand before Him and say they didn't know. It has been written as a living testimony of His kingdom. There are two more trials before Jesus is taken to be crucified.

The Last Two Trials

Scripture: Mt. 27:2, 15-26, Mark 15:6-15, Luke 23:13-25, John 18:39-19:1,4-16
Pilate seeking to extricate himself from the involvement in the ruling of the charges. He sent him to Herod who was in Jerusalem at the time. Herod had wanted to see this Jesus, maybe thinking he would perform some magic performance. He tried in vain to get Jesus to answer his questions. Jesus remained silent. In sending Jesus back to Pilate, Herod reaffirmed Pilate's original declaration of innocence. Thus Christ a second time was declared innocent by the Roman authorities.

Pilate then summoned the chief priests, the rulers and the people and said to them, "You have brought me this man as one who was inciting the people to rebellion. I have examined him in your presence and found no basis for your charges against him. Neither has Herod." This was the third declaration of Christ's innocence. Then Pilate seeking to placate the crowd, said he would punish Jesus and then release Him. Then Pilate offered to release Jesus as was the custom during Passover. He offered them the choice of Jesus or Barabbas. Pilate wanted to release Jesus for two reasons. The first one was because he knew Jesus was handed over to him because of envy, the second was because his wife warned him not to be implicated in this Jewish plot. Stunned by the crowds decision to release Barabbas, Pilate had Jesus flogged the traditional 40 stripes save one. On a platform where all could see Jesus was stretched against the pillar with his hands tied. The instrument of torture was the cat o'nine tails,

with bits of iron, or bone attached to rip open the skin with every lash. Many prisoners died due to the nature of this beating. Pilate wanting to show the Jews that he wanted Jesus to suffer severely so they might change their minds and release Him. The beating only incited the crowds and the soldiers placed a crown of thorns on his head. They placed a purple robe on Him, a sign of royalty and then struck him in the face. The beaten Jesus was paraded again before the assembled multitudes and Pilate made his fourth declaration that Jesus was innocent. When Pilate said "Here is the Man" to the multitude, he was trying to arouse some feelings of pity. The infuriated crowd screamed, Crucify! Crucify! Pilate for the fifth time again stated Jesus was innocent. You take Him and crucify Him, I find no basis for a charge against Him. But the crowd would not relent. Pilate was even more afraid. He feared the censure of Rome, he feared even more the censure of a deity, Caesar. He took Jesus into the palace and interrogated Him asking questions about where he came from and whether he was a God who had come in the flesh. Pilate stated again His life was in his hands. Jesus answered "You would not have any power over me if it were not given to you from above." Since He had affirmed that He was from God, Pilate was determined to release Jesus. Pilate knew however that the Jews would have grounds for treason if he released Jesus. He then went to sit on the judges seat. He was ready to make a disposition of the case. The multitude registered the judgment and Pilate was about to pronounce sentence. Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him! Pilate said, Shall I crucify your king? The priest representing the nation affirmed their loyalty to Rome, saying, "We have no king but Caesar." Five times he and Herod had declared Christ innocent, now Pilate seeking to, absolve himself took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. "I am innocent of this man's blood, It is your responsibility!" The custom among Greeks, Jews and Romans that at the time when a man shed blood, he would wash his hands, thus symbolically cleansing away the stain. The rulers, the priests, and the people united in accepting responsibility for the death of Christ. "Let his blood be on us and our children." Future generations reaped the results of this heinous sin. Thirty years later on this very spot, judgment was pronounced against some of the best citizens of Jerusalem. Of the 3600 victims many were scourged and crucified. Judas died a loathsome death, the home of Annas was destroyed, Caiphas was desposed a year later, Pilate soon after was desposed to Gaul and there died a suicide death. When Jerusalem fell her wretched citizens were crucified around her walls until there was no space and crosses left. The horrors of Jerusalem was unparalleled in history. Over one million were killed by the Roman invasion and destruction of Jerusalem.

The Civil Trial

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The Mockery and Procession

Scripture: Mt. 27:27-34, Mark 15:16-23, Luke 23:26-33, John 19:2-3. 16-17

After the sentence was passed Jesus was placed in the custody of the soldiers. The entire band then mocked Jesus. They turned His pain and shame into brutal mockery. Their main sport was watching gladiators fight and being injured by bloodshed, the art of terrorizing a disabled person was their game. Their horseplay took on a mock coronation. A scarlet robe placed on His nude body, but probably only to his elbows. A reed scepter placed in His hands, and a crown of thorns placed on His head.

The soldiers fell in front of Him and yelled, "Hail, King of the Jews." Then showed their loyalty to Rome as they spit on Him and beat Him on the head repeatedly with reeds and fists. In all this Jesus never protected himself or reviled in return. It was common to parade criminals through the streets to the place of execution. Redressed in His tunic, they placed the crossbeam on His shoulders and with four soldiers and a head centurion marched Him up to Golgatha (a skull shaped place) outside the gates of the city.

Along this walk the multitude would sneer and jeer the victim. Jesus being weak from the beatings, dropped the cross beam and Simon of Cyrene was enlisted to carry His cross. A large number of women weiled for Him, and Jesus spoke of the forthcoming judgment and sufferings. So great was the calamity to befall them that many would seek death rather than fall into the hands of the Romans.

Just a few years ahead, barrenness would be considered a blessing rather than a curse. In a few years ahead, 70 AD, over a million would perish in a few days at the hands of the Romans. Only 2 1/2 hours had passed since Jesus stood before Pilate when He reached Golgatha. It was now about 9AM in the morning. The rule in Rome was that two days must pass before an execution is completed from sentence to completion. The cross was next for Jesus. It was the most disgraceful and one of the cruelest instruments of death and torture invented. A Roman citizen could not be crucified. It was reserved for slaves and foreigners.

In many ways, we are foreigners to God, and the cross was reserved for us, but thanks be to God, who demonstrated His love for us and died on the cross for you and me!

The Crucifixion

Scripture: Mt. 27:35-44 Mark 15:24-32 Luke 23:34-43 John 19:18-27

The three crosses were laid on the ground. The crossbeam was nailed to the upright. This was the most hideous part of the episode. Jesus was stripped of His tunic, tradition says that He was allowed to keep His loincloth. He was then laid down on the implement of torture. His arms were stretched on the crossbeam and large nails, (about 6-8 inches long) were hammered into the base of his hands, (not His palms but the clari trabales) so that His hands would not rip as He hung. His legs were then placed on top of each other and nailed with a block of wood under them. This was done so that the person could lift themselves to get air into their suffocating lungs.

The whole cross was then lifted by the soldiers to the vertical position and dropped into a hole and as it dropped the victims suffered again the trauma of excruciating pain. The cross would only be a couple of feet off the ground so the lips of the victim could be moistened by hyssop, (wine vinegar) a drug that helped the pain. The four soldiers cast lots and divided the personal property of the crucified. The fulfillment of prophecy (Psalm 22:18) fulfilled as they divided the garments. A superscription was placed on the cross which read, "This is Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews," in the three main languages of the world. (Latin, Greek, and Aramaic)

The leading Jews on seeing for the first time this white wooden tablet smeared with black gypsum, were outraged! On three previous occasions Jesus was mocked, the Sanhedrin, Herod's soldiers, Pilate's soldiers. Now again He was subject to insults as those that passed by or watched, challenged Him to come down from the cross so they could believe Him as the Savior and King.

Even the two thief's confronted Him but Jesus pardoned one and gave him spiritual knowledge which he did not yet possess and told him he would be in Paradise with Him that day. This, as the first and foundation-creed of the soul, was the first and foundation-fact concerning the Messiah. All the disciple had deserted Jesus except John who was standing nearby with four women who loved Jesus, Mary, His mother, Salome being Mary's sister, Mary of Clopas (brother of Joseph), and Mary Magdalene. John was entrusted with the care of Mary by Jesus.

The first three hours lacked much narrative as John escorted Mary away from the scene to his home. He was the source to the others of the details of the crucifixion. The second three hours were now punctuated by the noonday sun which was shrouded in darkness. (An eclipse?) Jesus cried out, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" which means "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" The prophets foretold of the suffering servant that would be wounded for our transgressions. John the Baptist told of the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world. Others wrote "Him that knew no sin God made sin." We are redeemed by the precious blood of Christ." Scriptures confirm hundreds of times this completion of redemption. Jesus was entering a time of spiritual death and separation from God for the first time in eternity. He would soon enter into physical death as he fully tasted death for every man.

Jesus had seven last sayings on the cross; "Father, forgive them. Today you shall be with me. Behold, your son! Behold, your mother! Why has thou forsaken Me? I am thirsty. It is finished. Into thy hands I commit My spirit. When Jesus uttered "It is finished!" the Greek word here indicated a completed transaction, by full payment of a price or the discharge of a debt. When Christ died, He gathered for Himself the accumulated debt of a sinful race and offered to God a payment for past sins. When He died, it was in keeping with His own statements, "I lay down my life-only to take it up again." Christ died because by an act of His own will as He dismissed His soul from His body. Christ was sovereign even over His own resurrection.

There were Post-Crucifixion phenomena. The veil in the temple was torn from top to bottom. This veil was 60 feet by thirty feet wide and 6 inches thick and extremely heavy. It separated the Holy and Most Holy Places. Previously only one priest a year would be allowed to enter this Holy Place on the Day of Atonement. Early Christian tradition stated that many priests became believers as God's hand tore the separation between man and God apart. It serves as a picture of the intimacy we have with God, made possible by Jesus Christ, our only Lord and Savior. After the rending of the veil, a massive earthquake, many were buried under their rubble and many tombs were opened and Saints of Jesus were raised from the dead and were seen by the disciples after the resurrection. These were the first fruits of the victory over death!

The hardened, battle worn Roman centurion, leader of Jesus' execution was moved by God to realize that Jesus was indeed God. His testimony was simple, yet clear, "Truly this was the Son of God!"

A Miraculous Resurrection

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Scripture: John 19:38-20:10

We have now come to the most debated event of all time. Either Jesus Christ was resurrected or else we are the most foolish people of this world. The religious leaders appealed to Pilate that the legs of Jesus be broken to hasten the crucifixion. They however found Him dead. Pilate marveled that he was already dead after only six hours. These were expert executioners and to check if He was dead they pierced his side where blood and water drained out, clearly a miracle. Another fulfillment of prophecy, Zech. 12:10. A ruptured heart seems to be the only plausible answer.

There are three theories to undermine its validity: the swoon theory, the kidnap theory and the hallucination theory. Two courageous men, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus now take Jesus to a prepared burial. Haste was now required because it was late afternoon and the setting of the sun would bring the Sabbath. No corpse could be left unburied to defile the ceremonial purity of the Holy City, on that day. If Joseph had not acted with haste, Jesus body would have suffered the ignominy of being buried with the unknown in the Valley of the Corpses with the ashes of the Temple sacrifices.

The body of Jesus was first washed and then wrapped in linen between layers of aloe

and myrrh. A napkin was placed over His head. They laid Him on the shelf inside the sepulcher and then rolled the giant stone across the entrance. The tomb was sealed and guarded by order of Pilate after the insistence of the religious leaders who feared that Jesus would be taken out of the tomb by His followers and then declared resurrected as Jesus predicted. It appears that that Jesus entered the tomb at 6PM on a Wednesday and was raised soon after sunset on Saturday.

Three proofs declared an empty tomb. The first one was the stone was displaced, this stone was sealed so the soldiers would have not moved it. All they accomplished was to increase the number of those who could bear witness to the Resurrection. The soldiers were bribed to give false witness. The disciples were hiding throughout Jerusalem and Matthew tells us that an angel moved it. Second, the tomb was empty, Mary Magdalene was the first to see it. Who would

have taken the body? Third, His grave clothes were left behind. The word used when Peter and John looked into the grave was "saw." It is used three different ways, in the first instance he casually glanced at the grave clothes, the second instance he theorized or paid careful attention to the clothes and third, John believed and came to an understanding. (John 20:9) He was alive!

I suggest two conclusive points from this study. These affect the life of every individual...without exception. To live without faith in the resurrection of Jesus Christ is to deny Biblical evidence. To die without hope of the resurrection is to face a barren eternity.

May these devotions be a great encouragement to you.

Christ is risen! He has risen indeed!