



**Week #4**  
**...And Then Darkness (Matthew 27:45-66)**  
*Prepared by Mark Henry*

In prior Sundays we've already been to the Garden with Jesus and his disciples (March 15, Mt 26:36-56), experienced three rejections of Jesus (March 22, Jn 18:12-19:16), and thought about the suffering servant (March 29, Mk 15:16-32). Today, what is known as "Holy Week" begins in Matthew 21 with the Triumphal Entry. Palm Sunday commemorates this event and looks forward to the coming days in and around Jerusalem and the culmination of the week with the death and burial of Jesus. Today we also look forward to his ultimate resurrection on Easter Sunday morning followed by forty days of appearances and his ascension to be seated at the right hand of the Father from where he reigns now.

The text for today (Matthew 27:45-66) comes right after the unruly mob arrived at the Garden. The large crowd sent from the chief priests and elders and led by Judas found and arrested Jesus and as a result his disciples deserted him (Mt 26:47-56). The arresting throng took Jesus to the high priest where he was interrogated and where Peter disowned him (Mt 26:57-75). The teachers of the law and the elders and whole Sanhedrin were assembled. It was early in the morning when the chief priests and elders condemned Jesus to death. Upon hearing this Judas was filled with remorse and went out and killed himself (Mt 27:1-10). When Jesus came before Pilate, he made no reply to the charges brought against him. Luke tells us that Jesus also faced Herod before being returned to Pilate for his death sentence (Lk 23:6-12). Ultimately Pilate gave Jesus over to be crucified (Mt 27:11-26). The soldiers flogged Jesus, then stripped him and mocked him with a scarlet robe and a crown of thorns before leading him out to crucify him (Mt 27:27-31).

On the way to Golgotha the soldiers forced Simon from Cyrene to carry the cross. As they arrived, they offered Jesus wine to drink, but after tasting it, Jesus declined (Mt 27:32-36). John also tells us when the four soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into equal shares, but in order not to tear the seamless undergarment they cast lots for it (Jn 19:23-24). They also placed a sign above his head that said, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews." Mark tells us it was about the 3rd hour when they crucified him (Mk 15:25). The '3rd hour' corresponds to 9:00 am. Those who passed by hurled insults at Jesus while he was on the cross (Mt 27:37-44). John tells us that a few women and the disciple whom he loved stood near the cross (Jn 19:25) and Luke tells us others stood at a distance (Lk 23:49). As he was crucified between two thieves he called out, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they are doing" (Lk 23:34). The extent of his love for even his enemies is overwhelming. At first even the two thieves heaped insults on Jesus, but eventually one turned to Jesus and asked to be remembered. Luke records how Jesus assured him, "Today you will be with me in paradise." We can turn to God, right up to the very point of death, and still be heard and loved. From the 3rd hour to the 6th hour Jesus hung on the cross in agony, yet he never wavered in his love.

## Summary

Like many of us, the disciples are at the end of their rope. All is lost, and the one that they believed to be Messiah is out of options. By all accounts, everything is over. Jesus dies with a shout in a cataclysmic scene. "It is finished," and Jesus is right. He is gone and there is nothing more to be done. All hope is lost.

The body of Jesus is lovingly reclaimed and graciously placed in an offered tomb. The despair of the march to the cross is complete with the rolling of a massive stone, and then darkness.

### *The Death of Jesus: Matthew 27:45-56*

(Mt 27:45) Beginning at the 6th hour (about noon), a darkness came over all the land until the 9th hour (about 3:00 pm). This is recorded in Mk 15:33 and Luke 23:44 as well. In fact, Luke tells us, "The sun stopped shining." (Lk 23:45)

(Mt 27:46) At the 9th hour Jesus called out in Aramaic words that Matthew translates into Greek as, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" This is a quote from Psalm 22:1. Psalm 22 is an anguished prayer of David when he was being unjustly and viciously attacked by enemies. This psalm is also alluded to in Mt 27:35, 39, and 43 and is an apt fit for the occasion of the cross and the cry of a righteous sufferer. Hebrews 2:12 also attributes Psalm 22:22 to the lips of Jesus. This psalm reveals how deeply Jesus felt abandonment as he bore the sin of the world. Yet, it is fitting that though Psalm 22 begins with despair, it ends with triumph. Psalm 22 ends with God's victory and deliverance and the proclamation of praise for his righteousness. It was a common practice to quote the beginning of a psalm or section of Hebrew scripture as a way of recalling the entire passage. So, in this quote, we see in Jesus not only a cry that spoke to his suffering, but also a cry that anticipates his victory.

(Mt 27:47-49) Those listening thought Jesus was calling for Elijah. It was a common belief of the period that Elijah would come in critical times and rescue the innocent and protect the righteous. John 19:28 tells us that Jesus also said, "I am thirsty." When one man heard Jesus he ran, filled a sponge with wine vinegar, put it on a stick (the stalk of the hyssop plant according to John 19:29), and offered it to Jesus to drink saying, "Now, leave him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to take him down." (Mk 15:36) Luke does not mention this event. Wine vinegar was the equivalent of cheap wine, the drink of ordinary people.

(Mt 27:50) Jesus cried out with a loud voice and gave up his spirit. Mark 15:37 says, "With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last." Luke 23:46 records that Jesus said, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit" and then he breathed his last. John 19:30 tells us that when Jesus had received the drink of wine vinegar he said, "It is finished" and with that he gave up his spirit. Altogether the gospels record seven sayings of Jesus from the cross: In addition to the six listed above, earlier on the cross he also told Mary, "Dear woman, here is your son" (speaking of John), and to John, "Here is your mother." (John 19:26-27)

(Mt 27:51-54) The moment Jesus breathed his last and died, the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. (See also Mk 15:38 and Lk 23:45) The rending of the curtain that separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place indicated that those who belong to Christ now can be directly in the presence of God. In addition to the curtain being torn, two other amazing events occurred. First, there was an earthquake of such a magnitude that it frightened the guards. Second, tombs broke open and holy people were raised to life, coming out after the resurrection of Jesus and appearing to many people in the city. No other gospel records these two remarkable incidents, but it must have been overwhelming to the many who witnessed it. Even the Centurion and guards exclaimed, "Surely this was the Son of God!"

(Mt 27:55-56) Matthew records the names of some of the witnesses to these events. They include several women from Galilee who had followed Jesus and helped take care of him in his travels and ministry. They included Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons (Lk 8:2), Mary the mother of James the younger and Joses, and the mother of James and John. In addition, John tells us Jesus' mother, Mary, and John were there and Mark tells us many others were also present. It is interesting that the witnesses recorded

by Matthew, who was writing to Jews, would be women since women did not have much status in their world. Yet God uses their word as testimony to the greatest event to ever happen.

### *The Burial of Jesus – Matthew 27:57-66*

(Mt 27:57-58) Jesus died about 3 in the afternoon, but his body was left on the cross until the approach of evening. The Jews would count the beginning of the Sabbath as the time of sunset on Friday. If the bodies were not taken down before sunset, they would be left up on their cross till after the Sabbath rest. John tells us that the Jews did not want the bodies left on the crosses during the Sabbath, so they asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken down. The reason for breaking the legs was to speed up the death process. Without the ability to push up with their legs, those being crucified would not be able to take a breath and so die by asphyxiation. When the soldiers came to Jesus to break his legs, however, they saw that he was already dead, so instead one of them pierced his side with a spear. Before sunset and the start of the Sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Luke adds the detail that Joseph, a member of the Sanhedrin, was a good and upright man who had not agreed with the council's decision and action (Lk 23:50-51). Once the Centurion had assured Pilate that Jesus was dead then Pilate allowed Joseph to take the body away (See also Mk 15:44, Lk 23:52, and Jn 19:38).

(Mt 27:59-60) Joseph took the body of Jesus and wrapped it in linen shroud and laid it in his own new tomb which had been cut out of rock. John adds that Nicodemus accompanied Joseph and that the two of them also anointed the body with about 75 lbs of myrrh and aloes in accordance with Jewish burial customs (Jn 19:39-40). John also adds that this new tomb was in a garden and was near the place where Jesus had been crucified (Jn 19:41). Once the body had been placed in the new and unused tomb, Joseph rolled a large stone across the entrance to seal it off. Luke adds that Joseph barely got all this done before the Sabbath was to begin (Lk 23:54).

(Mt 27:61) Matthew records that besides Joseph and Nicodemus, at least two others were witnesses of this burial and the location of the tomb. Once again, these two witnesses were women: Mary Magdalene and the other Mary. This would ensure they knew where to go to anoint the body once the Sabbath rest was over. Matthew tells us that after the stone was rolled in front of the entrance and after Joseph and Nicodemus left, the two women simply sat opposite the tomb.

(Mt 27:62) The next day, the one after the Preparation Day, is the Sabbath. This particular day was a special Sabbath with the celebration of the Passover taking place. As soon as possible on that day, the chief priests and Pharisees went to Pilate to make a request. Their first request to have the legs broken and the bodies taken down had been allowed. Now they have another request specifically about securing the body of Jesus.

(Mt 27:63-66) In an effort to discredit the prediction of Jesus that he would rise on the 3rd day, the Jewish leaders sought the help of the Romans. The chief priests and Pharisees asked Pilate to make the tomb as secure as he possibly could in order to prevent the body from being taken by the disciples. Pilate answered by sending Roman soldiers to guard the tomb and telling them to seal the tomb and make it as secure as possible. Only Matthew gives this detail of guarding the tomb.

### **Reflections**

First, consider the actions of all the 'major players' in this drama:

- God: Watching as his Son dies for his creation. Waiting for Sunday, he appears to be far off and unconcerned, yet... he is still over all.
- Jesus: The focal point of the drama, willingly goes to and remains on the cross, suffering for the sake of those who want him dead, and even praying for God to be merciful to them. He endures to the end, crying out in his final breath, "It is finished." This is not a cry of despair, but of victory! He has completed

his task and he has faithfully followed God's leading with his every step. He has lived life perfectly and is ready to be received by the Father.

- The Jewish leaders: Mocked Jesus, yet even in his death they feared his words that he would rise from the dead and sought to protect themselves from any possibility that this might occur, for real or by deception.
- The Disciples: Most had deserted him and, fearing the authorities, they sought to protect themselves by hiding. Judas, of course, had betrayed him and then committed suicide. Peter had denied him and then wept over it. A few disciples to include women from Galilee, his mother, and John came to the crucifixion and stood by watching as his life ebbed from his body. Secret disciples later sought to show him respect by at least giving him a burial in accordance with Jewish customs. Through it all, confusion and sorrow met together along with fear and hurt. Shocked, they really didn't know what else to do.
- The Soldiers: Mocked him and divided up his clothing. They had no mercy for him or the others but watched over the proceedings indifferent to the torture they were inflicting. They were unconcerned, that is, until they were terrified by the earthquake and then began to consider how Jesus had faced his death – finally exclaiming, “He was the Son of God!”
- The Roman Authorities: Pilate was not concerned with justice or the life of Jesus, only his own position and power. He assumed he was in control of the events of the day, never suspecting God was involved at all. Pilate sought to maintain the status quo and quell any uprising or challenge to his rule. He gave in to the demands of the Jewish leaders in order to ‘keep the peace.’ The Roman authorities, like many of us today, were in their own little world, blind to the movement of God and believing they were in charge.

Second, the death and burial of Jesus marked the seeming victory of the Jewish leaders over Jesus. In the world of Rome and Israel, this ‘rabble-rouser’ had met his end. In the spiritual realm it appears Satan had won, and God's kingdom had lost. From the darkness of the afternoon to the anguished cry of abandonment, it appears all is gone. Elijah does not come to save him. Jesus does not miraculously and victoriously come down from the cross. Only a few brave souls come out to witness his death and where he is buried. The tomb is sealed with a stone, a seal, and a Roman guard. There is apparently nothing that can be fixed now. It seems it is ‘game over.’ The most that can be done is to respectfully bury the dead. At least let the end be done decently and in order. But... just when it is absolutely bleak, just when there is no hope left at all, that is when God is going to act!

Third, waiting is perhaps one of the hardest things we can do. Waiting and watching as things do not go as we think they ought to go makes it difficult for faith to flower and grow. In these verses we read of the resignation and sadness of the disciples as Jesus is crucified, dies, and is buried. Where is God? Why is this happening? What just happened? Why do we have to go through this? Jesus didn't deserve this! Who's next? What's going to happen to us now? These questions speak to the hiddenness of God. While difficult, when viewed through the lens of faith God's seeming distance can be very important in helping us develop a deeper faith. It is only by God remaining hidden that we learn to exhibit trust in greater ways and thus develop a hope that is unwavering no matter what comes our way.

Finally, meditate on the 7 sayings of Jesus while on the cross:

- To God: “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” (Lk 23:34)
- To his mother, Mary: “Dear woman, here is your son.” To the disciple whom he loved, John: “Here is your mother.” (Jn 19:26-27)
- To the thief on the cross: “I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.” (Lk 23:43)
- To those watching: “I am thirsty.” (Jn 19:28)
- To God: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mt 27:46; Mk 15:34)
- To God: “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” (Lk 23:46)
- To all of us: “It is finished.” (Jn 19:30)

## Conclusion

The death and burial of Jesus concluded a week of unequalled events in human history. Jesus was not forcefully 'put to death' but rather willingly gave his life 'as a ransom for many.' (Mk 10:45) Jesus orchestrated events so that his death would correspond with the Passover celebration – he is the Paschal Lamb for the ages. John records Jesus as saying in the garden, "Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?" (Jn 18:11) John also speaks of this hour as when the Son is glorified: "Now is the Son of Man glorified and God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself and will glorify him at once." (Jn 13:31-32) His glory comes via the cross and the salvation that would result. Selfless love and giving is the mark of Jesus, and the student is not above the teacher (Mt 10:24). It is through submission and even death that victory comes. May we this week consider the intense focus of Jesus to complete the Father's work and may we live our lives like him! "This is the way."