

Week of April 23 - 29

Jesus' Prayers in Gethsemane (Matthew 26: 36-46; Mark 14:32-42; Luke 22:39-46; John 18:1)

Together they crossed over Cedron brook that cuts through the olive orchard where they were staying and went to Gethsemane Garden, which was nearby. Jesus told his disciples to sit down while he went in to pray. Burdened, he called Peter, James, and John aside and expressed that his anxiety was killing him. He asked them to keep watch while he went a little further into the garden to pray.

When he was a stone's throw away, he fell to the ground and prayed in anguish, "Oh Father, you can do anything. Please don't make me go through what I am about to face. Yet, I will not object but will do as you tell me." As he prayed, an angel from Heaven appeared and encouraged him. In agony, he prayed all the more earnestly. His sweat welled up like huge drops of blood falling to the ground. When he got up, he returned to his disciples and was disappointed to find them all sleeping.

He asked Peter how he could sleep. "Can't you stay awake and support me for just a little while longer?" he asked. "Stay alert and pray. Otherwise, temptation will overtake you. You want to persevere, but your flesh is weak." Then he returned to his spot in the garden and prayed again until he was resolved to face his fate.

When he returned, he found his friends sleeping again. Yes, they were exhausted, but they really could have stayed awake and prayed as he asked. He left them a third time and prayed the matter through until he was resigned and committed to his fate. When he came out again and found them still sleeping, he let them get their needed rest. "There is nothing more to do," he concluded. The time has come for the Son of Man to be turned over so willful men can determine what they are going to do with him."

Jesus Betrayed, Arrested and Forsaken (Matthew 26: 47-57; Mark 14:43-53; Luke 22:47-54, 63-65; John 18:2-14, 24)

At last, he rose and said, "Get up. Here comes my betrayer." As he spoke, Judas made his way into the garden bringing with him a large crowd armed with swords and clubs sent by the chief priests and elders. Jesus stepped forward and demanded, "Who are you looking for?" They said they had come for Jesus. Judas stepped forward and greeted Jesus with a kiss and called him Master, identifying him to the others. Jesus looked at Judas and asked if he intended to betray him with a deceitful greeting.

"I'm Jesus," he declared, and they all stumbled backward. "What do you want?" To which they again replied they had come for Jesus of Nazareth. "If it's me you want, then let these others go," he said so the prophecy might be fulfilled that says, "I have lost none of those you brought me." As they captured him, his disciples tried to defend him. Peter drew his sword and swung it wildly, cutting the ear of Malchus, the high priest's servant.

Jesus told Peter to put his sword away, stating, "Those who initiate violence subject themselves to violence. This is my destiny. Don't you realize that if I requested, my Father would send a dozen legions of angels to protect me? But then how would the scriptures be fulfilled? Indeed, he will dispatch every legion of angels at his disposal to guard me. Then he reached out to Malchus and restored his ear.

“Have you come to arrest me, like a violent criminal?” he asked. “You didn’t bother me when I taught in the Temple in broad daylight. But then, this is your style, to come under cover of darkness.” Then they seized him, and his disciples fled. One of the disciples had only a towel wrapped around his body. When they grabbed for him, he narrowly escaped, dropping his towel, and running away naked.

They bound Jesus and blindfolded him and led him away to Annas, the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the head priest, who was trying to have Jesus killed. His captors beat him, kicked him, and spit on him. They mocked him and prodded him to tell them who was hitting him and “prophecy” who would strike him next.

Unjust Trial and Conviction (Matthew 26:58-27:2; Mark 14:54-15:1; Luke 22:54-23:1; John 18:13-27)

As morning approached, Caiaphas assembled the scribes, elders, and priests to interrogate Jesus, determined to find a cause to have him executed before he even arrived. As they brought in witnesses, their case fell apart because they couldn’t substantiate the offenses he was charged with. Even though they brought in false accusers, they couldn’t agree on the allegations against him. The best they had was two people claiming they heard Jesus say he would destroy the Temple. But even their versions were different.

Meanwhile, Peter and John followed the crowd from a distance. When they arrived at Annas’ house, the servants recognized John and invited him in, but Peter stayed outside. John went back for Peter and introduced him to the maid at the door who let him in saying, “Aren’t you one of Jesus’ disciples?” Peter denied it and told her he had never even met the man. As he warmed himself by the fire, the maid approached and told those nearby Peter was one of Jesus’ followers. He again vehemently denied it saying he didn’t know what she was talking about as a cock began to stir in the distance. Peter was surrounded by a group of men that included Malchus, who said, “I know that voice. Your accent gives you away. You’re from Galilee, one of that man’s disciples.” Cursing and swearing, Peter violently denied it saying he didn’t even know who Jesus was. As the cock crowed, Peter looked up and saw Jesus being brought into the room, bruised, and cut. Jesus looked right at him. Recalling what Jesus had told him about denying him three times before the cock crowed, he ran outside and wept bitterly.

Caiaphas asked Jesus about his disciples and his doctrine. Jesus said he had spoken publicly, and everyone knew what he had said and where he stood. An officer slapped Jesus on the face telling him not to address the head priest with disrespect. “If I am wrong, show me where I am wrong,” Jesus responded. “Why did you strike me for telling the truth?”

Jesus had nothing else to say until Caiaphas pleaded with him to tell them clearly or not, he was the Christ. “You’re right. I am,” he stated. “You don’t believe me, but eventually, you’re going to look into the sky and see the Son of Man sitting at God’s right hand.” Caiaphas ripped his clothes and said, “You heard it from his mouth. What further need do we have for a trial? What do you think?” They all knew that blasphemy was a crime worthy of execution.

That morning the priests and elders convicted Jesus of blasphemy and sentenced him to die. They tied him up and sent him to Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, but they wouldn’t enter the court because they would be contaminated and couldn’t participate in the Passover feast.

Jesus’ Trial before Pilate (Matthew 27: 2-14; Mark 15:1-5; Luke 23:1-7; John 18:28-38)

They told Pilate Jesus was an anarchist leading a revolt to make himself king, and they had already convicted him. Pilate told them to take him back and judge him according to their laws, but they objected because Jesus' crime warranted the death penalty, and they weren't allowed to execute their criminals. Pilate asked Jesus if he was the King of the Jews. "That's right," Jesus replied. The priests and elders roared accusations at him, but Jesus remained calm and didn't respond. So, Pilate took him inside and asked him again if he was their king. Jesus asked if he was asking for himself or just trying to confirm what they had told him. "Am I a Jew?" he asked. "Your own leaders brought you here. What have you done? Do you hear what they are saying about you? Have you anything to say on your behalf?"

"My kingdom is not of this world," Jesus began. "If my kingdom were worldly, my soldiers would fight to keep it from the Jewish authorities. My kingdom is beyond this place and time. You conclude I'm indeed a king which is my heritage and destiny. I can't deny it, and anyone interested in the truth will hear me out. Pilate marveled that Jesus remained stoic. "What is truth?" he replied. Then he sent him back to the Jews, telling them he found no charge against Rome worthy of execution.

They objected violently, saying Jesus had stirred up the whole nation all the way to Galilee. Pilate confirmed Jesus was a Galilean and told them to take him to Herod Agrippa, the governor of Galilee, who was in Jerusalem at that time.

Jesus' Trial before Herod Agrippa (Luke 23:8-12)

Herod had heard much about Jesus and hoped to see him perform some sort of magic. He asked Jesus questions, but Jesus didn't respond because the elders and priests scorned him loudly. Herod and his soldiers showed Jesus no respect and made fun of him, putting a purple robe on him, suitable for a king, and sent him back to Pilate.

Jesus' Third Trial, before Pilate (Matthew 27:15-30; Mark 15: 6-19; Luke 23:13-19; John 18:39-19:16)

Pilate told the Jewish authorities that neither Herod nor he considered that Jesus was worthy of execution. "Therefore," he conceded, "I'll reprimand him and release him according to the annual Passover custom of releasing a Jewish prisoner." Instead, the priests incited the crowd to rally behind a notorious rebel named Barabbas, convicted of treason and murder. While Pilate sat at the bench and saw the priests and elders inciting the crowd to demand to release Barabbas and have Jesus crucified, his wife sent word warning him she had a premonition that he should not get involved in Jesus' execution.

Seeing the unruly crowd wouldn't listen, Pilate acquiesced, releasing Barabbas and condemning Jesus to be whipped and crucified. He ordered a basin of water and washed his hands, declaring, "I'm innocent of shedding this man's blood." They responded, "Let his blood be on us."

Jesus was taken to the courthouse where a large band of Roman soldiers stripped him, put the scarlet robe back on him, pressed a crown of thorns on his head, and put a long stick in his right hand. Then they bowed and mocked him, chanting, "Hail, King of the Jews!" They spat on him, slapped him, grabbed the stick, and began beating his head with it.

When the priests and Jewish officials saw Jesus, they yelled out, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" So, Pilate told them to take him and crucify him themselves since he found no fault in him. The Jews said Jesus had violated their law and had to die because he claimed to be the Son of God. When

Pilate heard this, he became much more apprehensive. He took Jesus back to the courthouse and asked him who he really was. But Jesus said nothing. "Now you won't talk to me. Don't you realize I have the authority to crucify you or release you?" Pilate asked. Finally, Jesus opened up and said, "The only reason you have authority over me is that it was given to you from a higher source."

Pilate tried to release him, but the Jews argued that if Pilate let him go, he would be disloyal to Caesar. At noon when the Jews started preparing for the Passover feast, Pilate told the Jews to look at their king. "Would you crucify your king?" Pilate asked. "Caesar is the only king we have," they argued. So, Pilate delivered him over to be crucified, and Roman guards led him away.

Judas Commits Suicide (Matthew 27:3-10)

When Judas realized that Jesus had been condemned, he felt awful. He returned the thirty silver coins and told the priests he had made a terrible mistake, declaring that Jesus was innocent and that he was wrong to betray him. The priests and elders coldly shrugged, "What do we care. That's your problem." Frustrated and afraid, Judas threw the coins on the floor of the Temple, stormed out, and hanged himself. The priests picked up the coins but ironically decided they couldn't keep them for the Temple treasury because the money had been acquired by ill-gotten means. So, they bought the potter's field in which to bury aliens and social outcasts. The field became known as "the Field of Blood."

The Crucifixion (Matthew 27:31-43; Mark 15:20-32; Luke 23:37, John 19:127)

The soldiers removed the crown and robe and dressed Jesus in his own clothes, placing a cross on his shoulders to escort him to a hill called Golgotha to be crucified. Along the way, they compelled an onlooker from Cyrene named Simon to carry his cross. A huge crowd lined the streets. Women cried, and men protested his arrest. Jesus said, "Don't cry for me, women of Jerusalem. Cry for yourselves and your children. The time is coming when people will consider themselves fortunate to be barren or childless. They will want to hide in a cave. If they can bully someone young and full of life, what do you think they will do to those who are old?"

Arriving at Golgotha, they offered him a drink of vinegar wine to quench his thirst and numb his senses, but he refused. Pilate ordered a sign be made in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek reading, "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews." At nine on Friday morning, they crucified him along with two other convicts, fulfilling the prophecy he would be counted among criminals. Then they ripped his clothes apart to distribute among themselves. But his seamless coat was nice, so they threw dice for it fulfilling the prophecy, "They divided my clothes among them and cast lots for my coat."

Passersby shook their heads and scorned him saying, "You said you could abolish the Temple and rebuild it in three days. Now save yourself. If you're the Son of God, get off that cross." Priests also derided him, joking, "He saved others but can't help himself. Let him come down and show us he's the Christ. Let's see if God will intervene. After all, he did claim to be the son of God." Jesus' only response was to lift his voice and plea, "Father forgive them. They don't know what they are doing."

One of the criminals hanging beside him taunted him, saying, "Hey, if you are the Christ, why don't you prevent this from happening to us." But the other one stood up for him, saying, "Have you no regard for God, seeing you are condemned. We deserve to be punished for what we have

done, but this man has done nothing wrong. Jesus, remember me when you ascend to your throne.” Jesus replied, “Today, you will join me in paradise.”

Even the soldiers ridiculed him. But Jesus focused on his mother Mary standing below, looking on. She was with Mary, Cleophas’ wife, and Mary from Magdala. John, the disciple, was nearby. He spoke first to his mother and then to John, “Madam, look to your Son. Son, take care of your mother.” From that time on, John took Mary into his own home.

The Last Three Hours of the Crucifixion (Matthew 27:45-50; Mark 15:33-37; Luke 23:44-46)

From noon till three, eerie darkness gripped the land. At about three in the afternoon, Jesus cried out, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” Some thought he was summoning Elijah, the prophet. Jesus cried out, “I’m thirsty.” A soldier dipped a sponge in vinegar wine and put it on a stick to give him to drink. After drinking the sour wine, he cried out one more time, “Father, I commit my spirit into your hands,” and yielded his earthly life. The seamless curtain around the Most Holy Place in the Temple ripped apart, the earth quaked, rocks crumbled, and gravestones rolled away. Corpses were seen walking the streets of Jerusalem.

Witnesses of Jesus’ Death (Matthew 27:51-56; Mark 15:38-51; Luke 23:45-49)

The captain of the guard declared, “That’s the Son of God.” The crowd beat their chests as they dispersed and ran away. The Jews asked Pilate to break the legs of those hanging on the crosses so they might die and be disposed of before the Passover feast time arrived. Soldiers were sent to break the two criminals’ legs but saw that Jesus was already dead. So, they pierced him under the ribs and blood mingled with body fluid seeped out from the wound. John saw it and documented it to let others know what happened, fulfilling prophecy, saying, “None of his bones will be broken.” Another one said, “They will look upon the one they pierced.”

Certifying Jesus’ Death and Procurement of His Body (Matthew 27:57-66; Mark 15:52-55; Luke 23: 50-55)

At the end of the day, a Temple lawyer pleaded with Pilate to let him take the body and give Jesus a proper burial. Certifying that Jesus was dead, he told them to release the body to Joseph from Arimathea. Joseph wrapped the body in strips of clean linen and laid it in his cave tomb, hewn into the side of a rock hill in a nearby garden. Nicodemus, the priest who had come to Jesus late one night, brought nearly a hundred pounds of expensive fragrances and ointments he had for his own funeral. When he finished, they rolled a large gravestone over the entrance and left to celebrate the Passover and Mary from Magdala and Mary, the mother of Joseph, looked on.

The priests came to Pilate concerned about what Jesus said about restoring the temple in three days. They implored Pilate to station a guard at the tomb for at least three days so his disciples couldn’t steal the body and tell people Jesus had risen from the dead. Pilate granted their request and dispatched soldiers to secure the grave the best they could. Roman soldiers checked the body in the tomb, sealed the stone at the entrance, and stood watch around the clock, day and night.