

“THE PASSION OF OUR LORD”
MATTHEW 26:69-27:44

Peter Disowns Jesus Matthew 26:69-74

⁶⁹ Now Peter was sitting out in the courtyard, and a servant girl came to him. “You also were with Jesus of Galilee,” she said.

⁷⁰ But he denied it before them all. “I don’t know what you’re talking about,” he said.

⁷¹ Then he went out to the gateway, where another girl saw him and said to the people there, “This fellow was with Jesus of Nazareth.”

⁷² He denied it again, with an oath: “I don’t know the man!”

⁷³ After a little while, those standing there went up to Peter and said, “Surely you are one of them, for your accent gives you away.”

⁷⁴ Then he began to call down curses on himself and he swore to them, “I don’t know the man!”

Immediately a rooster crowed. ⁷⁵ Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken: “Before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.” And he went outside and wept bitterly.

Last week we considered Jesus’ illegal trial before the high priest and Jewish council—the most powerful authorities in Judaism. We saw how Jesus reacted as He became the victim of false accusations, malicious slander, and unrelenting humiliation and abuse. Somehow, in fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy, He remained calmly resolute, knowing that He was about to fulfill the primary purpose for which He had come into this world—to die for the sins of mankind.

In contrast, Peter, a bystander to these events who was trying to blend into the crowd without being recognized, did not react so well. During the Passover meal earlier that evening Jesus had predicted all the disciples would abandon Him that very night. Peter protested when Jesus made that prediction, declaring that he would die before doing such a thing. That’s when Jesus told him that before the rooster crowed that next morning, he would deny Him three times.

Peter wanted nothing more than to prove Jesus wrong. So, when Jesus was apprehended in the Garden of Gethsemane, while Peter and all the disciples scattered, he doubled back and furtively followed Jesus and His apprehenders to the house of Caiaphas, the high priest, where His trial before the Sanhedrin occurred. From the four Gospel records, it is not difficult to construct a scenario. In the courtyard of Caiaphas’ palatial home, a group of servants were standing around a fire, warming themselves, and Peter was standing among them. Undoubtedly, they were straining to hear the dialogue going on inside the house, and perhaps commenting on what they perceived was being said or done.

As they stood around, a servant girl claimed to recognize Peter as one of Jesus’ companions. Her age, gender, and occupation underline her insignificance, compared to the spiritual VIP’s who were questioning Jesus just a few yards away. And while Jesus did not open His mouth when being accused, Peter quickly blurts out that he had no idea what she was talking about. Then he moved away from the group and stood near the gate away from the light of the fire, presumably to be more inconspicuous.

While he was there another servant girl approached, having recognized him as a disciple of Jesus. This time, in order to come across as more convincing, Peter denied knowing Jesus with an oath.

Finally, several of the servants approach Jesus, including, according to John, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off in the Garden (John 18:26), and asserted that Peter had to be a disciple, for not only was he seen with Jesus earlier in the Garden, but his Galilean accent gave him away.

As Peter was confronted with this evidence, he made his strongest denial yet. Once again, he took an oath, but this time “called down curses.” He may have been calling down curses on himself, but the Greek language leaves open the possibility that he may have been calling down curses on Jesus—asking God to punish Jesus if he is lying.

And at that moment the rooster crowed, and we are told that Peter recalled Jesus’ prediction and went outside the gate and wept bitterly. Luke records that when the rooster crowed, the Lord turned and looked at Peter (22:61), which served only to intensify his guilt and shame.

We all know the story of Peter’s tragic failure. What is remarkable and significant is that the story of his denials was recorded at all. Since none of the other disciples were in the courtyard that early morning, it stands to reason that Peter himself is the origin of the story. And I am pretty sure that the reason he admitted his failure is because Jesus’ subsequent forgiveness and restoration of him after His resurrection highlighted God’s amazing grace, something that Peter never got over.

Judas Hangs Himself (Matthew 27:1-10)

¹ Early in the morning, all the chief priests and the elders of the people came to the decision to put Jesus to death. ² They bound Him, led Him away and handed Him over to Pilate, the governor.

³ When Judas, who had betrayed Him, saw that Jesus was condemned, He was seized with remorse and returned the thirty silver coins to the chief priests and the elders. ⁴ "I have sinned," he said, "for I have betrayed innocent blood."

"What is that to us?" they replied. "That's your responsibility."

⁵ So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself.

⁶ The chief priests picked up the coins and said, "It is against the law to put this into the treasury, since it is blood money."⁷ So they decided to use the money to buy the potter's field as a burial place for foreigners.

⁸ That is why it has been called the Field of Blood to this day. ⁹ Then what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled: "They took the thirty silver coins, the price set on him by the people of Israel, ¹⁰ and they used them to buy the potter's field, as the Lord commanded me."

We cannot be sure why Judas was "seized" with remorse after he saw that Jesus had been condemned to death. Perhaps he thought that his betrayal would lead to Jesus' imprisonment but not death, or maybe he thought that Jesus would finally mount a revolt and escape arrest. Nevertheless, he was filled with regret, and tried to ease his conscience by returning the money the Jewish leaders paid him to betray Jesus.

When they rebuffed him, he responded in anger and despair. He hurled the money onto the floor of the Temple and went outside and killed himself.

The temple officials refused to keep the money because it was ritually impure, having been used for devious ends, so they bought a field for use as a cemetery for resident aliens. The traditional site of this field is at the east end of the Hinnom Valley, just south of Jerusalem, not coincidentally at or near the place where King Manasseh had sacrificed his son to the god, Molech, and a place that eventually served as the city dump. Ironically, unclean money was used to buy an unclean place for unclean people!

Jesus Before Pilate Matthew 27:11-26

¹¹ Meanwhile Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor asked Him, "Are you the king of the Jews?"

"Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied.

¹² When He was accused by the chief priests and the elders, He gave no answer. ¹³ Then Pilate asked Him, "Don't you hear the testimony they are bringing against you?" ¹⁴ But Jesus made no reply, not even to a single charge—to the great amazement of the governor.

¹⁵ Now it was the governor's custom at the Feast to release a prisoner chosen by the crowd. ¹⁶ At that time they had a notorious prisoner, called Barabbas. ¹⁷ So when the crowd had gathered, Pilate asked them, "Which one do you want me to release to you: Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?" ¹⁸ For he knew it was out of envy that they had handed Jesus over to him.

¹⁹ While Pilate was sitting on the judge's seat, his wife sent him this message: "Don't have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him."

²⁰ But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus executed.

²¹ "Which of the two do you want me to release to you?" asked the governor.

"Barabbas," they answered.

²² "What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called Christ?" Pilate asked.

They all answered, "Crucify Him!"

²³ "Why? What crime has He committed?" asked Pilate.

But they shouted all the louder, "Crucify Him!"

²⁴ When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. "I am innocent of this man's blood," he said. "It is your responsibility!"

²⁵ All the people answered, "Let his blood be on us and on our children!"

²⁶ Then he released Barabbas to them. But he had Jesus flogged and handed Him over to be crucified.

In the early morning, battered, bruised, dehydrated, and worn out from a sleepless night, Jesus was taken across Jerusalem to the Praetorium. Knowing that their charge of blasphemy would be of no

consequence in a Roman court, the Jews had to twist their story and devise a new charge. They settled on *conspiracy*. They would portray Him as a self-appointed king who was conspiring to overthrow the Roman government.

That is why Pilate began by asking Jesus, "Are you the king of the Jews?"

Jesus answered in much the same way He answered the high priest's question. "Yes, it is as you say," could best be translated, "Those are your words, not mine," or "That is your way of putting it."

Pilate is amazed that Jesus refuses to defend Himself, and says to Him, "*You do hear, don't you, what these people are accusing you of?*" But Jesus made no reply, "*not even with a word.*"

In Matthew's account of Jesus' trial before the Roman governor, he emphasizes that Pilate saw through the ruse of the Jewish council and that he did not believe that Jesus was guilty of any crime. Pilate understood that Jesus Himself was the victim of a conspiracy, motivated by envy—envy at the success of Jesus in Jerusalem during the past few days which had intensified their long-standing hatred of Him. He knew that Jesus was not a security threat to Rome, but only a perceived threat to the status and influence of the Jewish leaders.

So, Matthew describes Pilate's futile attempt to get Jesus freed by employing the custom of releasing a prisoner at Passover. He knew about Jesus' increasing popularity among the people in Jerusalem, and he must have reasoned that they would surely side with Jesus rather than with a criminal like Barabbas. So, he put the choice before them, thinking that in this way he would be able to release Jesus. But he discovered, to his surprise and dismay, that the tide of public opinion had turned against Jesus. They demanded that He be crucified.

"With a dramatic, symbolic gesture, and in order to avoid a riot that could threaten his job, Pilate refused to have anything more to do with Jesus' case" (Blomberg). The system of Roman justice with its due process of law was famous, yet Pilate ultimately let the crowd have their way. His words, "You see to it," suggests that Pilate abrogated his rightful responsibility and permitted a gross miscarriage of justice. He also became complicit in Jesus' wrongful death, releasing Barabbas and delivering Jesus to his soldiers to be flogged and then crucified.

The Soldiers Mock Jesus Matthew 27:27-31

²⁷ Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers around Him. ²⁸ They stripped Him and put a scarlet robe on Him, ²⁹ and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on His head. They put a staff in His right hand and knelt in front of Him and mocked Him. "Hail, king of the Jews!" they said. ³⁰ They spit on Him and took the staff and struck Him on the head again and again. ³¹ After they had mocked Him, they took off the robe and put His own clothes on Him. Then they led Him away to crucify Him.

Flogging was a legal preliminary to any Roman execution. The purpose was to weaken the victim to a state just short of collapse or death. The instrument was a short whip called a *flagellum*, which had several leather tongs into which small iron balls or fragments of bone were tied at intervals.

Jesus was led to a half pillar, waist high, which stood between two runnels for washing away the blood. They stripped Him, bent Him over the pillar and tied Him so that His back and legs were equally exposed. Two burly slaves stood with *flagellums* in hands. They took turns bringing the whips down upon His body with all their might, cutting through the skin, nerves, and muscle. They lashed His shoulders, spinal cord, and thighs. The tongs curled around and cut His chest and ribs. After many blows the skin was hanging in long ribbons, and the entire area was an unrecognizable mass of torn, bleeding tissue.

Pain and blood loss sent His body into circulatory shock. When it was determined that Jesus was near death, the centurion in charge ordered the beating stopped, because a man sentenced to crucifixion must be left with enough strength to carry the crossbeam to the site of his execution.

Amazingly, during this scourging, Jesus did not cry out. He endured the horrific pain in silence. This courage did not move the soldiers, however. When the flogging stopped, they unbound Him and He stood in His blood, shivering from shock.

They began to mock Him. They found a military robe and threw it across His back and placed a stick in His hand. To make their travesty complete, they gathered small flexible branches covered with long thorns, commonly used for kindling, and shaped them into a crown. They thrust it down onto His head, piercing the vascular tissue and causing Him to bleed. Then they began to taunt Him and beat His head with sticks, driving the thorns deeper into His skin. When they tired of their horseplay, they tore the robe from His back. It had

already become adherent to the clots of blood and serum in the wounds, and its removal caused enormous pain.

The Crucifixion Matthew 27:32-44

³² As they were going out, they met a man from Cyrene, named Simon, and they forced him to carry the cross. ³³ They came to a place called Golgotha (which means *The Place of the Skull*). ³⁴ There they offered Jesus wine to drink, mixed with gall; but after tasting it, He refused to drink it. ³⁵ When they had crucified Him, they divided up His clothes by casting lots. ³⁶ And sitting down, they kept watch over Him there. ³⁷ Above His head they placed the written charge against Him: *THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS*. ³⁸ Two robbers were crucified with Him, one on His right and one on His left. ³⁹ Those who passed by hurled insults at Him, shaking their heads ⁴⁰ and saying, "You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!"

⁴¹ In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked Him. ⁴² "He saved others," they said, "but He can't save Himself! He's the King of Israel! Let Him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in Him. ⁴³ He trusts in God. Let God rescue Him now if He wants Him, for He said, 'I am the Son of God.'" ⁴⁴ In the same way the robbers who were crucified with Him also heaped insults on Him.

After Jesus' flogging, the heavy wooden crossbeam, called a *patibulum*, was tied across his shoulders. It weighed between 75 and 125 lbs. He was escorted by Roman soldiers along a route called the *Via Dolorosa*, a steep and crowded street in the heart of Jerusalem. Because Jesus was so weak, He stumbled and fell, the rough wood of the beam gouging into His lacerated skin and muscle. He could not rise and so Simon of Cyrene was recruited to carry the *patibulum* on this 650-yard journey to Golgotha.

The place of the Skull is an ominous looking rock just outside the city gates that looks like a human skull. Formerly a quarry, it had been turned into a dump and a place which made burials convenient. Several tree trunks were erected. Beneath each of them were dark red stains. It reeked of decaying garbage and death.

Crucifixion was a practice introduced by the Persians, adopted by Alexander the Great, and perfected by Rome. With skill and efficiency, they stripped Jesus naked and threw Him to the ground. Two soldiers stretched out His arms, a third pushed the crossbeam under them while a fourth pressed hard against His knees. A soldier picked up two 7-inch square nails and drove them through each wrist into the crossbeam. They then lifted the beam with Jesus on it and hoisted Him by ropes to the upright so that He was vertical. They crossed His legs, forced His feet against the tree and drove a spike through each. He was now crucified.

The entire weight of Jesus' body was on the nails in the wrists. Excruciating pain shot along the fingers up the arms into the brain. It was difficult to breathe. Air could be drawn into the lungs, but it could not be released. So, Jesus was forced to push Himself upward, shifting all of His weight upon the nails in the feet, scraping His scourging wounds against the rough wood, until He could get a short breath.

While He was on the cross, He was ridiculed by those who had condemned Him and those who had demanded that Barabbas be released instead of Jesus. Seeing Him suffering on the cross did nothing to diminish their rage or mute their mocking.

Isaiah's prophecy of the Suffering Servant begins with a remarkable statement. Before he describes how He would be oppressed and afflicted and brutalized, before he declares that He would be despised and rejected, he says, "*See, my servant will act wisely; He will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted*" (52:13).

"Raised...lifted up"—that is a veiled reference to His death on a cross. Isaiah was predicting the kind of death that Jesus would die centuries before crucifixion was even devised as a method of execution. Jesus would say to Nicodemus in John 3, "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be *lifted up*, that everyone who believes in Him may have eternal life" (3:14-15). "Lifted up" refers to Him being elevated on a cross.

But what about that statement, "my servant...will be raised and lifted up *and highly exalted*"? Isaiah seems to suggest that crucifixion would be the means by which God's servant, Jesus Christ, would be glorified. Indeed, when Jesus was with His disciples in the Upper Room just before He was arrested on the night of His crucifixion, He said, "Now is the Son of Man glorified", and there is little doubt that He was referring to His impending death on the cross (John 13:31). How can that be? For everyone who lived in the first century the cross was a symbol of revulsion and shame.

How could the cross be the means by which Jesus was glorified? Because the cross, ugly and horrible as it was, was precisely God's method of saving us, rescuing us, delivering us, restoring us and making things

right. Listen to the words of Isaiah: “He was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon Him, and by His wounds we are healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to His own way, but the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all” (53:5-6).

When Jesus hung spread eagle on that cross, He was waging an invisible war and securing a spiritual victory far greater and more significant than any earthly or political struggle.

He was liberating us from the power of sin, a force so powerful and dominating that it has enslaved every human being since Adam. Sin is our *greatest* adversary, not only because its consequences are so destructive, but because it alienates us from God and makes us His enemies and condemns us to a place called hell.

When Jesus hung on that cross, He was providing the only possible way for every single human being on this earth—past, present and future—to be saved from sin’s condemnation, because (and this is important) none of us can save ourselves.

We are all sinners, every one of us. It doesn’t matter how many good deeds we’ve done or how religious we’ve been. The Bible says that “all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). The Bible also tells us that sin has a very serious consequence. It says the wages of sin is death, which is eternal separation from God in a place called hell. That is the just punishment that every person who sins deserves. The only way to escape that punishment is to *never* have sinned at all—to be perfect.

That’s not very good news for the human race since no one meets those requirements. But when Jesus hung on that cross God allowed Him to be our *Substitute*. God permitted Him, the spotless Son of God—the one who had been tempted in every way that we are, yet had never, ever sinned, to take our sins upon Himself and bear them in His body. In the words of the Apostle Paul in his second letter to the Corinthians, “He who knew no sin actually became sin for us...” (5:21).

And then God the Father intentionally and deliberately kindled His anger—an anger that had been stored up since the very first sin and which had intensified with every successive sin. And all of that pent-up rage He funneled onto the body of His Son, so that Jesus became the object of His wrath.

That bleeding body bore our sin and experienced our punishment so that God’s justice could be satisfied, and we wouldn’t have to be punished. So that we could become God’s friends. So that we could be forgiven. So that we could have eternal life.

That’s why Jesus died. He died to save you and me. He died because we were helpless to save ourselves. In so doing, He broke the power of sin. He enabled us to be released from its bondage. He defeated all of the spiritual forces of evil. He provided forgiveness and reconciliation with God to all those who believe in Him.

The Passion of Our Lord Matthew 26:69-27:44

Peter's Denial (26:69-75)

Judas' Tragic Demise (27:3-10)

Jesus' Roman Trial (27:11-26)

Jesus' Humiliation (27:27-31)

Jesus' Crucifixion (27:32-44)

Application