

THE *PRELUDE* OF THE CROSS

We can never begin to fully understand the *Passion of the Christ*, if we start our study at His crucifixion on Golgotha. That was the final act in this passion drama. But the full passion story was a seamless spiritual and physical continuum – just like the garment Jesus wore to the cross. So we must examine the entire passion from start to finish to fully appreciate the breadth and depth of His suffering. Therefore, we must begin in the Garden of Gethsemane, because that's where Christ's passion really began in earnest.

Even though we looked at this part of Christ's passion earlier, let's do so now in more detail. Let's roll the film in slow motion so we can capture every thing that took place that Thursday night in the Garden of Gethsemane. And since Matthew gives us the longest account, let's begin with his detailed narrative:

“Jesus went with His disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and He said to them, ‘Sit here while I go over there and pray.’ He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with Him, and He began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then He said to them, ‘My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with Me.’

Going a little further, He fell with His face to the ground and prayed, ‘My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from Me. Yet not as I will, but as You will.’

Then He returned to His disciples and found them sleeping. ‘Could you men not keep watch with Me for one hour?’ He asked Peter. ‘Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak.’

He went away a *second time* and prayed, ‘My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may Your will be done.’

When He came back He again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. So He left them and went away once more and prayed the *third time*, saying the same thing.

Then he returned to the disciples and said to them, ‘Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour is near, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us go! Here comes My betrayer!’” (Matt. 26:36-46).

If time and space permitted, I could write dozens of pages on Jesus' agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, as many commentators have already done. So let me just summarize several key points about this part of Christ's passion. And as I do so, remember at the very beginning that 'Gethsemane' means 'oil-press.' Since this was an 'olive garden,' there would have been a great 'oil-press' there used for extracting the oil from the olives. So it was in such a place that the Lord Jesus is put into the 'oil-press' of God's justice so that from Him would flow the 'oil of salvation.' But it would not be 'oil' that would flow from Jesus during His passion. It would be *blood* as He would be pressed out of measure under the weight of the sins of the whole world – and the wrath of a holy God executing judgment upon that sin! So Jesus' first drops of blood were spilt in the Garden of Gethsemane as He submitted to the 'oil-press' of God's grace.

First, there was the utter sense of *aloneness* and *abandonment* by His closest friends who slept through His agonizing time of sorrow. Not only did all of the other disciples 'go to sleep on Him,' but also His 'inner circle' of Peter, James and John. Desperately desiring their fellowship and support during His first hours of agony, He had taken them "...a little farther" with Him into the Garden so they could be close to Him. But none of them could "...watch with Him for one hour." So Jesus is absolutely 'alone in a crowd' in the 'oil-press' of Gethsemane.

Perhaps there is no greater pain than to be abandoned by your closest friends in your greatest hour of sorrow and grief! And to know in your heart of hearts that even if they are with you physically, they do not *really* understand the 'dark night of the soul' that you are going through. So how frustrated and disappointed Jesus must have been with their 'weak bodies' and 'heavy eyes!' And how painful it is for me to realize that if I would have been there, I would also have been 'sleeping like a baby' with the rest of them!

But there was even a greater spiritual and emotional agony Jesus was going through in the 'oil-press' of Gethsemane. It was His struggle before His Father concerning the "**cup**" that was before Him to drink. Certainly a part of the dregs of this cup was physical death. No person in the prime of life and health wants to die – especially through the agony of crucifixion. So Jesus would not have been fully human if He would not have had a natural aversion to such a death. He was not in any way a masochistic person. As the Author of life, He loved life to the fullest.

And yet, as we have seen earlier in this study, physical death was not something that was unanticipated for Christ. It was for this reason that He was born! So there is something far deeper and more mysterious here about Christ's agony in the Garden. As Edersheim rightly observed about this part of Christ's passion: "*We are here in full view of the deepest mystery of our faith*" (Ibid, p.540). That's because in this short 3 act drama in the Garden, we see both the majesty of Christ's *incarnation* and the mystery of His *humiliation*. We get a brief glimpse into the uniqueness of the *God-Man* Jesus Christ – *one Person with two Natures*. And in His hours of agony in the 'oil-press' of the Garden, we hear both Natures speaking.

First we hear the *full humanity* of Jesus crying out several times through His agonizing words: "**My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death...**"; and "**My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from Me.**" It is interesting to note that this is the single place in the life of Christ where He addressed God with the personal pronoun, "**My Father...**" Mark's account says that Jesus used the Aramaic: "**Abba, Father...**" (Mk. 14:36) – which was the most intimate expression of loving address from a son to his father. So this was perhaps the most *intensely personal* conversation He had ever had with His Father while here on earth.

But we also hear His *full deity* responding thrice with the words of perfect obedience and submission to His Heavenly Father: "**Yet not as I will, but as You will.**" As *Perfect Man*, He did not want to die. But at *Perfect God*, He knew that He had to – for that was the reason for His incarnation. Only a few hours earlier at His last Passover meal with His disciples, Jesus had 'broken bread' and said it was His body which was "...**given for you.**" Likewise He had 'poured wine' and called it His blood that was going to be "...**poured out for you**" (Lk. 22:19-20). Both clear graphic preludes to His imminent death.

However, on this side of eternity none of us will ever be able to fully fathom or explain the spiritual mystery of the “**cup**” that Jesus was agonizing over having to drink. Untold thousands of other humans had faced execution by crucifixion before and after Him without this degree of agony and “...**sorrow unto death.**” So for Jesus to have agonized to this degree over nothing more than His contemplation of physical execution by crucifixion would have been a flaw in His character and masculinity – thus disproving His perfect humanity. So there had to be something *more* – something much, much more about that “**cup**” of sorrow that He had to drink! And while we can visualize the contents of the “**cup**” from the outside, only Jesus fully understood the eternal significance of the contents He was being asked to drink. It will take all of eternity for us to be able to begin to comprehend the full spiritual significance of His ‘cup of sorrow.’

One thing for sure is that the very anticipation of the full dregs of this cup was so awful and repugnant to His holiness and sinlessness – that it caused Him to ‘sweat blood!’ Thus we read:

“And being in anguish, He prayed more earnestly, and His sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground” (Lk. 22:44).

It is very interesting that only Luke recorded this psycho-spiritual-physical phenomena – something that a doctor would have been especially interested in. Although many liberal theologians have rejected or given a metaphorical interpretation to this part of the passion narrative, the medical profession has confirmed this phenomena. Although very rare, there are other medically documented cases where this has happened. Technically, the medical term for this is ‘*Hematidrosis*,’ or ‘bloody sweat.’ It can take place under situations of very *severe emotional stress* where the tiny capillaries in the sweat glands break, thus mixing ‘blood with sweat.’

So whatever the nature of the full contents of the “**cup**,” it caused Christ to agonize like no other person in history! It was the weightiest moments of pressure in the ‘oil-press’ of God’s grace. It was when the weight of eternity pressed down upon Him in a few moments of time to the degree that it squeezed out of Him ‘drops of blood.’ And those sweaty ‘drops of blood’ would be but the prelude to the shedding of all of His blood on Calvary!

What was it then, that caused this bloody extraction from the brow of Jesus? Was it the awful anticipation of having the cumulative sins of the world laid upon Him? Was it the anticipation of experiencing for the first time in both time and eternity the *hell* of spiritual separation from His Father? Was it the unthinkable anticipation of spiritual death? Was it the awful anticipation of ‘going into death’ for His last great battle with Satan for the souls of mankind? Was it a fear that the weakness of His human nature would fail the requirements of His divine nature?

I am sure that it was all of that and *more – much more!* But we will have to wait until heaven for Him to fully explain it to us. However, until that time I have found the following explanation about Christ’s agony in the Garden from the late Donald G. Barnhouse, to be very insightful and consistent with scripture. He gives this interpretation of Christ’s agonizing prayer for the “**cup**” to pass from Him:

“Some have thought that He was flinching before the thought of the agony of the cross that was about to come. Such flinching would have been a spot and a blemish, which would have rendered Him ineligible to be the Lamb slain for sinners. Some have thought that Satan had come with a fierce attack that would have meant premature death, when He sweat great drops of blood and that the attempt was being made in order to prevent Him from going on to the cross to become the Savior. Such an explanation would have Satan to possess power superior to that of the Son of God and would negate His own expressed statement, ‘*No man taketh it [My life] from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have the power to take it again*’ (Jn. 10:18). The cup, as another passage clearly shows, was the wine of the wrath of God, the full wages of sin, the second death, separation from God in torment in hell, and ultimate eternity in the lake of fire” (*The Invisible War*, pp. 226-227).

Therefore, when we have said all we dare to say about this ‘beginning of His sorrows,’ the full contents of this “**cup**” will remain an unfathomable and unutterable mystery beyond our full human comprehension! All we know is that *His Father heard and answered His prayer* as He was being ‘pressed out of measure’ in the ‘oil-press’ of Gethsemane. We know this from the insightful words of clarification given by the Holy Spirit to the writer of Hebrews:

“During the days of Jesus’ life on earth, He offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the One who could save Him from death, and He was heard because of His reverent submission” (Heb. 5:7).

Let me again quote Barnhouse concerning this prayer of agony by Christ in the Garden:

“God must answer all prayer that is in His will (I Jn. 1:14-15). Christ, being of the deity, could not have prayed a prayer outside of the divine will; otherwise He would thereby have been a sinner. Therefore the prayer for the passing of the cup must have been heard and answered affirmatively. This is what the writer to the Hebrews clearly affirms: ‘*He prayed and was heard*’” (Ibid, p. 227).

Jesus then, was even willing to be *eternally separated from God through the ‘second death’* if that was the only way He could satisfy the justice and holiness of God and bring salvation to mankind! Such passion! Such love! Such mercy! Such grace – I cannot even begin to comprehend! Can you?

As amazing as that kind of grace is, the Apostle Paul would later on exemplify that same kind of passion for the salvation of his fellow Jews. He wrote that he would even be willing to be “**...cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers...the people of Israel...**” (Rom. 9:3-4). Oh, that God would give more of us that same kind of *passion* for the lost!

But it is also instructive to note that in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus faced three assaults of Satan – just as He had three years earlier in the wilderness. And at the zenith of His spiritual battle in the Garden, “**An angel from heaven appeared to Him and strengthened Him**” – just as He had in the wilderness (Lk. 22:43; Matt. 4:11). So after three successive spiritual conflicts with the evil one, Jesus vanquished him. He came out of the ‘oil-press’ in the Garden victorious!

Therefore, Christ's *human nature* ultimately acquiesced and totally submitted to His *divine nature*. And from that moment on, He was the only one who had peace and poise in the Garden – because He alone had totally submitted Himself to His Father's perfect will. With His agony in the 'oil-press' of the Garden completed, He could now say with calm confidence: **“Rise! Let us go! Here comes My betrayer!”** (Mk. 14:42). And it seems that the torch lit mob interrupted Jesus in mid sentence...

“While He was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived...” (Matt. 26:47).

So while the agony of the Garden of Gethsemane is over, the *Passion of Christ* quickly moves into its next phase – His *betrayal* and *arrest*.

As Jesus comes out of the 'oil-press' of Gethsemane, the arresting mob noisily enters the garden – and they came 'armed to the teeth.' Judas was leading the procession because of his familiarity with this place as a favorite place of retreat for Jesus. So we read:

“Now Judas, who betrayed Him, knew the place, because Jesus had often met there with His disciples. So Judas came to the grove, guiding a detachment of soldiers and some officials from the chief priests and Pharisees. They were carrying torches, lanterns and weapons” (Jn. 18:2-3).

At this point, John gives us information not recorded by the other 3 Gospels. What he shares about this first encounter by Jesus with the mob shows how 'calm, cool and collected' Jesus was:

“Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to Him, went out and asked them, ‘Who is it you want?’

‘Jesus of Nazareth,’ they replied.

‘I am He,’ Jesus said (and Judas the traitor was standing there with them). When Jesus said, ‘I am He,’ they drew back and fell to the ground.

Again He asked them, ‘Who is it you want?’

And they said, ‘Jesus of Nazareth.’

‘I told you that I am He,’ Jesus answered” (Jn. 18:4-8).

So because of his familiarity with the place, Judas was leading and directing the mob. He knew it was one of Jesus' favorite places of repose and prayer. So because of his knowledge of Jesus and familiarity with the Garden, Judas led them to the exact spot where Jesus had been praying – and where the disciples had been sleeping. So we read that **“With Judas was a large crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priest and the elders of the people.”**

And as per his prearranged agreement with the guards, Judas betrayed Jesus with a kiss – forever making the ‘Judas kiss’ synonymous with betrayal! In response, **“The men stepped forward, seized Jesus and arrested Him.”**

At that moment, Peter **“...reached for his sword, drew it out and struck for the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear.”** Jesus then reprovved Peter with these incredible words:

“Put your sword back in its place...for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. Do you think I cannot call on My Father, and He will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?” (Matt. 26:47-54).

After Jesus orders Peter to put his sword away, He further admonishes Peter with the words: **“Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given Me?”** (Jn. 18:11).

Jesus then, was in absolute control – not only of His own will and emotions, but also of the crowd. He knew He had the power to not only resist them – but also to destroy them! Just one word from Him and a multitude of angels would have descended and not only destroyed them – but probably the whole world! One Roman Legion consisted of 6,000 soldiers. Jesus said that with a snap of His finger **“twelve legions of angels”** would instantaneously descend with their fiery swords of judgment – and ‘clean house!’ Instead, just as He told Peter to put his sword back in its sheath, He did not beckon the angels to come rescue Him. But Oh how they must have wanted to as they watched in heavenly horror as these events rapidly unfolded!

Unlike the members of the Triune Godhead, the angels were not fully privy to this eternal mystery of redemption. As Peter would later write, **“Even angels long to look into these things”** (I Pet. 1:12). So for now, they would have to ‘watch through the veil’ that separated time from eternity as the *Passion of Christ* was fully played out.

So when Jesus neither allowed Peter to defend Him, nor call down **“twelve legions of angels”** to destroy them, **“...all the disciples deserted Him and fled”** (Matt. 26:56). And one of Jesus young followers was so frightened that he ‘ran right out of his clothes’ in trying to escape the angry mob! Mark recounts:

“A young man, wearing nothing but a linen garment, was following Jesus. When they seized him, he fled naked, leaving his garments behind” (Mk. 14:51).

The very fact that Mark alone gives this little vignette in the passion, leads many scholars to the conclusion that *he was the young man in this incident*. It very well could be that the last Passover meal had been celebrated by Christ and His disciples in Mark’s father’s house (Mk. 14:13-15; c.f. Acts 12:12). We know from the Greek word used to describe him, *neaniskos*, he was a **“young man,”** meaning a person in the ‘prime of life’ between the ages of 24 – 40.

So perhaps after assisting with the preparations for the Passover Meal (Mk. 14:15), Mark may have gone to sleep. That’s because a **“linen garment”** was often used as a ‘sleeping gown’ – especially for the more affluent. We know that after the Passover was over, Jesus went to the

Garden with His disciples. It is possible that later that night Judas brought his crowd of thugs to the house thinking he would find Jesus and the disciples still there. When they learned that they had gone to the Garden of Gethsemane. Mark is aroused by the noise of the group, and follows them – without taking the time to get dressed. So when he gets to the Garden, he is still wearing the **‘linen garment.’** When the mob get there, Jesus disciples flee for their lives after a brief encounter. Mark is presumed to be one of them, so is perhaps seized as a witness against Jesus since the other disciples have fled in fear. So Mark ‘ran out of his pajamas’ in fear – and ‘streaked off’ into the night!

Now, deserted by all of His disciples, Jesus faces the angry and unruly crowd alone. So in the face of their rage, Jesus calmly says:

“Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come with swords and clubs? Every day I was with you in the temple courts, and you did not lay a hand on Me. But *this is your hour – when darkness reigns*” (Lk. 22:52-53)

After saying this, Jesus calmly submitted to the crowd. We are then told that

“...the detachment of soldiers with its commander and the Jewish officials *arrested Jesus*. They *bound Him* and brought Him first to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year. Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it would be good if one man died for the people” (Jn. 18:12-14).

And with those words of transition, the drama of the *Passion of the Cross* shifts from Christ’s betrayal and arrest in the Garden, to home of Annas, and the first of His six “mock trials.”

THE PAIN OF THE CROSS

Of all the ways every devised by fallen man for execution, crucifixion is probably the very worse! It is the most inhumane way to die imaginable. Crucifixion was designed to inflict maximum *pain* and *shame* upon its victims. And as a means of 'public execution, it was also designed to strike maximum terror in the heart of all observers. As executed criminals hung for days on their crosses as grizzly public spectacles, they would be a stark warning to everyone about the deadly consequences of breaking Roman law or challenging Rome's authority.

Even though crucifixion is most often associated with the Romans because of the story of the *Passion of Christ*, they did not invent it as a means of capital punishment. And it was certainly not a Jewish form of punishment, because they generally practiced stoning for capital offenses (Lev. 24:10-17; Acts 7:58; II Cor. 11:25). However, in the period between the Old and New Testaments, the Jewish Maccabean King Jannaeus, had some 800 people crucified in Jerusalem at one time – a deadly testimony of how far he had fallen from the standards of his Jewish religion and culture!

History suggests to us then, that crucifixion as a means of execution was first used by the Phoenicians. However, it was also adopted by the Carthaginians, Egyptians and Romans. But it was the Romans who perfected this diabolical means of capital punishment – especially for the execution of rebellious slaves, disobedient foreigners and the lowest criminal classes. A number of Roman authors like Livy, Cicerl and Tacitys, wrote about crucifixion. So did Josephus, the Jewish historian who became a protégé of the emperor Vespasian, plus other high Roman officials. As a part of the events of his day that he chronicled – Josephus records the crucifixion of 2,000 Jews by the Roman general Varus in 4 BC.

However, not even the sadistic and cruel King Herod used this mode of execution. It probably was an affront to his well known aesthetic senses – and he did not want Palestine littered with the horrific scene of rotting corpses on crosses! So crucifixion was not employed by the Romans until after the time of the Caesars. And Edersheim writes that it was especially characteristic of the justice system of the Roman Governors ruling in Judea to the degree that "...during the last siege of Jerusalem hundreds of crosses daily arose, till there seemed not sufficient room nor wood for them, and the soldiery diversified their horrible amusement by new modes of crucifixion" (ibid. pp. 583-584).

Because of their use of crucifixion to execute Jesus Christ, history will always primarily associate crucifixion with the Romans.

However, there is another more modern association connected with the crucifixion of Jesus, and that is the movie, *The Passion of the Christ*, produced by Mel Gibson. By now, tens of millions of people have seen it in America and around the world. In spite of the opposition of the Hollywood establishment and media pundits, it has become one of the most widely seen movies of all time. So the very graphic descriptions of the crucifixion portrayed in that film are forever etched in the mind and memory of all who saw it – including me. It was a very shocking and realistic portrayal of the crucifixion – and I believe a historically accurate one. But while Gibson's movie gave a very graphic visual portrayal of the crucifixion, it did not give any commentary. There were very few

words spoken in the entire movie. But the painfully poignant scenes powerfully spoke for themselves!

Nor do we find a lot of detailed commentary in the Four Gospels about the specific physical details of the crucifixion. They simply recount that Pilate “...had Jesus **flogged, and handed Him over to be crucified**” (Matt. 27:26). As we saw above, apparently the physical details of scourging and crucifixion were so common during the lifetime of the Gospel writers that they did not feel compelled to give a detailed description. Everyone of their readers already understood more about crucifixion than they wanted to know from the many executions that they had seen the Romans carry out – sometimes hundreds at a time. So they simply and succinctly summarize Christ’s execution with three words: “...**they crucified Him**” (Jn. 19:18).

Therefore, with the combined help of Biblical archaeology, historians and medical experts, I want to give some more detailed commentary on the physical, spiritual and emotional aspects of the *Passion of Christ*. While these more detailed descriptions may make us uncomfortable, we need to study them so we will have a greater appreciation of the realities of the passion that the Lord Jesus endured for our salvation.

Let me set the stage then, for a more detailed examination of crucifixion by the following quotation. It is a macabre description of this inhumane way of execution:

“(Crucifixion)...represented the acme of the torturer’s art; atrocious physical sufferings, length of torment, ignominy, the effect of the crowd gathered to witness the long agony of the crucified...We cannot even say that the crucified person writhed in agony, for it was impossible for him to move. Stripped of his clothing, unable even to brush away the flies which fell upon his wounded flesh, already lacerated by the preliminary scourging, exposed to the insults and curses of people who can always find some sickening pleasure in the sight of the tortures of others...the cross represented miserable humanity reduced to the last degree of impotence, suffering and degradation” (Peter Winter, *On the Trial of Jesus*, p. 65).

Theologian William Barclay, described some of the agony and ignominy of a crucified person as follows:

“He might hand for days in the heat of the midday sun and the cold of night, tortured by thirst, tortured by the gnats and the flies in the wounds of his torn back from the scourging. Often men died raving mad on their crosses. Neither did the Romans bury the bodies of crucified criminals. They simply took them down and threw them away and let the vultures and the crows and the dogs feed upon them” (*The Gospel of John*, p. 303).

As we have already seen, Jesus faces the agony of the cross after a sleepless night following His arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane, followed by several late night ‘religious trials’ before Annas, Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin (n. 18:12-27). This is immediately followed by several very early morning ‘political trials’ before Pilate and Herod – that would have begun around 6:00 AM (Jn. 18:27-40; Lk. 23:1-25).

So early in the morning Jesus is taken to the Praetorium of Pilate. When He arrives there He is already battered and bruised, and probably dehydrated and exhausted from a sleepless night. After Pilate and Herod each seek to absolve themselves of personal responsibility by shifting Jesus back and forth between them, He ultimately ends up back in Pilate's hands. After his several futile attempts to free Jesus, He capitulates to crowd pressure, and turns Jesus over for crucifixion. But first, He has Jesus *scourged* – which was considered to be an *'intermediate death!'* It was designed to further weaken the condemned prisoner, and bring him to the very brink of death before He was finally crucified.

For everyone who has seen Mel Gibson's movie, the scourging scene is one of the hardest to watch – and hardest to forget! The graphic scenes of Jesus' backs, arms and buttocks being laid open by the lashes are forever etched in the viewer's memory! To say nothing of the cynical and hardened guards doing the scourging – with their sadistic grins of satisfaction over the wounds, gashes and lacerations produced by their successive lashes!

What Gibson's movie graphically portrayed was not just gory Hollywood dramatization. It was a very true-to-history portrayal of this viscous and inhumane treatment of a condemned criminal. Therefore, so that you do not think that this was over-dramatized in the film, let me share a quotation from a Medical Doctor who described the typical Roman scourging in the context of what Jesus would have experienced. And this was written many years before Gibson ever produced his movie. If you have the stomach – or heart for it, continue to read. If not, skip to the end of this chapter. But I urge you to prayerfully read this full account of Christ's passion. And as you do, remember that He went through all of this for *you* and for *your salvation!*

“Preparations for the scourging are carried out. The prisoner is stripped of His clothing and His hands tied to a post above His head. It is doubtful whether the Romans made any attempt to follow the Jewish Law in this matter of scourging. The Jews had an ancient law prohibiting more than forty lashes. The Pharisees, always making sure that the law was strictly kept, insisted that only thirty-nine lashes be given. (In case of a miscount, they were sure of remaining within the law).

The Roman legionnaire steps forward with the flagrum (or flagellum) in his hand. This is a short whip consisting of several heavy, leather thongs with two small balls of lead attached near the ends of each. The heavy whip is brought down with full force again and again across Jesus' shoulders, back, and legs. At first the heavy thongs cut through the skin only. Then, as the blows continue, they cut deeper into the subcutaneous tissues, producing first an oozing of blood from the capillaries and veins of the skin, and finally spurting arterial bleeding from the vessels in the underlying muscles. The small balls of lead first produce large, deep bruises which are broken open by subsequent blows. Finally the skin of the back is hanging in long ribbons and the entire area is an unrecognizable mass of torn, bleeding tissue. When it is determined by the centurion in charge that the prisoner is near death, the beating is finally stopped.”

For most other criminals, the agony of scourging ends at this point – and they are mercilessly crucified. But for Jesus, the *Passion of the cross*, does not stop here. His pain and humiliation continues.

“The half-fainting Jesus is then untied and allowed to slump to the stone pavement, wet with His own blood. The Roman soldiers see a great joke in the provincial Jew claiming to be a King. They throw a robe across His shoulders and place a stick in His hand for a scepter. They still need a crown to make their travesty complete. A small bundle of flexible branches covered with long thorns (commonly used for firewood), are plaited into the shape of a crown and then pressed into His scalp. Again there is copious bleeding (the scalp being one of the most vascular areas of the body). After mocking Him and striking Him across the face, the soldiers take the stick from His hand and strike Him across the head, driving the thorns deeper into His scalp. Finally, they tire of their sadistic sport and the robe is torn from His back. This had already become adherent to the clots of blood and serum in the wounds, and its removal, just as in the careless removal of a surgical bandage, causes excruciating pain...almost as though He were again being whipped – and the wounds again begin to bleed.”

With the torture finished of this unspeakable crime against Jesus in the Praetorium of Pilate, Jesus now begins the ‘death march’ to Golgotha. Our medical account continues...

“In deference to Jewish custom, the romans return His garments. The heavy patibulum of the cross is tied across His shoulders, and the procession of the condemned Christ, two thieves and the execution detail of roman soldiers, headed by a Centurion, begins its slow journey along the Via Dolorosa. In spite of His efforts to walk erect, the weight of the heavy wooden beam, together with the shock produced by copious blood loss, is too much. He stumbles and falls. The rough wood of the beam gouges into the lacerated skin and muscles of the shoulders. He tries to rise, but human muscles have been pushed beyond endurance. The Centurion, anxious to get on with the crucifixion, selects a stalwart North African onlooker, Simon of Cyrene, to carry the cross. Jesus follows, still bleeding and sweating the cold, clammy sweat of shock. The 650 yard journey from the Fortress Antonia to Golgotha is finally completed. The prisoner is again stripped of His clothes – except for the loin cloth which is allowed the Jews.

The crucifixion begins. Jesus is offered wine mixed with myrrh, a mild analgesic mixture. He refuses to drink. Simon is ordered to place the patibulum on the ground and Jesus is quickly thrown backward with His shoulders against the wood. The legionnaire feels for the depression at the front of the wrist. He drives a heavy, square, wrought-iron nail through the wrist and deep into the wood. Quickly he moves to the other side and repeats the action, being careful not to pull the arms too tightly, but to allow some flexion and movement. The patibulum is then lifted into place at the top of the stipes and the titulus reading, ‘*Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews*’ is nailed in place.

The left boot is pressed backward against the right foot, and with both feet extended, toes down, a nail is driven through the arch of each, leaving the knees moderately flexed. The Victim is now crucified.

As He slowly sags down with more weight on the nails in the wrists, excruciating, fiery pain shoots along the fingers and up the arms to explode in the brain – the nails in the wrists are putting pressure on the median nerves. As He pushes Himself upward to avoid this stretching

torment, He places His full weight on the nail through His feet. Again, there is the searing agony of the nail tearing through the nerves between the metatarsal bones of the feet.

At this point, another phenomenon occurs. As the arms fatigue, great waves of cramps sweep over the muscles, knotting them in deep, relentless, throbbing pain. With these cramps comes the inability to push Himself upward. Hanging by His arms, the pectoral muscles are paralyzed and the intercostal muscles are unable to act. Air can be drawn into the lungs, but cannot be exhaled. Jesus fights to raise Himself in order to get one short breath. Finally, carbon dioxide builds up in the lungs and in the blood stream and cramps partially subside. Spasmodically, He is able to push Himself upward to exhale and bring in the life-giving oxygen. It was undoubtedly during these periods that He uttered the seven short sentences which are recorded.

The first, looking down at the roman soldiers casting lots for His garments, **“Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.”** The second, to the penitent thief, **“Today you shall be with me in Paradise.”** The third, looking down at the terrified, grief-stricken, John (the beloved Apostle), He said, **“behold thy mother,”** and looking to Mary, His mother, **“Woman, behold thy son.”** The fourth cry is from the beginning of the 22nd Psalm: **“My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?”**

Hours of this limitless pain, cycles of twisting, joint-rending cramps, intermittent partial asphyxiation, searing pain as tissue is torn from His lacerated back as He moves up and down against the rough timber.

Then another agony begins. A deep crushing pain deep in the chest as the pericardium slowly fills with serum and begins to compress the heart. Let us remember again the 22nd Psalm: **“I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels.”**

It is now almost over – the loss of tissue fluids has reached a critical level. The compressed heart is struggling to pump heavy, thick sluggish blood into the tissues. The tortured lungs are making a frantic effort to gasp in small gulps of air. The markedly dehydrated tissues send their flood of stimuli to the brain.

Jesus grasps His fifth cry: **“I thirst.”** Let us remember another verse from the prophetic 22nd Psalm: **“My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaves to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death.”**

A sponge soaked in Posca, the cheap, sour wine which is the staple drink of the Roman Legionnaires, is lifted to His lips. He apparently doesn't take any of the liquid. The body of Jesus is now in extremis, and He can feel the chill of death creeping through His tissues. This realization brings out His sixth words – possibly little more than a tortured whisper. **“It is finished.”** His mission of atonement has been completed. Finally He can allow His body to die.

With one last surge of strength, He once again presses His torn feet against the nail, straightens His legs, takes a deeper breath, and utters His seventh and last cry, **“Father, into Thy hands I commit My spirit.”**

The rest you know. In order that the Sabbath be not profaned, the Jews asked that the condemned men be dispatched and removed from the crosses. The common method of ending a crucifixion was by crucifaction, the breaking of the bones of the legs. This prevented the victim from pushing himself upward, the tension could not be relieved from the muscle of the chest, and rapid suffocation occurred. The legs of the two thieves were broken, but when they came to Jesus they saw that this was unnecessary.

Apparently to make sure of death, the legionnaire drove his lance through the fifth interspace between the ribs, upward through the pericardium and into the heart **“...and immediately there came out blood and water.”** Thus there was an escape of watery fluid from the sac surrounding the heart and blood from the interior of the heart. We therefore, have rather conclusive post-mortem evidence that our Lord died, not the usual crucifixion death by suffocation, but of heart failure due to shock and constriction of the heart by fluid in the pericardium.”

Then our medical expert gives this chilling – but hopeful summary:

“Thus we have seen a glimpse of the epitome of evil which man can exhibit toward man – and toward God. This is not a pretty sight and is apt to leave us despondent and depressed. How grateful we can be that we have a sequel, a glimpse of the infinite mercy of God toward man – the miracle of the atonement and the expectation of eternal life” (*The Passion of Christ from a Medical Point of View*, by Truman Davis, M.D., 1965).

After reading this very detailed and graphic ‘medical account’ of the scourging and crucifixion of Christ from a physician, I know you have a deeper understanding of the *Passion of the Cross* than you have ever had before. I know that just typing this ‘medical report’ on my computer caused me to wince and weep several times! The *passionate love* of Christ that was demonstrated on the cross for you and me goes beyond my comprehension. In my highest moments of spirituality and worship, the height, depth, length and breadth of God’s love, mercy and grace escapes me! And to know that He came into the world for this expressed task is almost unthinkable!

Ask yourself: ‘Why would the Son of God leave the eternal joy and fellowship of the Triune Godhead...the indescribable majesty of heaven...the worship of angels, archangels and seraphs – to come to earth and endure such *shame* and *pain*?!’ Even though I do not fully know the answer to those questions, I do know that the only reasonable response is the *total surrender* of my life to Him!

Perhaps one of the best poetic responses was penned by the hymn writer, Isaac Watts. The verses of his famous hymn, *“When I Survey the Wondrous Cross,”* summarizes it as well as human pen can. It has always been one of my most favorite hymns that I sing to myself often to remind me of the *Passion of the Cross*. Sing the following verses in your mind and spirit afresh...

“When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,
Save in the death of Christ, my God;
All the vain things that charm me most –
I sacrifice them to His blood

See, from His head, His hands, His feet,
Sorrow and love flow mingled down;
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all!”

THE *PATH* OF THE CROSS

In Jerusalem today, this *Path of the Cross* is known as the *Via Dolorosa*, or the ‘*Way of Sorrows*.’ As we saw in our preceding chapter, it began at the Fortress of Antionia and ended at Golgotha – some 650 yards away. I have walked it many times on the Holy Land Tours I have led through the years. It is always a moving experience to slowly and prayerfully walk the approximate same route that Jesus would have taken. And there are several places along the way where the actual Roman stone pavement from the time of Christ is still in place – where you can literally “walk where Jesus walked.”

This ‘Way of Sorrows’ commemorates the various ‘Stations of the Cross’ that Jesus walked after “...**Pilate handed Him over to them to be crucified.**” After he cowardly “...**surrendered Jesus to their will**” (Lk. 23:25), John’s Gospel simply states: “**Carrying His own cross, He went out to the place of the Skull...Here they crucified Him**” (Jn. 19:16-18). And as we will see in our next chapter, this slow ‘death march’ would have taken place between eight and nine o’clock on Friday morning of Passover week.

But we have seen from the very beginning of this study that Jesus’ *Path of the Cross* began long before eight o’clock in the morning on what we now call ‘Good Friday.’ It really began in the eons of eternity past. This ‘Calvary Road’ that Jesus ultimately walked began in heaven in the Council of the eternal Triune Godhead. So His *Path of the Cross* started in eternity – and was consummated in time.

As the “...**lamb that was slain from the creation of the world**” (Rev. 13:8), the Second Member of the Godhead was incarnated into human history specifically to *die*. Prior to His death, He certainly lived a perfect life, gave the greatest teachings the world has ever heard and performed signs and wonders never before seen in history. But His *perfect life* was directed toward the end of His *perfect death*. That’s why He said to His disciples: “...**the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many**” (Matt. 20:28; c.f. I Tim. 2:6; Titus 2:14; Heb. 10:28; I Pet. 1:18-19). So in a unique way like no other man in history, *Jesus was born to die!*

But this was not a message that His disciples wanted to hear. This was not the path that they expected the Messiah to walk! They wanted Him to only walk the path of ‘power and glory.’ So they strongly contended with Him about this *Path to the Cross*. They wanted Him to take a detour around it into His glory! But as the shadow of the cross loomed larger and larger over His life, He taught them the cardinal lesson about the *Path of the Cross* being God’s *path to glory*. Carefully follow His reasoning here with them:

“The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life...Now My heart is troubled, and what shall I sway? ‘Father, save Me from this hour?’ No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your Name” (Jn. 12:23-28).

Because Jesus always understood this principle of *passion* being the '*path to glory*,' the cross was never far from His insight and sight. So the very first step of His public ministry was also the first step on the *Path of the Cross*. And immediately after He had revealed to them that He had come to establish His church, we read:

“From that time on Jesus began to explain to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and *suffer many things* at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that *He must be killed...*” (Matt. 16:21).

So the cross was not an unexpected interruption to His earthly life and ministry. It was not some kind of capricious ‘fiat of fate’ that suddenly struck Him. The cross was not an unanticipated event that imposed itself upon His life through the religious intrigue of the Jews – and the political injustices of the Romans. It was the sovereign and providential plan of God from *before time began*. Carefully read again these passages in which He sought to teach His disciples that the *Path of the Cross* was a perfect *fulfillment of prophecy* from start to finish.

- **“Now as Jesus was *going up to Jerusalem*, He took the Twelve disciples aside and said to them, ‘We are going up to Jerusalem, and the *Son of Man will be betrayed* to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. *They will condemn Him to death and will turn Him over to the gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified*. On the third day He will be raised to life” (Matt. 20:17-19).**
- **Jesus took the Twelve aside and told them, ‘We are going up to Jerusalem, and *everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled*. He will be handed over to the Gentiles. They will mock Him, insult Him, spit on Him, flog Him and *kill Him*. On the third day He will rise again” (Lk. 18:31; Mk. 10:32-34).**

So from the very early days of His public ministry we read that **“Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem”** (Lk. 9:51). I especially like how the King James Versions renders this: **“He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem.”** And in spite of the understandable confusion and reluctance of the disciples about this *Path of the Cross*, we read that **“Jesus...went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem”** (Lk. 19:28).

So man was not in control of these crucifixion events. God was. It was His gracious plan all along. And it was foretold by the prophets down to the minutes detail. That’s why Jesus clearly assured His disciples that He and the Father were totally in control of all of these events – even though the Jews and Romans were living under the delusion that they were! So Jesus said: **“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.”** He further strengthened His claim to have authority over His own death by saying:

“The reason My Father loves Me is that *I lay down My life* – only to take it up again. *No one takes it from Me*, but *I lay it down of My own accord*. I have the authority to *lay it down* and authority to *take it up again*. This command I received from My Father” (Jn. 10:14-18)

So again, *Jesus was born to die*. That's why He had to walk the 'Calvary Road' to its very end. He could only fulfill the plan of His Father and the words of multiple prophecies – by obediently walking the *Path of the Cross*.

However, it is also important for you and me to understand that our *footsteps* must follow His *footprints* on that same road! That's why Jesus also told His disciples: **“Whoever serves Me must follow Me, and where I am, My servant also will be”** (Jn. 12:26). So Jesus concisely 'cut to the bottom line' by saying: **“If anyone would come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me”** (Lk. 9:23). That's 'painfully clear' isn't it?! And this was not just an isolated teaching by Christ. He repeated it on several occasions:

- **“...anyone who does not take his cross and follow Me is not worthy of Me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for My sake will find it”** (Matt. 10:38-39; 16:24-26).
- **“And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow Me cannot be My disciple”** (Lk. 14:27).

So for any Christian “worth his salt” or “worthy of her light,” there is a cross in both your present and future! And remember: *the cross does not represent pain, problems, persecutions, heartaches and disappointments*. No, the cross represents *death!* It was for one thing and one thing only – *execution*. When you were nailed to a cross, you did not come back down alive! As we will see further in a subsequent chapter, the cross means that you “die out to self.” And that's always a very *costly and painful process!* That's why most of us Christians *avoid the cross at all cost!*

Sadly then, millions of Christians avoid the cross – at all cost, all of their lives. But as a result, they never learn the liberation of the principle that the *Path of the Cross* is also the *path of power and glory!*

Have you taken up your cross yet?

THE PLACE OF THE CROSS

When it comes to the *place* where Jesus was crucified, all four Gospels tell us that it was called “**Golgotha**,” which means “**The Place of the Skull**” (Matt. 27:33; Mk. 15:22; Lk. 23:33; Jn 19:17-18). We noted it briefly in passing in several earlier chapters. Now let’s look more closely.

John’s Gospel succinctly summarizes Christ’s grisly ‘death march’ to Golgotha this way: “**Pilate handed Him over to them to be crucified. So the soldiers took charge of Jesus. Carrying His own cross, He went out to the Place of the Skull...Here they crucified Him**” (Jn. 19:16-17).

There is controversy to this very day as to the exact location of this *Place of the Cross*. The Catholics have built the ‘Church of the Holy Sepulcher’ over the place where they believe the crucifixion took place. The majority of the Protestants generally prefer the place that is known as ‘Gordon’s Calvary.’ This is an archaeological and theological debate that will probably not soon be solved. There are now decades of tradition built up around both places. Perhaps we will never know for sure until the Lord returns and identifies the *Place of the Cross* for us. He knows for sure exactly where it happened – and has nail scars in His hands and feet as eternal reminders of what He went through at “**The Place of the Skull!**”

There are some scholars and theologians who have conjectured that the gory name for this place was derived from the ire presence of sun-bleached skulls scattered around from previous crucifixions. They were left there as stark warnings to anyone who might want to challenge the authority of Rome. But this theory is highly unlikely because the Jews would never have permitted such macabre exposure of skulls since it was unlawful in Judaism. They were required by Jewish Law to bury all of the remains of a dead person the same day he died (Deut 21:22-23).

A more plausible explanation would be that the place was in some way skull-like in its shape and appearance. And as we saw earlier, it would also have had to be some kind of rocky knoll that was a part of Mount Moriah. We also know that Golgotha had to be both near the City of Jerusalem – but also “outside the gate.” That’s because the Book of Hebrews tells us that “**...Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through His own blood**” (Heb. 13:12). This is also clearly indicated by John’s words that “**Carrying His own cross, He went out to the Place of the Skull.**”

Obviously then, this public place of execution was “**...outside the city gate**” of Jerusalem. And most probably it would have been outside the current ‘Damascus Gate’ on the North side of the City. This gate was also called ‘St. Stephen’s Gate’ because it is believed that this first martyr of the Christian faith passed through it to the place of his stoning – again, somewhere “outside the gate.” And not far from here stands a “stony knoll” that certainly fits this description.

The German Jewish scholar described this place this way: “*It is a weird, dreary place...with a high, rounded, skull-like rocky plateau, and a sudden depression or hollow beneath, as if the jaws of the skull had opened*” (*The Life and Times of Jesus The Messiah*, vol. 2, p. 585). I have seen this very place many times. To this very day it still has the ghost-like appearance of a human skull, with its hollowed out eye sockets. In my mind, this is the *Place of the Cross*.

John's Gospel also gives us some other information that helps us locate the general vicinity where the crucifixion was carried out:

“At the *place* where Jesus was crucified, there was a *garden*, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid” (Jn. 19:41).

In this very place archaeologists have found graves and rock-hewn sepulchers that clearly date back to the time of Christ. And we also know that a rich man by the name of **“Joseph of Arimathea”** – who was a **“secret disciple of Jesus,”** used his influence to get the body of Jesus. After that we read: **“Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and placed it in his own new tomb that he had cut out of the rock”** (Matt. 27:57-59).

But even if the exact *Place of the Cross* is never known for sure until Jesus comes, the key issue here is not the *place* – but the *Person!* Even though we may not know in this lifetime *where* the crucifixion took place, we know for certain *Who* it was that was killed there – God's Messiah. As Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost: **“God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ”** (Acts 2:36). This was a great spiritual mystery that the perpetrators of the crucifixion did not understand at the time. That's why Paul wrote: **“None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory”** (1 Cor. 2:8).

So let me again remind you in closing this brief chapter what we saw from Hebrews 13:8, that **“Jesus...suffered outside the city gate.”** And if we are going to be worth our 'salt' and 'light' as Christians – we to must be willing to **“suffer outside...”**

Those are two powerful and poignant words! Together they remind us of two great truths. First, that the *Place of the Cross* is a *place of suffering*. There are no painless crucifixions! There is no anesthesia that will deaden the pain of spikes being driven into your hands and feet. So for us to **“...take up our cross and follow Jesus”** means *suffering*. It may be physical. It may be spiritual. It may be emotional. It may be mental. It may be all of those – and more. But *suffering* is what the *Place of the Cross* is all about!

Secondly, we are reminded that it is **“outside”** that we are called to. We all want to be 'insiders' – but Jesus calls us to be 'outsiders.' That's because He was an 'outsider.' So He calls us to follow Him and go **“...outside the city gate.”** Outside the 'in group.' Outside the social establishment. Outside our comfort zone. Outside our traditions. Outside our little boxes. Outside our plans. Outside our wills. *Outside ourselves!* That's because the Spirit of God is always at work 'outside' where the *need is the greatest* – and where the *response is also the greatest!* It's usually 'outside' where we *feed the hungry, give water to the thirsty, clothe the naked, heal the sick, visit the stranger, minister to those in prison* (Matt. 25:31-40).

Therefore, since Jesus was *crucified, buried and resurrected* **“...outside the city gate”** – that's where we need to go! That's the best place for us to identify with His saving death, burial and resurrection power!

Are you living and ministering 'inside' or "...**outside the gate?**" Jesus is 'outside' – and He is calling you to meet Him there!

THE *PERIOD* OF THE CROSS

When we begin to study the *period of the passion*, we are talking about the issue of *time*. Since we in the West are a very time conscious people, we often want to know the time frame of an event. That's why one of our first questions we ask concerning something that took place is: "*What time did it happen?*" So it is only natural that we want to know what was the *time* frame of all of these passion events that we have been studying?

Time has always been something of a mystery to mankind. Down through the ages, people have come up with different ways of calibrating and "telling time." These "time machines" have gone from the very simple to the very specific. Perhaps the most ancient is some form of "sundial" that measured the day through the slowly-moving shadows created by the rotation of the earth around the sun. It was a very general calibration of time. Today through our sophisticated science and technology we can measure time in nana-seconds!

While the exact time of day or night that these events took place is not the central theme of the study, it is an important consideration. This is especially true since the Gospel accounts of the *Passion of the Christ* make several very important passing references to the time a particular event took place. And we are obviously told that for a purpose.

During the *Passion of Christ*, there were different ways of reckoning time. The Romans had one way and the Jews another. And since both are mentioned in the passion narratives, we must study the passages carefully or we will be confused. So while the purpose of this study is not the study of *time* per se, we do need to hit the pause button and get some basic information about the time frames of the passion. (*)

As we briefly look at the *time of the passion*, let me remind you again of what we saw earlier in this study. The Bible clearly teaches that the events of the passion were planned by the Triune Godhead in the eons of eternity past – long before time began. That's why the Bible refers to Christ as "...**the lamb that was slain from the creation of the world**" (Rev. 13:8). Note also these very crucial related verses that emphasize this same truth about the *time of the passion* – before the first second of cosmic time began:

- **"All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on His right and the goats on His left. Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, *the Kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world*'"** (Matt. 25:32-35).
- **"This *grace* was given us in Christ Jesus *before the beginning of time*, but has *now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel*"** (II Tim. 1:9-10).

- Paul also wrote similar words to Titus about the *passion of Christ* that was planned by God for us before He created the world. He wrote that “...**the faith of God’s elect**” and our “**hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time, and at His appointed season, He brought His word to light through the preaching entrusted to me by the command of God our Savior**” (Titus 1:1-3).
- Paul further wrote about this ‘divine mystery’ to the saints at Corinth. He said that these events of the cross were “**God’s secret wisdom...the God destined for our glory before time began**” (I Cor. 2:7).

So those verses let you view the passion from the vantage point of *eternity* – before time ever began...before the cosmos was ever created...before the first sin was ever committed...before grace was ever humanly needed...before you and I were ever born. It’s incredible and mind-blowing to realize that God was thinking about you and me and our salvation “way back then!”

As wonderful as that revelation is, it is still a bit hard for us to comprehend because we are all encapsulated into time. For us everything is either *past, present* or *future*. Therefore, this truth about our salvation being secured “before time began” is something we could *only know through divine revelation* – never through *human reason*. It is not something that we would have ever “dreamed up” or conceived because all of our thinking is time-focused and earth-bound. But God dwells in the realm of *eternity* which is “outside of time.” Therefore, the only thing we can know about His domain and what takes place there is if He chooses to reveal it to us. And since *love, mercy* and *grace* are a part of His eternal nature – He wanted us to know that it was working for our salvation “...**before the beginning of time.**” What incredible, awesome, ‘Amazing Grace!’

But now let’s step back out of eternity into time – not the time you and I are living in right now, but the precise *time of the Passion of Christ*.

The Jews of Christ day divided both the day and night into 8 distinct time periods. And remember, because of the creation account in Genesis, the Jews reckon time from “sundown to sundown” – not from “sunup to sunup” like we do in the West. That’s because the various fiats of creation were each followed by the phrase: “**And there was evening, and there was morning – the first day...**” (Gen. 1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31). So the night hours would be listed first, then the daylight hours – which again is generally the reverse of how we reckon time in the West. So here are the approximate time units of their nights and days:

NIGHT:

- 1ST Watch = 6:00 PM – 9:00 PM
- 2nd Watch = 9:00 PM – Midnight
- 3rd Watch = Midnight – 3:00 AM
- 4th Watch = 3:00 AM – 6:00 AM

Here are several good Old Testament example of these “night watches”:

- First, the familiar question in Isaiah 21:12: “**Watchman, what is left of the night?**”

- Then there are King David's several references to his "night meditations": **"On my bed I remember you; I think of you through the watches of the night"** (Ps. 86:6; c.f. 16:7; 119:148; 90:4; Lam. 2:19).
- In the New Testament it is interesting to read that Jesus specifically performed one of His greatest miracles in the last watch of the night just before sunrise. When His disciples were in a fierce storm on the Sea of Galilee, we read: **"During the fourth watch of the night Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake"** (Matt. 14:25).
- Jesus also made a specific reference to the late "night watches" in one of His parables that exhort us to vigilance and watchfulness through all of the long night hours separating His First and Second Comings:

"Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning (Because of the darkness of the "night watches"), like men waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet...it will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready even if he comes in the second or third watch of the night...You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect Him" (Lk. 12:35-38).

Now the basic periods of the day in Jewish reckoning...

DAY:

- 3rd Hour = 9:00 AM
- 6th Hour = 12:00 noon
- 9th Hour = 3:00 PM
- 12th Hour = 6:00 PM

A good example of this is found in the "Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard" told by Jesus. As you will recall, the landowner went out **"...early in the morning to hire men to work in his vineyard."** Then Jesus said he continued to hire workers **"...about the third hour...the sixth hour and the ninth hour and...the eleventh hour..."** (Matt. 20:1-16). And the fact that the landowner paid them all the exact same wage seemed unfair! But that must be kept as the subject of another study! At this point I just wanted you to note these Jewish times of day that were used by Jesus.

These various references to time in the Old and New Testaments we have paused to briefly look at will now help us better identify some of the time frames of the *Passion of Christ*. But first, let me remind you of the various trials that Jesus went through *after* His last Passover Meal in the Upper Room and His late night arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane. There were actually '6 Trials.' 3 were 'Religious Trials' and 3 were 'Civil Trials.'

Religious Trials:

- Before Annas (Jn. 18:12-14)

- Before Caiaphas the High Priest (Matt. 26:57-68)
- Before the Sanhedrin (Matt. 27:1-2)

Note: We know that these ‘Religious Trials’ also began very early in the morning because of these words of commentary by Doctor Luke: **“At *daybreak* the council of the elders of the people, both the chief priests and teachers of the law, met together, and Jesus was led before them”** (Lk. 22:66).

Civil Trials:

- Before Pilate (Jn. 18:28-38)
- Before Herod (Lk. 23:6-12)
- Before Pilate (Jn. 18:39-19:6)

There is another very important series of events that we must carefully put within this time frame of Jesus’ various trials in the late night after His arrest – the *denials of Peter*. Without a careful comparative reading of the Gospel narratives, we will miss the important sequence of Peter’s various denials – generally thought of as ‘3 times.’ However, it has often been pointed out by critics of the inspiration of the Bible that there are blatant discrepancies in the denials of Peter. As one Bible scholar said:

“Discrepancy has been charged to this account because the related details are so diverse that they simply refuse to group themselves into just three denials without some very questionable manipulating of the texts” (*The Life of Christ in Stereo*, p. 218).

Suffice it to say at this point, in all probability there were ‘6 denials’ in total by Peter – and not just 3 as has often been thought. A careful parallel study of all Four Gospel accounts seem to indicate that there were ‘3 denials’ by Peter *before* the cock crowed at all, as well as ‘3 denials’ **“...before the cock crowed twice”** (Mk. 14:30). [For a further discussion of this, please note the Appendix at the end of this chapter].

Jesus’ last ‘trial’ before Pilate is summarized by these words of capitulation that represent a guilty verdict resulting in the death sentence: **“Finally Pilate handed Him over to them to be crucified”** (Jn. 19:16).

After this point, the *Passion of Christ* moves from the various houses, palaces and judgment chambers where Christ was tried – to Golgotha, the place of His execution by crucifixion. With these understandings, let’s now place the various time periods of Christ’s passion into the larger crucifixion story. I trust that this outline summary below will be helpful to you.

A GOSPEL HARMONY OF THE *PERIOD* OF THE PASSION OF CHRIST *

After being dismissed from Pilate’s court, Jesus is sent out carrying His cross Golgotha, along with the two condemned thieves. There he is crucified (Matt. 27:33; Mk. 15:22; Lk. 23:33; Jn. 19:17). Then we read: **“It was the *third hour* (9:00 AM) when they crucified Him”** (Mk. 15:25).

Note: Only Mark's Gospel – most probably the first Gospel written, recorded that Jesus' crucifixion took place at 9:00 AM. Initially, Mark's account seems to contradict John's account at this point because John recounts that Jesus was crucified at the **"sixth hour"** (Jn. 19:14). However this is easily resolved when you realize that John was no doubt using the 'Roman Clock,' which calibrates time like we generally do today – from midnight to noon and vice versa. As a result, John says the trial of Jesus before Pilate took place at **"...about the sixth hour,"** or around 6:00 AM. The rest of the time between 6:00 AM and 9:00 AM was filled with the mocking of the soldiers (Mk. 15:16-20), Pilate's guilty verdict against the two robbers (Mk. 15:27), the various other preparations for the crucifixion and the "death march" to Golgatha. Jesus then, was crucified around the **"third hour"** by Jewish reckoning, or at the **"sixth hour"** by Roman reckoning – or 9:00 o'clock in the morning.

After Jesus is crucified around 9:00 AM in the morning, the following events took place in the *time period* between then and early afternoon while He was hanging on the cross – suspended by nails between heaven and earth for the sins of the whole world. And even though we looked briefly at Christ's '7 Last Words' in a previous chapter, let's look at them again in this time context.

1. He was nailed to the cross between the two thieves, for we read: **"Two robbers were crucified with Him, one on His right and one on His left"** (Matt. 27:35-38; Mk. 15:24-28; Lk. 23:33-38) with **"...Jesus in the middle"** (Jn. 19:18).

2. The soldiers took Jesus' garments, leaving Him almost totally naked on the cross:

"When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes, dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarments remaining. This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom" (Jn. 19:23; c.f. Matt. 27:35; Mk. 15:24; Lk. 23:34).

3. The Jews and other on-lookers mocked Jesus, as we saw in our previous chapter (Matt. 27:39-43; Mk. 15:29-32; Lk. 23:35-37).

4. Then Jesus refused the offer of wine mixed with myrrh as a narcotic to help deaden the pain:

"There they offered Jesus wine to drink, mixed with gall; but after tasting it, He refused to drink it" (Matt. 27:34; Mk. 15:23).

5. He then gave His first cry from the cross: **"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing"** (Lk. 23:34).

6. Jesus now begins to conversed with the two thieves crucified on each side of Him – leading to the conversion of the one on the right (Lk. 23:39-43). As a result, Jesus spoke His second words from the cross: **"I tell you the truth, today you will be with Me in paradise"** (Lk. 23:43).

7. Sometime thereafter, Jesus spoke His third words from the cross to His mother, Mary: **“Dear woman, here is your son,”** and to His beloved disciple, John: **“Here is your mother”** (Jn. 19:26-27).
8. Now darkness descended upon the land when **“God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us...”** (II Cor. 5:21). Therefore we read: **“From the sixth hour until the ninth hour, darkness came over all the land”** (Matt. 27:45; Mk. 15:33; Lk. 23:44). So from 12:00 noon until 3:00 PM a *physical darkness* encompassed the land that symbolized the *spiritual darkness* that had now entombed Jesus.
9. In the midst of this spiritual and physical darkness, Jesus cried out His fourth utterance from the cross: **“Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?’ which means, ‘ My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?’”** (Matt. 27:46-47; Mk. 15:34-36).
10. Shortly after this time, Mark and John gives us this account of Jesus’ next succinct cry from the cross, and the response of a by-stander:

“Later, knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, ‘I am thirsty.’ A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus’ lips” (Jn. 19:28-29).
11. After this, Jesus uttered His sixth words from the cross – only recorded by John: **“When He had received the drink, Jesus said, ‘It is finished’”** (Jn. 18:30).
12. Jesus then cries out His seventh and last words of His passion – only recorded by Doctor Luke: **“Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit”** (Lk. 23:46). However, Matthew tells us that these were not gasping, whispered, muffled, dying words – but ones of the final crescendo of the song of salvation planned from before the beginning of time! So we read that Jesus **“...cried out again in a loud voice...”** (Matt. 27:50).
13. After this last and final cry from the cross, Jesus **“...breathed His last”** and **“gave up His spirit”** to His Heavenly Father by an act of His own will (Matt. 27:50; Mk. 15:37; Lk. 23:46; Jn. 19:30).
14. Then what was perfectly orchestrated in eternity past took place in the Holy of Holies – dramatically symbolizing that the work of salvation was complete: **“At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom”** (Matt. 27:51; Mk. 15:38; Lk. 23:45).
15. Apparently the cause of this ‘rending of the temple veil’ was a great *earthquake* that shook the City of Jerusalem and surrounding area. For we read that at that **“The earth shook and the rocks split.”** And as a result of this violent convulsion of the earth, another event took place that is only recorded by Matthew:

“The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs, and after Jesus’ resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people” (Matt. 27:53).

16. During this time we read of the testimony of the Roman soldier who had been in charge of the crucifixion of Jesus:

“The centurion, seeing what had happened, *praised God* and said, ‘Surely this was a righteous man’” (Lk. 23:47).

Mark gives more details of this confession when he writes:

“And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, heard His cry and saw how He died, he said, ‘*Surely this man was the Son of God!*’” (Mk. 15:39).

Matthew records the centurion’s response this way:

“When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, ‘*Surely He was the Son of God!*’” (Matt. 27:54).

17. At this point, those who hated Jesus left the crucifixion scene – with a sick satisfaction that they had ‘won the day.’

“When *all the people* who had gathered to witness this sight saw what took place, they beat their breasts and went away.”

But we see the ‘lingering love’ of those who staid on a while longer in grief contemplating what had taken place:

“But all those who knew Him, including the women who had followed Him from Galilee, stood at a distance watching these things” (Lk. 23:48-49).

From this careful harmonizing of the Four Gospel accounts, we can now better understand the *time period of the Passion of Christ*. We have seen that after His celebration of His last Passover with His Disciples in the Upper Room, Jesus went to the Garden of Gethsemane for a late night of prayer. That agonizing time was interrupted by the angry mob that arrested Him and took him away in shackles for a series of 6 ‘mock trials’ that lasted late into the night – and continued early in the morning. So Jesus had very little – if any sleep, the night of His arrest!

Then after the injustices of those trials were completed, Jesus was led away to Golgotha where He was crucified at approximately 9:00 AM. After that He hung on the cross until around noon when the earth became dark for the next 3 hours. At approximately 3:00 PM, Jesus died. As a result, the earth shook...the temple veil was rent into from top to bottom...some graves were opened – and the work of redemption was *forever* completed!

So as you read this book in this moment of time, know that God was thinking about you “*before time began!*” And be assured that if you personally know Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord, then God loved you and made provision for your salvation before He *ex nihilo* spoke the worlds into existence through His fiat power!

Therefore, before you were ever born, He had made provision for His perfect Lamb to be “...**slain from the creation of the world**” (Rev. 13:8). So your salvation did not begin at the time you “first believed.” No, His love for you began long before your love for Him! As John rightly said: “**We love because He first loved us**” (I Jn. 4:19). So God’s unmerited love, mercy and grace were provided for you before you were ever born. Before you were ever conceived in your mother’s womb, God’s love for you was conceived in the council of the Triune Godhead! That’s why Paul reminds us: “**This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time**” (II Tim. 1:9).

Therefore, God *unconditionally loves you* and has *unconditionally forgiven you* – all on the basis of His Beloved Son’s death in your behalf!

With these eternal truths in mind, I want to close this chapter with the Apostle Paul’s exhortation for the saints of his day – which is equally relevant for the *time* you and I are living in:

“As God’s fellow workers we urge you not to receive God’s grace in vain. For He says, ‘In the *time of My favor* I heard you, and in the *day of salvation* I helped you.’ I tell you, *now is the time of God’s favor, now is the day of salvation*” (II Cor. 6:1-2).

Note: This concludes this series for now. It will be continued and finished in the printing of this entire study in the months ahead. So I do covet your prayers as I seek for the time to finish writing this book in the midst of my busy travel and ministry schedule. And thanks so much for reading these first two installments leading up to Easter. I trust that they will make your Easter week more worshipful as you go with Christ through Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Sunday Morning!

In His Resurrection Love,
JL

PS: he following are chapter titles for the remaining portions of the book that I hope to complete soon:

THE *PSALMS* OF THE CROSS

THE *PETITIONS* OF THE CROSS

THE *PROPITIATION* OF THE CROSS

THE *PROFIT* OF THE CROSS

THE *PEACE* OF THE CROSS
THE *PREACHING* OF THE CROSS
THE *PERCEPTION* OF THE CROSS
THE *PERSUASION* OF THE CROSS
THE *POWER* OF THE CROSS
THE *PERSECUTION* OF THE CROSS
THE *PERVERSION* OF THE CROSS
THE *PATTERN* OF THE CROSS
THE *PRAISE* OF THE CROSS
