

Chapter 15

HIS LAST WORDS



Face of Christ by Claude Mellan (1598-1688)

INTRODUCTION

Let us begin this chapter by quietly remaining in the presence of the Lord while he delivers his final words to his disciples in the dimly lit Upper Room. As the shadows of those assembled are cast upon the rough surface of the walls and ceiling of this sacred space, though eerily quiet, their silence is worthy to be heard. Through the study of these unsettled shapes, the unspoken words of those present become almost audible to the ear, causing all of us as onlookers to stand still and listen with open ears and bated breath. As the disciples try to comprehend the words of the Master, the dark silhouettes their bodies foster on the walls create a story of their own worth proclaiming to man; an unspoken account replete with emotions of fear, puzzlement, perplexity, and confusion. In conjunction with these shapes, the sounds of their breathing adds layers of even greater depth to the plot; as their lungs produce breathless, shallow, gasping noises; all reactions to their inability to comprehend the enormity of what the Jewish Messiah is proclaiming.

Then, when identifying our Lord's shadow on the same walls, are you able to draw a visual image of what message it portrays? How does the silhouette appear of one who is on a mission to prepare the loyal followers for his impending crucifixion, and lay a foundation consisting of only eleven stones solid enough to carry on the good news of the kingdom without him visibly at their side? Do you suppose the desperation and contemplation of his impending death quickened his speech pattern? Pause for a moment, allowing the shadow imagery to play itself out in your mind. Remember, we have the advantage of viewing it from a historical point of view simply by reading the Bible. The Holy Script we read was what they were creating as they gathered at this critical juncture with Jesus in the Upper Room.

"Jesus in the Upper Room With His Disciples" by James Tissot



HIS LAST WORDS

In the previous chapter not only did Jesus share the Passover Meal with his followers, but also washed their feet; a poignant example of how all believers should be in service to one another. Although there are many other lessons the Lord taught his disciples while gathered in the Upper Room, the entire focus of the remainder of this chapter will be on what is called, “The High Priestly Prayer,” followed by the words he spoke at his arrest, trial, and death on the cross. The messages the Lord’s words delivered accompanied by beautiful paintings will take us through the crucifixion of our Savior in such a meaningful manner that it is the writer’s hope it will be fixed in our minds until we meet him face to face. Thus, until then, no matter what challenges in life we endure, the sacrifice he so unselfishly made will serve as a moral compass that is applicable in all situations, and above all, will always keep us on course.

As we learned in the last chapter, still following the religion of his people, Jesus called on his disciples to accept the fact that as their Messiah, through his death on the cross, he would now become both the bloody and unbloody sacrifice; thus instituting *The Passover of the Messiah*. Yet, in spite of knowing the terrible death by crucifixion he would face, he still was thinking of others as he prayed a beautiful prayer of intercession on behalf of his disciples and “*all his believers*”; titled in the Bible as “The High Priestly Prayer.” Yes, folks, the words, “*all his believers*”, mean we were included in this magnificent prayer; spoken at a time when his human and divine natures would be opposing one another in such a monstrous battle that it is impossible for any human being ever to comprehend it. By simply recalling all the crucified lambs Jesus had observed in the Temple at Passover will provide a reason why this internal war was taking place. In addition, since crucifixion was the chosen punishment at that time by the Roman Government, Jesus would have frequently witnessed members of his community suffering death on the cross.

Surprisingly, given the scope of the content and timing of “The High Priestly Prayer, one must wonder why it is not more frequently the focus of worship services worldwide. Ladies and gentlemen, it is so important to our future that it is worth writing our own name above the words where he includes us among those that are invited to enter into his kingdom.

As you read aloud this prayer, listen to the tone that shows the loving intimacy between the Son and his Father; one so rich that it will take your breath away. Note the plea Jesus makes to God on behalf of his disciples and for generations of people throughout time; words of intercession for mere human beings, meaning you and me. It demonstrates how precious we are to our Lord and Savior. Then to offer even more assurance that our Lord is interceding for us even now, read with joy, **Romans 8:34, “Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died---more than that, who was raised to life---is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.”**

THE HIGH PRIESTLY PRAYER

John 17 New International Version (NIV)

Jesus Prays to Be Glorified

17 After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed:

“Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. ²For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. ³Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. ⁴I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do. ⁵And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.

Jesus Prays for His Disciples

⁶ “I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word. ⁷ Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. ⁸ For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me. ⁹ I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours. ¹⁰ All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them. ¹¹ I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one. ¹² While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled.

¹³ “I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them. ¹⁴ I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. ¹⁵ My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. ¹⁶ They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. ¹⁷ Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸ As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹ For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.

Jesus Prays for All Believers (That means us!)

²⁰ “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, ²¹ that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²² I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one— ²³ I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

²⁴ “Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.

²⁵ “Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. ²⁶ I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.”

Oh, sweet child of God! Are you as moved as I with the words our Lord spoke just prior to walking his final steps to his demise? Please pause and think carefully about Christ’s thoughts, remarks, and actions! He was just moments away from being filled with agony in the Garden of Gethsemane; so much that sweat would pour like drops of blood from his body! Yet, he not only remembered his disciples that were close followers that he deeply loved, but was able to travel ahead in time and pray for all his future believers! He included us in the magnificent High Priestly Prayer! During our times of feeling insignificant on our journey in this chaotic life, let us stop and recall this powerful moment and realize without doubt exactly how much we matter to Jesus!

Then, upon completion of this prayer, without hesitation, he resolutely walked out into the night with the mission of becoming the blood sacrifice for our sins. The final chapter on his ministry of three years of teaching about the arrival of the kingdom of God had just closed. It was now time for him to finish the task with the knowledge that, not only would his faithful disciples abandon him, but his Father would also turn his face away as the nails were driven into the very soul of his One and Only Son! And...yet, for all of us, it was the beginning step for him to offer all creation ETERNAL LIFE as a gift of his grace; a decision we are free to accept or refuse. Halleluiah! What a Savior!

As the last word was penned above by the writer, the page had become an absolute blur due to the salty tears that streamed down a distorted face resulting from overflowing pools of emotion. Yet, in spite of being temporarily blinded, her feet determinedly followed in the footprints of the Lord as he quietly led his disciples out of the room. Perhaps you were walking along beside me allowing your hand to hold mine as a way of promoting courage for both of us. At the conclusion of this magnanimous prayer, were you aware of the silence that filled the space around the stunned disciples? Do you think the shadows their forms cast upon the dark walls and ceiling at this point in time were absolutely motionless due to suffering from such paralyzing internal distress? Even today, with the mystery disclosed through Scripture, the actions out of love being displayed by the Son and His Father are still overwhelming, to say the least. Which disciple do you suppose broke the silence? Peter? At this moment in time, were you quietly listening to the sound of the sandals worn by Jesus and his eleven disciples as they trudged toward the Garden of Gethsemane?

Dear child, let us continue walking with Jesus! He needs to know that we are willing to internalize the price he is getting ready to pay for our sins. If, at this point, you have not

been sitting beside the disciples as the lessons our Savior unfolded in his prayers, parables and miracles as described in prior chapters of this collection, you are not too late to fall into step with us. As the unified body of Jesus, our hands are extended to you right this very moment! Let us soberly walk together behind the Jewish Messiah to the Garden of Gethsemane in a time of reverent prayer as we prepare to witness the unimaginable decision our Lord chose to make on our behalf!



Christ and the Disciples Going out into the Garden of Gethsemane after the Last Supper - Nikolai Ge, 1889

Jesus Prays in Gethsemane

Matthew 26: 36-46

36Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, **“Sit here while I go over there and pray.”** 37He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. 38Then he said to them, **“My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.”** 39Going a little farther, 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.”**



Christ in Gethsemane - Vasily Perov - WikiArt.o



In Luke 22: 43-44 of the Life Study Bible (NIV) Scripture reads, “An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.”

Agony in the Garden by Frans Schwartz, 1898.jpg - Wikimedia



40 Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. “Couldn’t you men keep watch with me for one hour?” he asked Peter. 41 “Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.” (NIV) (Symbolic of 1st cup of wine at Passover Meal)

42 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.” 43 When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. (NIV) (Symbolic of 2nd cup of wine at Passover Meal)



Agony in the Garden by James Tissot





44So he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing. 45Then he returned to the disciples and said to them, **“Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour has come, and the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners. 46Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!”** (NIV)(Symbolic of 3rd cup of wine at Passover Meal)



Giovanni Bellini ca. 1430 – 1516

Let us now pause for a moment and think together about what has just transpired. One thing that can be pointed out is the troubled spirit of Jesus; the condition spoken about in the above section whose cause was due to Jesus being both human and divine. The Gospel of Luke is the only one that describes the Lord’s sweat as coming forth as great drops of blood; seemingly a fit commentary due to his background as a physician.

Then when researching other recorded instances where human beings’ sweat was secreted as drops of blood, several examples were available.

A commentary from biblehub.com indicated the following situations that were recorded throughout history as follows: “huanus (f), a very grave and credible historian, reports of a governor of a certain garrison, who being, by a stratagem, decoyed from thence, and taken captive, and threatened with an ignominious death, was so affected with it, that he sweat a “bloody sweat” all over his body. And the same author (g) relates of a young man of Florence, who being, by the order of Pope Sixtus the Fifth, condemned, as he was led along to be executed, through the vehemence of his grief discharged blood instead of sweat, all over his body: and Maldonate, upon this passage, reports, that he had heard it from some who saw, or knew it, that at Paris, a man, robust, and in good health, hearing that a

capital sentence was pronounced upon him, was, at once, all over in a bloody sweat: which instances show, that grief, surprise, and fear, have sometimes had such an effect on men...." (Wikipedia)

Regardless of the motivation for this unusual occurrence at this time in the life of Christ, it certainly shows the deep cavernous travail of the soul brought on by unimaginable agony; a demonstration for all of us to forever retain when contemplating the price our Lord paid on the cross for our sin.

Since we have been following closely the reactions of the disciples, it is also worthwhile to center on their inability to stay awake during this time of anguish the Savior was enduring. One can make the argument that, given the fact they had so willingly dedicated their lives to follow Jesus for the past three years, this is certainly one time they would have desired to be there for him. Unfortunately, the words Jesus spoke as quoted above, "the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak", fit their behavior like a glove.

In spite of their inability to comply, does not your heart go out to them? Don't their bodies appear exhausted? Given the "High Priestly Prayer" Jesus just delivered in the Upper Room, would you agree that they still lack understanding of what truly is about to happen? Regardless of the gravity of the situation, their mere human minds still could not comprehend the depth of the meaning. The eye lids of this poor rag-tag group of men that loved Jesus with all their hearts simply closed against all restraint and desire to remain vigilant. Have you ever been so exhausted that your body ached and you felt as if you could sleep standing up?

Last, did you notice the wine goblets beside the words that described Jesus returning to find his devoted disciples asleep? In order to explain the reason for doing this, a referral must be made to Brant Pitre's remarks from his book "Jesus and the Jewish Roots of the Eucharist" when he connected the number of times Jesus found his disciples asleep directly to the four cups of wine consumed in the Upper Room at the "Passover of the Messiah". Do you recall the Savior refusing to drink the fourth cup? The reason the fourth cup is missing will be answered after Jesus died on the cross.

Isn't this an interesting connection Pitre draws? I am not surprised by this author's commentary because of the silver thread God draws from beginning to end in the Bible. Sometimes, the thread he weaves is so intricate and subtle we overlook the connection between the happenings in the Old and New Testaments as being a continuation of the same story.

Finally, let us pay close attention to the number of times Jesus prayed to his Father, not only in what has transpired thus far, but throughout the remainder of this chapter. Folks, our Lord never ceased to stay in connection with the Father; symbolic that he was One with the Father and the Father was One with him.

Betrayal and Arrest of Jesus (NIV) Matthew 26: 47-56

⁴⁷ While he was still speaking, Judas came, one of the twelve, and with him a great crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people. ⁴⁸ Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, "The one I will kiss is the man; seize him." ⁴⁹ And he came up to Jesus at once and said, "Greetings, Rabbi!" And he kissed him. ⁵⁰ Jesus said to him, "**Friend, do what you came to do.**"^[E] Then they came up and laid hands on Jesus and seized him.



The Kiss of Judas by James Tissot , Brooklyn Museum , between 1886

⁵¹And behold, one of those who were with Jesus stretched out his hand and drew his sword and struck the servant^[d] of the high priest and cut off his ear. ⁵²Then Jesus said to him, **“Put your sword back into its place. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword. ⁵³Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? ⁵⁴But how then should the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?”** ⁵⁵At that hour Jesus said to the crowds, **“Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs to capture me? Day after day I sat in the temple teaching, and you did not seize me. ⁵⁶But all this has taken place that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled.”** **Then all the disciples left him and fled.**

Luke 22: 49-51 offers added information by stating: When Jesus' followers saw what was going to happen, they said, Lord, should we strike with our swords?" And one of them (thought to be Peter) struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his right ear. But Jesus answered, **“No more of this!”** And he touched the man's ear and healed him.

Ladies and gentlemen, please note the highlighted sentence above that lets us know that Jesus was now totally alone. Although his divinity would have made him aware of this in advance, do you think the human part of him would have ever been ready for this situation? What would you have done?



"Jesus Heals The Soldiers Ear" by James Tissot

Were you surprised the religious leaders arrested Jesus in the dark of night rather than in the Temple where everyone could witness their deeds? It is thought the reason for this was to prevent a riot; action that would have brought the Roman soldiers into the situation immediately. Thus, if this happened, one thing the leaders were assured would have been their loss of power.

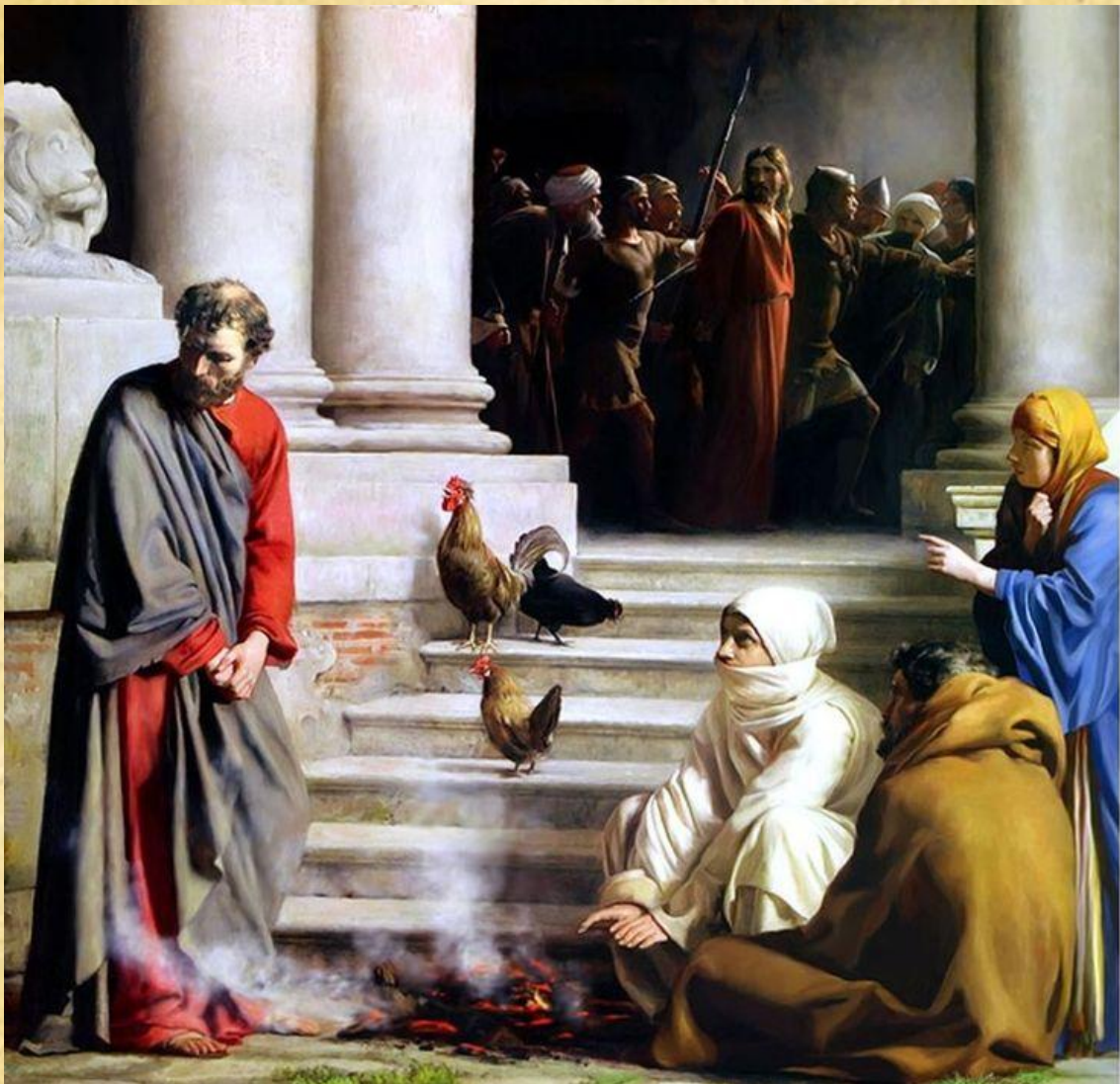
At this point in time, are you picturing the disciples escaping through the garden in every direction? Given Peter's bravado in exclaiming to Jesus that he would follow him to his death, plus the fact that he would be identified as the one to have drawn his sword, what would he be thinking and feeling? Perhaps the disciples are in such a state of panic that processing is not a part of their brain's power right now. Instead, they are running for their lives.

Do you feel they still believe Jesus to be their Messiah; given the fact that he now appears powerless with his very life resting in the hands of his enemies? Certainly, it would seem to all of us mere humans that Satan, who tempted our Lord so unmercifully in the desert, was now totally in charge of the outcome. Since nothing is impossible for God, however, can you picture the sights and sounds coming from heaven as this point in time?

Trial of Jesus

During an earlier discourse between Jesus and his disciples, one familiar happening that occurred was when exuberant Peter proclaimed he would be willing to go all the way with Jesus; meaning to the point of death. However, our Lord, being fully aware of what was to come and Peter's human frailties, let him know by the time the cock crowed this particular disciple would have disowned him three times. Thus, upon the Lord being seized and led away to the house of the high priest that prediction regarding Peter immediately came true; thus causing this well meaning disciple to weep bitterly. It was also at this particular time, the men who were guarding Jesus began mocking and beating him while demanding he prophesy who had hit him. However, our Lord spoke not a word!

"Peter's Denial" by Carl Bloch

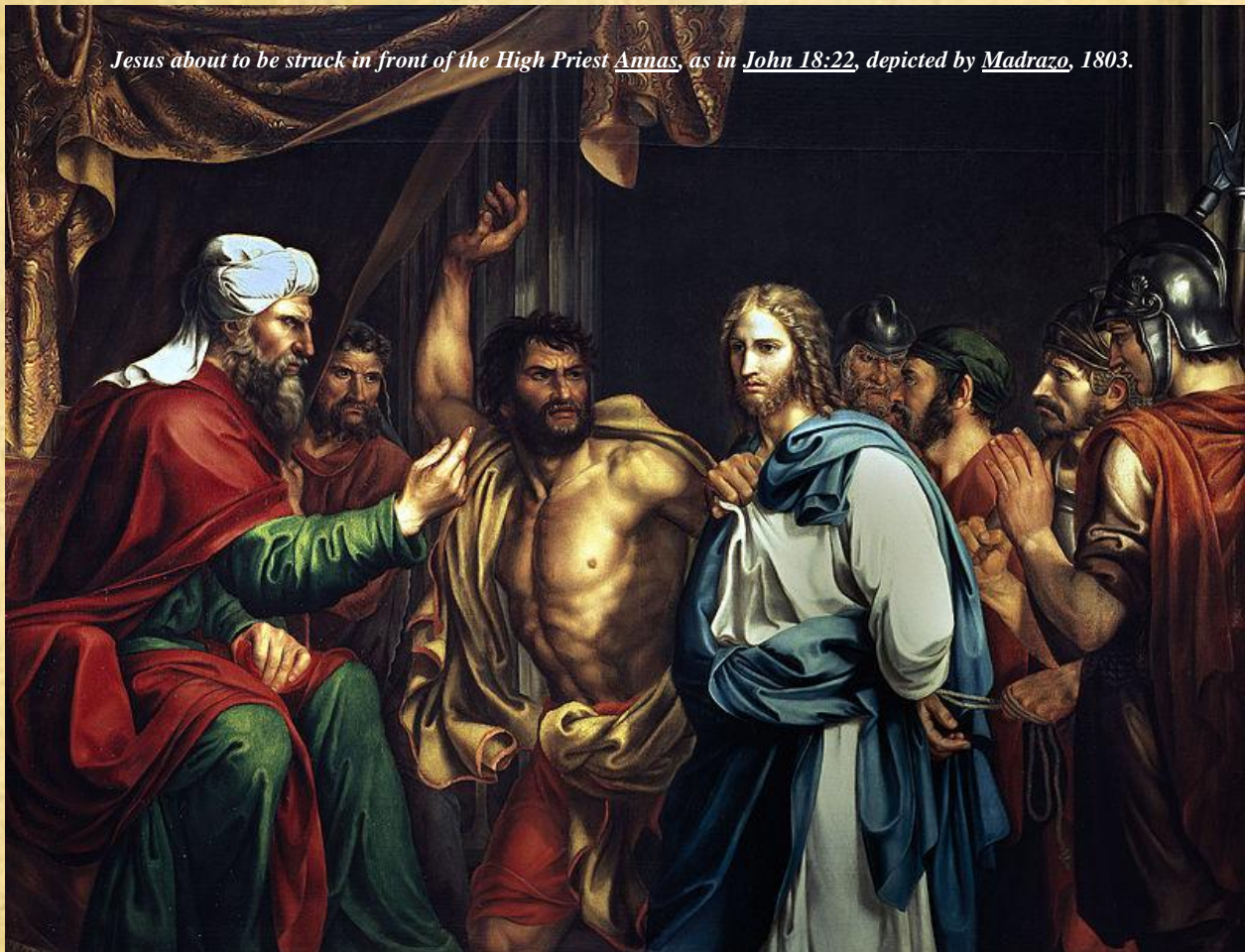


Please study the painting above and imagine how both Jesus and Peter felt at this moment in time. Then, be sure to place yourself in Peter's shoes and recall the number of times your behavior has disappointed the Lord. Since we are all dreadful sinners, the shoes of the disciple are exactly our size. Our good intentions simply don't hold up! **Without the grace of our Lord, where would we be?**

Then, according to Luke 22: 66 (NIV), "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. If you are the Christ, they said, "Tell us." Jesus answered, "If I tell you, you will not believe me, and if I asked you, you would not answer. But from now on, the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the mighty God." They all asked, "Are you then the Son of God?" He replied, "You are right in saying **I am.**" Then they said, "Why do we need any more testimony? We have heard it from his own lips." *(Life Application Study Bible NIV)*

Again, let us pause a moment and reflect on the attitude of the council of elders' words when they asked, "Why do we need any more testimony?" Since they did not believe Jesus was the Son of God, according to their religious doctrine, he had just committed blasphemy; meaning claiming to be God. Once again, Jesus who was a devout Jew that loved his people had been slapped directly in the face with the hand called "rejection".

Also, it is important to note the response from Jesus using the words, "I am." Since another title for God in the Old Testament was the "Great I Am", he was connecting himself directly to the Father in heaven.



Then, moving on, Luke 23: 1-5 (NIV) describes where Jesus was taken next by stating:

1 Then the whole assembly rose and led him off to Pilate.

2 And they began to accuse him, saying, “We have found this man subverting our nation. He opposes payment of taxes to Caesar and claims to be Messiah, a king.”

3 So Pilate asked Jesus, “Are you the king of the Jews?” **“You have said so,”** Jesus replied.

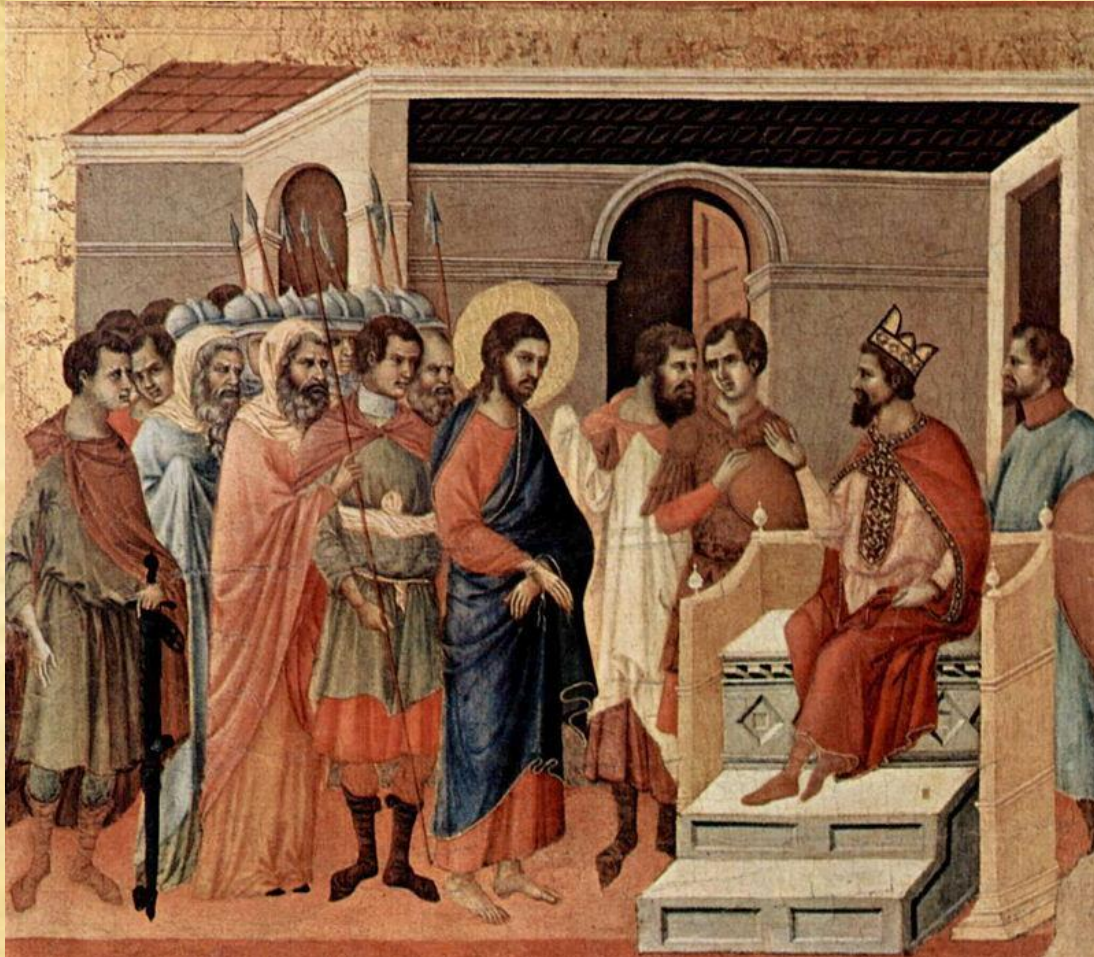
4 Then Pilate announced to the chief priests and the crowd, “I find no basis for a charge against this man.”

5 But they insisted, “He stirs up the people all over Judea by his teaching. He started in Galilee and has come all the way here.”

Thus, realizing he was in a tight spot and possibly in danger of being removed from his post by the Roman government if a formal complaint was made against his administration, Pilate immediately passed Jesus off to Herod. Although Herod, having heard about the miracles Jesus had performed, was desirous to meet him, the chief priests and teachers of the law were standing close by vehemently accusing him. During this time, our Savior spoke not a mumbling word.

Therefore, after plying Jesus with many questions, Herod sent him back to Pilate with a “not guilty” verdict.

Jesus at Herod's Court, by Duccio, c. 1310.



Jesus Before Pilate

Matthew 27: 11-27 (NIV)

11 Meanwhile Jesus stood before the governor, and was asked by him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" "You have said so," 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 festival to release a prisoner chosen by the crowd. 16 At that time they had a well-known prisoner whose name was Jesus Barabbas. 17 So when the crowd had gathered, Pilate asked them, "Which one do you want me to release to you: Jesus Barabbas, or Jesus who is called the Messiah?" 18 For he knew it was out of self-interest 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 the Messiah?" 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, "His blood is 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.

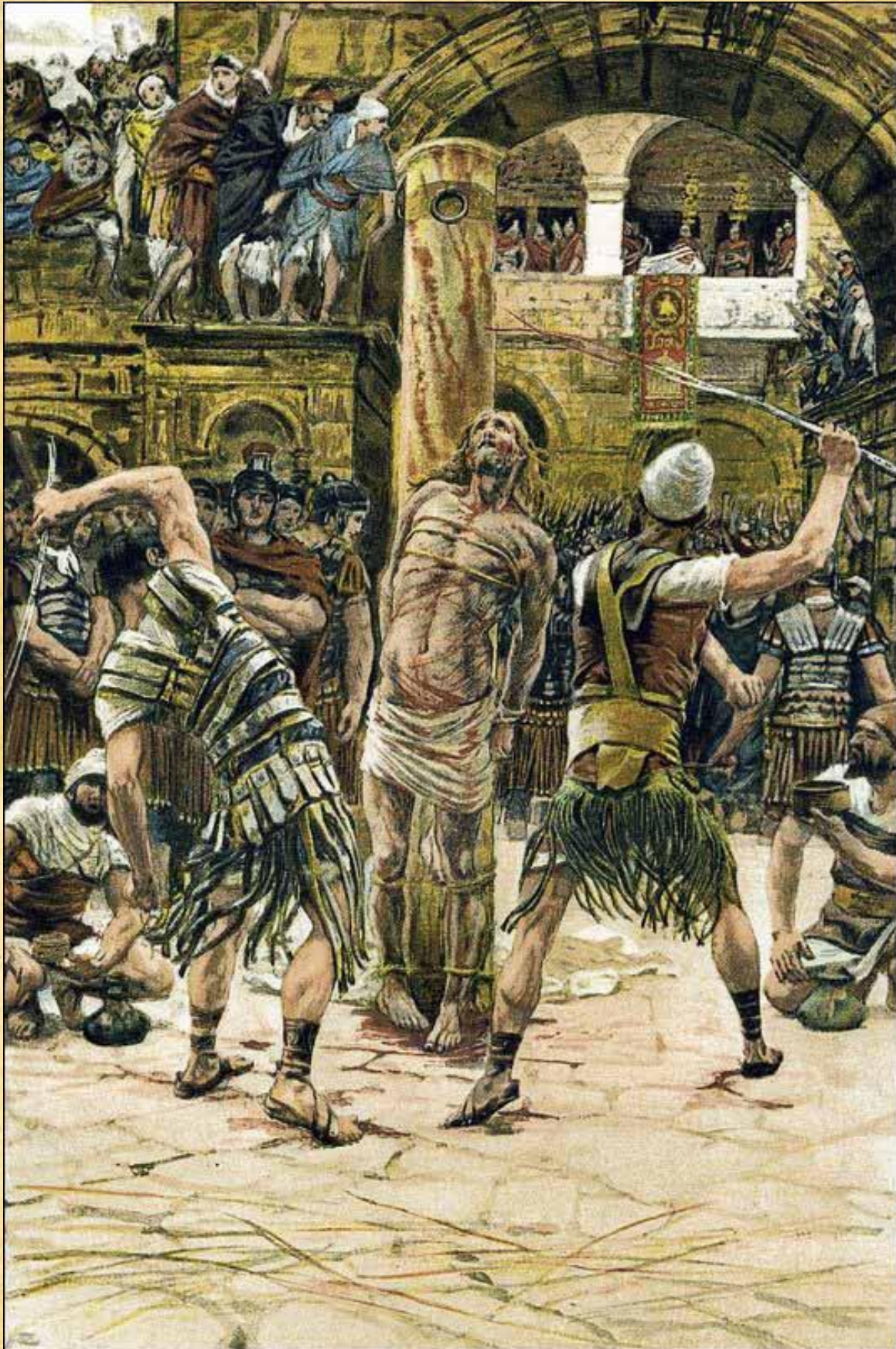
The Soldiers Mock Jesus

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. Then they 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. "

Ladies and gentlemen, it is important at this point to allow the Scripture you just read above to permeate your entire being in order to truly internalize the suffering the One and Only Son of God has just endured on your behalf. When comparing the technique used on the lambs that were crucified at Passover in the Temple, the suffering they felt in comparison to that of our Savior paled. Though totally innocent, his body and soul were brutalized by members of the human race to which we all belong. It is hard to imagine mankind being able to inflict this type of torture on anyone, isn't it? Are you as ashamed as I am right now?

Proceed to the next page and view the painting by Tissot to gather a visual image in your mind as to how intense the punishment was for Jesus; all because he was rejected for being the Son of God!

"Flaggation of Jesus" by James Tissot



The Crucifixion of Jesus

Luke 23: 26-31 (NIV)

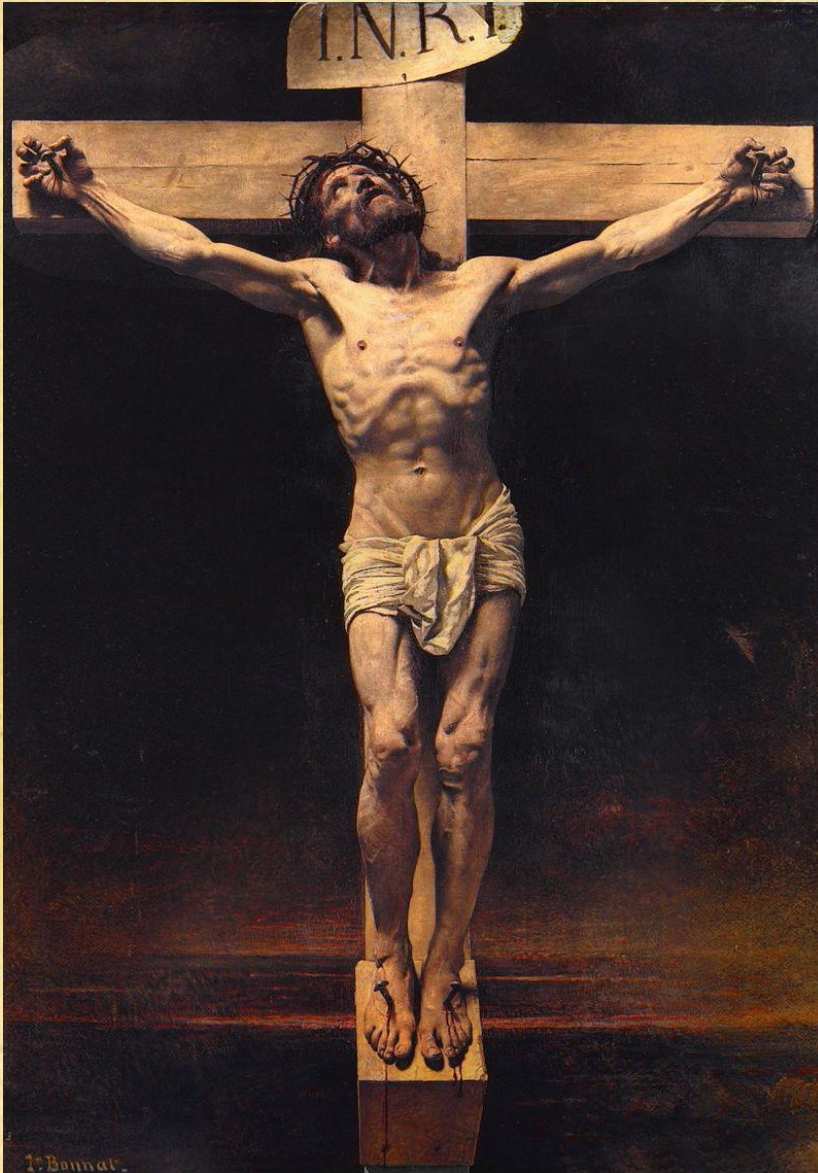
²⁶As the soldiers led him away, they seized Simon from Cyrene, who was on his way in from the country, and put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus. ²⁷A large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wailed for him. ²⁸Jesus turned and said to them, **“Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. ²⁹For the time will come when you will say, ‘Blessed are the childless women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!’ ³⁰Then they will say to the mountains, ‘Fall on us!’ and to the hills, ‘Cover us!’³¹ For if people do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?”**

(The Jewish Writings (Targumist) paraphrases Ezekiel 17: 24 in a way that will clarify the last sentence Jesus spoke above as follows: “I have humbled the kingdom of the nations, which was as strong as a green tree, and I have strengthened the kingdom of the house of Israel, which was weak as a dry tree.”)

“Jesus Falls” by James Tissot



³⁸Two rebels were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. ³⁹Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads ⁴⁰and 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!”

⁴¹In 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. ⁴³He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’ ⁴⁴In the same way the rebels who were crucified with him also heaped insults on him.” (NIV)

The attack upon our Lord is relentless and brutal beyond measure; all because he loved us so much that he chose to die for our sins. It is even more understandable why his spirit was so troubled in the Garden of Gethsemane, isn’t it? Being both human and divine, Jesus was identifying with this moment in his final journey.

(Jesus of Nazareth by Leon Bonnat)

As the writer searched for paintings that depicted truly how the body of Jesus would have appeared on the cross, it was difficult to locate one that matched Scripture’s description. Perhaps the ugliness and brutality was too much emotionally for a painter to portray. In order for us to internalize how disfigured our Savior’s body truly appeared, let us refer to Isaiah 52: 14: *Life Study Bible; NIV*

“Just as there were many who were appalled at him---his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any man and his form marred beyond human likeness.”

John 19: 23-24 tells us that Jesus was stripped of his clothing and the soldiers cast lots to see how they were to be divided. "23 When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes, dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining. This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom. 24 "Let's not tear it," they said to one another. "Let's decide by lot who will get it." This happened that the scripture might be fulfilled that said, "They divided my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment." So this is what the soldiers did." (Although the Roman soldiers would have simply wanted to preserve the seamless garment for value only, the fact that Jesus was wearing it, according to Jewish customs, offers a deeper understanding of who Jesus was in the eyes of his people. In the book, "Jesus the Bridegroom" by Brant Pitre the following quote from Josephus, Antiquities 3.161 is used regarding the seamless garment Jesus wore by stating: "This vesture of the high priest was not composed of two pieces, nor was it sewed together upon the shoulders and the sides, but it was one long vestment so wove as to have an aperture for the neck".) This lets us clearly know that even though our Messiah had been rejected by the Jewish leaders, he was still considered a high priest.

Seven Final Statements From The Cross

First: ***"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."***

Luke 23: 34 (NIV)

After having been rejected and beaten by a mob beyond recognition, can you imagine how shocking this statement sounded to the ears of those who heard his voice? In fact, scholars have reported that it was so unbelievable that early Christians dropped it from the record of Jesus' words. It simply cannot be found in the Codex Vaticanus and numerous other earlier writings. Think about our Lord having being oppressed by a brutal Roman Empire that caused suffering to his people! Then recall how poorly treated he was by the Jewish rulers of his day; the High Priest, the Sanhedrin, and the Pharisees! Let us not leave ourselves out of this equation, either. How many times per day does this statement apply to us? Thinking NOT about how much suffering and pain he was experiencing, but about our lives, he asked his Father to forgive mankind! Yes, we were there when they crucified our Lord!

Second: ***"Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."***

Gospel of Luke 23:43

As Jesus hung on the cross between two criminals, one of them hurled insults at him, while the other rebuked him out of fear of God. His comment, "We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong", shows an inner wisdom. Thus, knowing he was in need of forgiveness and recognizing Christ's eternal authority, his request was, "Jesus remember me when you come into your kingdom." Thus, the second remark from Jesus above in red. It was through faith, not deeds that he was saved. Jesus' words will be the same to **anyone** wise enough to ask him for forgiveness. However, it is better to repent now than wait until it is too late. I have known people in the

nursing home that put off asking for forgiveness until the very last moment; a chance I would rather not take in my life. In the case of some residents, the loss of mental faculties occurred before they had repented of their sin.

Third: ***"Jesus said to his mother: "Woman, this is your son."
Then he said to the disciple: "This is your mother."***

Gospel of John 19:26-27

At the foot of the cross were three women named Mary; one being his mother, as well as an aunt and Mary Magdalene. Having been the eldest son, and Scripture stating that Joseph was deceased, Jesus would have provided for his mother as long as needed; thus beginning his ministry at age 33. In keeping with the respect he had for his earthly mother, he was making sure a trusted close friend named John would not only provide a home for her, but also be available to offer strength during her time of deep sorrow. After all, it was this close friend John that stayed with him at the cross until he took his last earthly breath. What a wonderful example for all of us to follow in sharing one another's sorrows.

Fourth: ***"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"***
Matthew 27:46 and Mark 15:34

These words recorded in Psalm 22 would have been committed to memory by Jesus when only a little child; along with other Scriptures taught in the synagogue. Ladies and gentlemen, this is a vivid example of our crucified Savior realizing the horror of what is happening and the excruciating suffering he is enduring for the sake of mankind. Remember Jesus' words at the time of his arrest from Luke 22: 53 when he said to the temple guards: "But this is your hour---when darkness reigns?" Our Lord calls out in agony to his Father as he carries the burden of all the sins of humanity; at a time when he is totally engulfed in the raging sea of darkness. Let us also recall that both Matthew and Mark describe this time during the crucifixion as being in the ninth hour; occurring after 3 hours of darkness which would be three o'clock in Judea.

(Di Matthias Grünewald - The Yorck Project: wikipedia)

Now, think back to the time the priests would slay the sacrifices for the Jewish people in the Temple



as discussed in the last chapter regarding Passover; that being from the ninth hour (about 3 p.m.) to the eleventh (about 5 p.m.). As Brant Pitre stated in his book "Jesus and the Jewish Roots of the Eucharist": "Jesus acted as the host of the Messianic Passover, because he saw himself as the Messiah. He offered himself as a sacrifice, because he saw himself as the Passover Lamb." Yet, even though Jesus the Christ had taught that the kingdom of earth had arrived through beautiful parables and marvelous miracles far and wide, he now faced the cross as a rejected Messiah by the Jewish leaders of his own people. The signs were all around. Yet they had been blind to the vivid images, and deaf to his magnificent words.

Fifth:

"I thirst."

Gospel of John 19:28

Scholars have approached the words of Jesus, "I thirst" from both a physical and emotional perspective. We do know that it has been eighteen hours since his last meal with the disciples, and that the punishment that preceded this point has been brutal and relentless. In addition, others have connected it directly to many spiritual meanings recorded in Scripture.



However, Brant Pitre, in the book, "Jesus and the Jewish Roots of the Eucharist" refers us right back to the Upper Room when Jesus shared the wine as a part of the Passover meal with his disciples. The author's belief is that at this point when Jesus called for a drink; it represented the 4th cup of wine he said he would not consume until he came into his Father's kingdom. Thus, when one of the bystanders took a sponge, (referred to as a Holy Sponge) soaked in sour wine, that was attached to a reed, and offered it to Jesus, our Lord had consumed the final cup. In Pitre's words, "Jesus not only accepted the wine of his execution; he explicitly requested a drink at the moment before his death." Mission accomplished! (Vinegar, meaning sour wine, was thought to most likely be posca, a favorite beverage of the Roman soldiers.) In addition, Jewish custom of offering wine to those condemned to die, according to the Talmud is rooted in a biblical command from Proverbs 31: 6 "Alcohol is for the dying and wine for those in bitter distress."

Sixth:

"It is finished;"

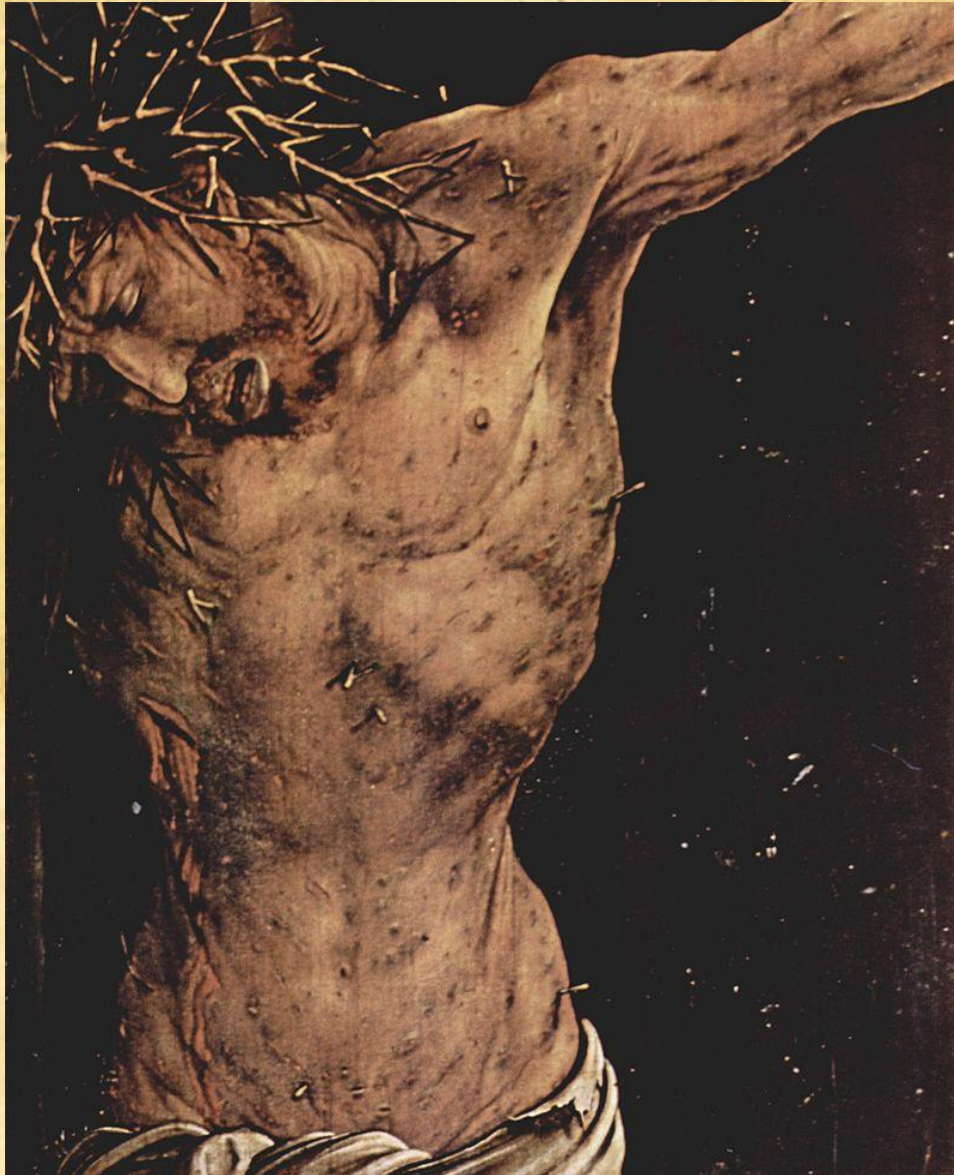
Gospel of John 19:29-30

These words came immediately after Jesus was given the sponge soaked in wine on a sprig of hyssop. John indicated he bowed his head and handed over his spirit. God's Son had given his life as a sacrifice for our sin in order to draw us back to him. Although we deserved to die, he had taken our place as both the bloody and unbloody sacrifice; truly the perfect Lamb without blemish! His thirty-three years had come to an end! His blood had been shed! His body had been broken for us.

Seventh: ***"Father, into your hands I commend my spirit."***

Gospel of Luke 23:46

The final words Jesus loudly cried out served as a dramatic example of the beauty and simplicity of his faith in God. He showed absolutely no fear as he faced what some label as "the unknown." In the heart and mind of the Savior, there was no such thing as an "unknown." Everything that mattered was left to God!



Di Matthias Grünewald - The Yorck Project: 10.000 Meisterwerke der Malerei. DVD-ROM, 2002. ISBN 3936122202.

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<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=152340>

Dear Reader, thanks for being at the foot of the cross with me. This writer believes with all her heart that Jesus looked down, just like Tissot shows in this painting below, and saw all future believers that day. He knew we were there! Let us now depart in a time of silent contemplation and follow the nail scarred body of our Lord as it is carried to his tomb. Rest assured that, no matter how ugly life appears, God is still, and will always be in charge!



Crucifixion as seen from the cross by Tissot

Sources:

1) *New International Version (NIV)*

2) *Life Application Study Bible (NIV)*

4) *"Jesus the Bridegroom" by Brant Pitre*

5) *In the Footsteps of Jesus by Jean-Pierre Isbouts*

3) "Jesus and the Jewish roots of the Eucharist" by Brant Pitre 6) Biblehubcom

7) "His Finest Week" by James Roy Smith



GROWING IN THE WORD



- 1) Go to the www.devotionalembbers.com home page and open the hymnal for the suggested song, "The Old Rugged Cross" and play it for the group with the goal of bringing them into the present.
- 2) High Priestly Prayer: Read this prayer together as a group and spend time discussing the importance of it for Christians.
- 3) As the disciples listened to the last words of Jesus in the Upper Room, why do you feel their understanding of the Lord's message was so challenging for them? After all, it is stated many times by people today that at least Jesus' followers could visibly see and touch the Lord, while Christians now must believe based on faith. Discuss the pros and cons of this statement.
- 4) Go to the Garden with Jesus and the disciples. Were you able to internalize both the human and divine aspects of Jesus?
- 5) How did you feel about author Pitre's writing on connecting the number of times Jesus approached the disciples and found them sleeping to the 4 cups of wine? Discuss the author's feelings about when Jesus drank the 4th cup. Do you agree?
- 6) In order to take the crucifixion to application level, use the poem below as your final prayer

PRAYER

My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me---words we sometimes cry

When enveloped in clouds of darkness---under a thick black ebony sky

Once basking in rays of sunshine---now distressed, and utterly alone

Rigid hands now wildly groping --- wearing a heart as cold as stone.

The brightness of the Father's smile---now eclipsed by a curtain of fear

Abandoned in shadows of grief---without hope the Lord will appear

Poor distressed frightened child---miserably suffering from unbelief

God promised He'd never leave thee---so fully trust and find relief.

When we feel a slight withdrawal---of our Heavenly Father's love
Harkin back to the woes of the Savior---as it appeared from up above
How deep the agony of Jesus---as God, from His Son, turned away
He entered the abyss of cruel suffering---its depth impossible to say.

The departure of His Father's presence---prompted our Lord to cry in pain
Utterly deserted, forsaken and abandoned--- from His feelings He did not refrain
All connection to His Abba now severed---into the midnight of horror He fell
'Twas for you He endured the cross---so with Him you could choose to dwell.

Amen!

