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I. Introduction

At last we come to the events which form what scholars call the passion narrative, Mark 14 and following (and the parallels in the other gospels). We pass over Wednesday of Passion Week in silence. There is nothing in the Gospels unambiguously attributed to this day.

II. Maundy Thursday

And we come to Thursday, the Thursday which in the history of Christian literature and liturgy has come to be known as Maundy Thursday from the Latin word *mandatum*—or the commandment, the commandments that Jesus gave His disciples that Thursday night in the upper room.

A. Last Supper

The Last Supper occupies a central role in all four Gospels, although, as we pointed out in an earlier lesson, the actual account of Jesus' words over the meal, the Passover ceremony around which this last supper was built, are absent from John. They are found only in the other three gospels, even while John gives a much fuller account of Jesus' teaching for His disciples after the meal. That meal, which indeed was originally the Passover celebration, following the commandments of the book of Exodus to commemorate the Israelites' liberation by God from the land of Egypt, is given new significance by Jesus as He celebrates this meal with His twelve disciples as the head of the household would typically celebrate the meal with family members.

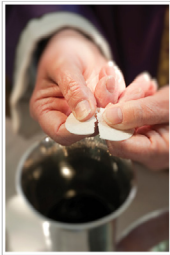
On this occasion He takes the customary bread and wine and He says, "This is my body, which is given for you. This is my blood." He says, "It is my blood of the new covenant,



**The Last Supper =
A Passover Meal**

Luke 22:19-20

And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body given for you; do this in remembrance of Me." In the same way, after the supper He took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is poured out for you."



John 14:25-26

All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.

which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.” In the original context of a Jewish man holding up a loaf of bread and cups into which wine was poured and drunk, there would have been no misunderstanding His statement as somehow claiming that these elements of food and drink were supernaturally transformed into molecules or portions of His physical flesh, as some later church controversies have seemed to suggest.

Rather, this is a vivid way of symbolizing the significance of His death, just as Jesus has been using symbolism in parables—symbolic, prophetic-like actions—all throughout the days and weeks leading up to His crucifixion. He is pointing out in a very graphic way the saving or atoning significance, the substitutionary nature, of His death—paying the penalty for sins—for the sins of all humanity, for those who will come to Him and trust in Him. Therefore, the church has rightly, in all its diverse forms, almost always ever since celebrated Communion, the Eucharist, the Lord’s Supper—it goes by many names—but some form of reenactment of taking of bread and wine, both to memorialize the significance of Christ’s death for us and also to point forward to His return and to the Messianic banquet yet to come when He does return—even as His words on that initial night were spoken: “I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father’s kingdom.”

B. Farewell Discourse

After the supper, Jesus predicts Peter’s denial. He has already alluded to Judas’ upcoming betrayal, though cryptically enough that all of the disciples do not yet understand. John’s gospel adds considerable amounts of additional teaching, what is often referred to as Jesus’ farewell discourse. John, in John 13, has already included the unique segment of Jesus taking a towel and washing His disciples’ feet to teach them about servant leadership.

Then in chapters 14-17, He teaches them about His need to go away and His promise to return and an even more precious guarantee that He will send the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, the Comforter, the Exhorter, the Encourager, to empower His disciples for the ministry that they will

Jesus' High Priestly Prayer:

- For Himself
- For His disciples
- For all believers



carry on—a ministry that can expect to receive hostility and tribulation, and yet He promises that in Him they have overcome the world. These chapters also contain, as we noted in our introduction to John's gospel, some of the clearest teachings that form the seeds for the later, more full-orbed Trinitarian doctrine of the church, as Jesus talks about His oneness with the Father and with the Spirit.

Particularly in chapter 17— what has been called Jesus' high priestly prayer (perhaps the more true candidate for the title the Lord's Prayer, the one the Lord actually prayed) we see glimpses not only into His unity with His Father and His completion of all the tasks that the Father has sent Him to perform, but also His prayers for His disciples and strikingly for those who had become disciples through their testimony, which by extrapolation include all Christians of all ages in all times and places. Fundamentally, His prayer for them centers on the theme of unity. It is undoubtedly a disgrace in our contemporary world how many hundreds, if not thousands, of Christian denominations have emerged, making a mockery of this call to Christian unity.

There have, no doubt, been key times in the history of the church when its teaching has moved so far from the fundamentals of the New Testament that reformation and division and starting afresh have been necessary. But it is difficult to claim that this has been the case in more than just a handful of key periods throughout church history. It is interesting, too, to see in John 17 that the primary reason for Jesus' call to unity and prayer for unity among His disciples is an evangelistic one that the world might see and might know that they are in Christ and He is in them. The unity of the church can have a powerful evangelistic function in every culture, in every time and age, and as one Christians today should take far more seriously. After these final teachings and prayers in the upper room, Jesus then departs for the Garden of Gethsemane.

C. Garden of Gethsemane

Along the way He continues to teach His disciples, and when He arrives on the slopes of the Mount of Olives He calls Peter, James, and John, the inner core of the three closest to Him, to come with Him while He goes ahead to pray. Then

Luke 22:42

*Father, if You are willing,
take this cup from Me;
yet not My will, but Yours
be done.*

Luke 22:48

*... Judas, are you betraying
the Son of Man with a kiss?*



He leaves them at a certain place and goes off to a further distance and begins to pray one of the most marvelous and incredible prayers of Scripture, a prayer, on the one hand, that demonstrates absolutely Jesus' complete humanity. He does not wish to go through the agony of crucifixion any more than any other natural mortal would want to. "If it be your will, if there is any way possible," He prays, "Lord let this cup pass from Me." But at the same time He also recognizes His utter dependence on His Father and His utter submission to the will of God. If it must be His will, then He is prepared to undergo this ordeal. What a contrast with the disciples' inability even to keep awake, much less to pray, just a short distance further afield.

D. Betrayal and Arrest

At the end of this time in the Garden of Gethsemane, Judas, who has already left the little troupe of disciples and gone after the soldiers, who may well be a combination of the Jewish temple police and Roman soldiers, comes leading this arresting party into the garden. He kisses Jesus as his sign in the dark as to who the ringleader of this small sect is; and Jesus, putting up no defense—indeed rebuking Peter who pulls a sword and tries to start a slight revolt and healing the servant's ear whom Peter has cut off. Defenseless by choice, Jesus is led away for captivity and for trial. Meanwhile the disciples flee, providing another ignominious contrast between those who had recently boasted they would follow Jesus even unto death if necessary and Jesus' own exemplary response. We are now well into nighttime on Thursday night, and the events which proceed do so throughout the night that ultimately turns into Friday morning.

III. Thursday-Friday

There are a series of quickly assembled, hurried, nighttime gatherings—hearings in which Jesus participates. In John's gospel, we learn that He is taken firstly and briefly to the home of Annas, the former high priest and father of several sons who took turns being high priest, including Caiaphas the currently reigning high priest. It was Rome who set up and at times overthrew the various high priests. According to Jewish law one was a high priest for life, so this trial or brief hearing before Annas is understandable as an appropriate Jewish gesture to

the one who technically, in their eyes, should still have been reigning as high priest.

A. Trial before Caiaphas

All of the Gospels then describe in varying detail and to varying degrees Jesus' subsequent hearing before Caiaphas the legal high priest in the eyes of Rome. However, there seems to be a considerable discrepancy between Matthew and Mark, who place the account of this hearing during the nighttime, and Luke, who explicitly states that this took place when it became dawn. However, in fact it was illegal by Jewish law to come to a binding verdict in any kind of nighttime hearing and so it is quite plausible that some brief repeat, as it were, of the nighttime hearing did take place in the morning, and Luke chooses to narrate those particular events. In fact, a close reading of Mark 15:1-2 and its parallel in Matthew shows that Mark and Matthew also knew of a brief morning hearing before the Jewish leaders then took Jesus and handed Him over to the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate.

What transpires at these hearings? Even as Peter is denying Jesus three times outside to people no more significant than servant girls, Jesus, by striking contrast, is giving the good confession before those who have the power to turn Him over to be crucified. The question that is finally posed after various false witnesses are brought, who themselves cannot agree on testimony to indict Jesus, is the question: "Are you the Christ, the Son of the living God?" In Mark 14:62, Mark's account of Jesus' answer is described simply as having him say, "Yes, I am." Matthew and Luke put it a bit more euphemistically: "You say that I am."

B. Son of Man

This is probably not a denial but a more literal translation of Jesus' Aramaic words, which were undoubtedly, a veiled affirmative but not an unqualified one, because all of the gospel writers, the Synoptic writers that give an account at this point, go on to say that Jesus qualified or clarified or explained His remarks by saying, "and you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand and coming in the clouds with glory." You see, there were many different kinds of

Mark 15:1

Very early in the morning, the chief priests, with the elders, the teachers of the law, and the whole Sanhedrin, reached a decision. They bound Jesus, led Him away and handed Him over to Pilate.

Mark 14:61b

Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?

Son of God
Messiah
Son of Man



Daniel 7:13-14

In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into His presence. He was given authority, glory, and sovereign power: all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and His kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

Messianic expectations in Jesus' day. Even the title Son of God for some people, particularly at Qumran, meant little more than a Messiah. Neither of these terms necessarily meant, either on Caiaphas' lips or in conventional understanding, a supernatural divine figure who would atone for the sins of the world. And so as Jesus goes on to allude to teaching in Daniel 7, especially verses 13-14, about the ministry of a heavenly Son of Man—one who is prophesied to have the power to come before the Ancient of Days, the very throne room of God Himself, and to receive universal dominion and authority over all of the peoples of the world.

Paradoxically, Jesus, by using this title, Son of Man—one which He has used somewhat more cryptically throughout His ministry—is using a title that for some Jewish listeners would have been more exalted than the titles Christ, Messiah, or Son of God. We may have to revise our popular Christian thinking where so often we associate Son of Man with Jesus' humanity and Son of God with Jesus' deity.

Although there are contexts in the New Testament where these implications appear, in the initial Judaism into which Jesus came Son of Man could actually be a more exalted title—one that more clearly referred to Jesus' divinity than the title Son of God. And it seems that that sequence accounts for the reaction of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish supreme court, to Jesus' words here. It is when He speaks of being the Son of Man, sitting at the right hand of the Father and coming with the clouds of heaven, that the high priest then tears His robes and the court agrees on the charge of blasphemy.

C. Questions about Trial

Now, there are many alleged historical inaccuracies surrounding the trial of Jesus: He was not allowed what we today would call a defense attorney; too much happened at night; proper protocol was not followed in the order of witnesses (even the gospel writers speak of false witnesses being attempted to be subpoenaed); and on the list goes. We should reply to this question of the authenticity of the Gospel accounts in at least two ways. First of all, some of these later laws, written down in the Mishnah near A.D. 200, may not have yet been in force prior to A.D. 70 and the

destruction of the temple and the emergence of Pharisaism as the main branch of Jewish thought.

But it is also important to realize that desperate men may choose to break the law or choose to create a veneer of legality, even while ignoring various details, under desperate or exceptional circumstances. After all, that seems clearly to be what happened with the stoning of Stephen. John's gospel makes it clear that the Jews did not have the right to put someone to death, to inflict capital punishment on them. But what begins in Acts 7 as having a semblance of legality seems to degenerate simply into mob action, and there may be some elements of that here in the trial of Jesus as well. However, all of the details worked out, the Sanhedrin reaches a guilty verdict; and in the morning, when Pilate heard court cases brought to him, they delivered Jesus up to the Roman governor and appealed for His crucifixion.

IV. Friday

A. Jesus before Pilate

Pilate at first seems convinced of Jesus' innocence and tries to find ways to release Him. Ultimately, however, the crowd calls for Barabbas, an insurrectionist—not simply a thief, but one who probably was a zealot or terrorist. There was a Passover custom that one prisoner should be released, and Pilate hopes that he can release Jesus following that custom. The Jewish leaders whip up the crowd who call for Barabbas instead. Ironically, Barabbas in Hebrew means “son of a father.” Jesus, the one who is the true Son of His true heavenly Father, is the one unfortunately who is not released in favor of this other individual. Pilate tries also to get off the hook by sending Jesus to Herod, who happens to be in town for the Passover festival. This is Herod Antipas, the son of Herod the Great, who is ruling in Galilee in those days, the area of jurisdiction for a Galilean like Jesus. We read of this account in Luke's gospel, but Herod is not willing to be the person of final judgment either and passes the buck back to Pilate, who eventually gives in to the crowd to crucify Jesus.

B. Death by Crucifixion

Jesus' death by crucifixion may well be one of the most

**Barabbas =
son of a father**



Seven Sayings:

1. “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”

Luke 23:34

Seven Sayings:

2. “I tell you the truth, today you will be with Me in paradise.”

Luke 23:43

agonizing and ignominious forms of torture and execution that humanity has ever devised. It was usually a long and protracted procedure, occupying two to three days. It was not blood loss that eventually led to the death but the victim’s inability to lift his head up far enough from his chest to breathe; and therefore he would die of suffocation. Jesus actually dies unusually quickly for a crucified victim. Perhaps this is due to the lashes, that scourging or flogging that Pilate had ordered the Roman soldiers to give Jesus previously in hopes that that would satisfy the Jewish leaders. Or perhaps there is a more supernatural or voluntary element to Jesus’ death, since it appears He has the strength to still cry out with a loud voice just before He dies. Perhaps the gospel writers want us to understand that even in the moment of Jesus’ greatest agony He is able to consciously and voluntarily lay down His life.

C. Seven Sayings

The theology of the cross, of Jesus’ time on this torture stake, is also profound; and perhaps as good a way to epitomize it as any in a short survey like this is to focus on what has come to be known as Jesus’ seven last words on the cross, actually referring not to individual words but to the seven sayings that the gospel writers, all four of them, in different places, record. The probable sequence of these seven words and their significance may be as follows:

1. The first words that are recorded from Jesus on the cross show that even in this situation of great agony He is prepared to forgive His accusers, His torturers, His enemies, as He cries out, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they are doing.” We have commented earlier on Jesus’ call to His followers in the Sermon on the Mount to love their enemies, then clearly He exhibits this even under the most extreme and difficult circumstances.
2. Secondly, He turns to one of the thieves or criminals (better translated “rebels” or “insurrectionists”) surrounding Him on the two crosses on either side of Him, who has cried out for remembrance when Jesus comes into His kingdom. Jesus replies, “Truly, today you will be with me in paradise.” As soon as they both die, they can enjoy the presence of God the Father in eternal

Seven Sayings:

3. “Dear woman, here is your son.” . . . “Here is your mother.”

John 19:26-27

4. “My God, my God, why have you forsaken Me?”

Mark 15:34

5. “I am thirsty.”

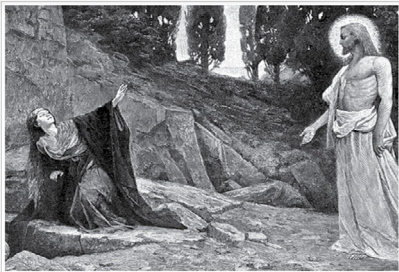
John 19:28

6. “It is finished.”

John 19:30

7. “Father, into your hands I commit My spirit.”

Luke 23:46



bliss.

3. Thirdly, Jesus turns to his mother and to the beloved disciple, the apostle John, and says, “Woman, behold your son. Son, behold your mother”—speaking of both of them in terms of family endearment. Even on the cross He has not forgotten those closest to Him. Many believe that Joseph, Jesus’ adopted father, may well have died by now, and therefore He is calling upon His beloved disciple John to care for Mary, His mother.

4. Fourthly, Jesus cries out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Although theologians wrestle with all of the implications of what it means to bear the sins of the world, this one thing is clear: that Jesus felt some awareness of now being separated from His heavenly Father. The consciousness of oneness and intimacy that He had enjoyed throughout His life was broken.

5. Fifthly, He cries out, “I thirst.” And yet He refuses to drink what was either a painkiller or a poison, anything that would relieve His suffering or speed up the process of His death. And so His statement, “I thirst,” is probably not merely a statement of human anguish but also one of spiritual anguish following His acknowledgment of separation from God.

6. Sixthly, He says, “It is finished”—certainly referring to His life, but again perhaps we are meant to see the whole plan of salvation has now been accomplished.

7. Lastly, He cries out, remarkably, with that well-known Jewish prayer of children, childlike trust in the Father whom He no longer feels is present: “Father, into Thy hands I commit my spirit.”

V. Sunday

A. Resurrection

If that were the end of the story it would be the great tragedy of a great human martyr, but all four Gospels stress that it is not. After death, after the remaining hours of Friday, Saturday and early Sunday morning, with His body lying in



1. Cor. 15:3-6a

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, He appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time . . .

1. Cor. 15:14

And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.

the tomb, He is raised. God raises Him from the dead. There are many who stumble at this part of the Gospel account more than any other, believing it impossible for modern individuals to come to grips with such a miraculous story. And yet the alternatives seem to require even greater faith.

B. Possible Alternatives

Some have argued that Jesus never really died; He simply passed out and revived in the tomb and somehow rolled the huge stone away and convinced His disciples He was in great health. Others claim that the body was stolen. But why then was it never produced? Why, if the disciples were the ones who stole it, were they prepared to die martyrs' deaths for that which they knew was a lie later in their careers. Others claim the women went to the wrong tomb, but then clearly the correct one could later have been pointed out. Others argue for mass hallucination, but the psychology of the disciples, defeated and cowering behind locked doors, is not one which inspires hope leading to visions of a risen Lord.

Most scholars who cannot accept the literal, bodily, physical resurrection, therefore, simply refer to this as a later mythological accretion on top of Christian faith. Yet Paul in 1 Corinthians 15, referring to what was taught to him at the time of his conversion perhaps no more than two years from the events of Jesus' death, already lists a litany of more than 500 witnesses, most of whom are still alive, who can attest to the truth of the resurrection. Supernatural though it may be, the evidence for the resurrection is stronger, more powerful, than for most other normal, ordinary events in history.

C. Significance for Believers

If we are open to the possibility of the supernatural, we must acknowledge this marvelous event; but we must also talk about its significance. The possibility of our life after death, as Paul teaches also in 1 Corinthians 15, is directly dependent on Jesus' resurrection. His resurrection, as it were, was the firstfruits of the general resurrection of all believers, of all of God's people throughout human history (see especially 1 Corinthians 15:14); but also the nature of Christ's resurrection body points forward to the nature of our resurrection body— continuity as well as discontinuity with

our current bodies.

Jesus, in His various resurrection appearances, shows that He is no longer bound by the limitations of the human body. He is able to pass through locked doors; He is able to appear and to disappear, and yet at the same time He makes it clear that it is a real human body. It can be touched, it can be felt, it can eat food. This same combination of completely redeemed and glorified and perfected humanity—the second half of 1 Corinthians 15 (vv. 12-58) teaches—will characterize all believers' future resurrection bodies. So while there are many things that we do not understand about this final and climactic episode in Jesus' life and ministry, we must admit that it is the single most important element. Without the Resurrection, His death could not have been atoning. Without His death, the Resurrection would not have been a real, genuine human event.