

Easter Week Devotional & Bible Study

Devotional

Victory, Preparing for Resurrection Sunday

By Billy Graham

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Bible Study

Passion of Christ

As told by the Gospel of John

John 18:1 – 20:18

Adapted from John: An Introduction and Commentary, Volume 4

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For the fellowship of Yorkshire Church
2020 with revisions in 2021

Greetings! This document represents a daily devotional and Bible Study program for you to undertake during Easter week. *I suggest printing it out to make notes on if you received it through email.* It begins on Palm Sunday and ends on Resurrection or Easter Sunday.

For the Bible Study, I suggest that you read all of John 18 and 19 in one sitting, before you begin the study. Then, beginning on Palm Sunday, start your study by simply reading the day's verses in their entirety from your Bible. When you are done reading that day's passage, leave your Bible handy and as different verses are referenced in the study, take the time to find them in your Bible and read them as well as the verses that lead up to it, and then some after it.

Note: In the Bible Study discussion, the author (Kruse) refers to "the evangelist" in his dialog. Just know that "the evangelist" is John. Also, verses shown in parenthesis without a "Book" referenced, always refer to the Book being studied, in this case, "John." Ex: (13:30) would be (*John* 13:30)

I know the text in the study is sometimes challenging, but I am hoping that you will find it not only challenging, but also enlightening as to the story being portrayed. The text takes nothing away from the Word of God, but provides insight and context to the external situations that were present that the

earliest audiences would have been aware of, but because of our western culture, we would not. I also find the cross references to other scripture passages very valuable and exciting to work through.

Lastly, if you have any questions or would like to discuss this study, please reach out to me and let's do some Bible study!

P.S. Don't forget to take a moment to pray before you jump into the Word to seek the discernment of the Holy Spirit- He's a great help!

Blessings to you during this week of study!

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Devotion for Palm Sunday: READ 1 Corinthians 15:1-10

When I picture Jesus Christ dying on the cross, I see the free gift of God's grace in Christ reconciling to Himself all those who believe and repent. Grace occurs when something we don't deserve is given to us freely. It is the free gift of God to needy men and women. Paul said, "God made him [Christ] who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21). When Christ bore our sin on the cross, He created a value of grace and righteousness that changes the lives of men and women, and it still works today! The truth "that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:3), and that truth alone, has relevance to mankind today. That is because there is saving power in Christ's cross to transform any life and to change the world.

How has the gift of God's grace changed your life? Will you share your story this week so that someone you know can be made alive in Christ?

BIBLE Study for Palm Sunday: READ: John 18:1-11

Jesus is betrayed and arrested in the olive grove (18:1–11)

Following the description of Jesus' Last Supper discourses (13:31–16:33) and his prayer for himself and his disciples (17:1–26), the evangelist (John) provides an account of Jesus' arrest, trials, crucifixion and burial (18:1–19:42).

1–2. The evangelist begins with a comment about the timing of the arrest: *When he had finished praying, Jesus left with his disciples and crossed the Kidron Valley.* The Kidron valley separates the city of Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives.

The evangelist describes the setting of the arrest: *On the other side there was an olive grove, and he and his disciples went into it.* In the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark & Luke) this olive grove is identified as 'a place called Gethsemane' (Matt. 26:36; Mark 14:32). The evangelist adds, *Now Judas, who betrayed him, knew the place, because Jesus had often met there with his disciples.* It is only in the Fourth Gospel we learn that Jesus and his disciples frequented this place, and therefore Judas knew where to find him.

3. Having described the time and setting, the evangelist begins his description of the arrest: *So Judas came to the grove, guiding a detachment of soldiers (speiran) and some officials (hypēretas) from the chief priests and Pharisees.* The NT, including the Fourth Gospel, always uses *speira* for Roman soldiers, and *hypēretēs* is used mostly for Jewish temple

officials. So the chief priests and Pharisees to whom Judas had betrayed Jesus not only sent temple officials to arrest him but asked Pilate for a detachment of Roman soldiers as well. *They were carrying torches, lanterns and weapons.* The torches and lanterns were needed because it was night (13:30), though being Passover time the full moon might have been visible. Weapons were normally carried by Roman soldiers and needed in this case to deal with possible resistance on the part of Jesus or his followers.

4–5. Then the evangelist says, *Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, ‘Who is it you want?’* Here we see Jesus taking the initiative. He was no victim of circumstance. His arrest and subsequent death did not take him by surprise. In fact, he insisted that he would lay down his life of his own accord, and that no-one would take it from him (10:17–18).

To be arrested was a matter of shame, but by taking the initiative himself Jesus showed that he was not accepting the shame. He stepped forward and asked, ‘Who is it you want?’ ‘*Jesus of Nazareth,*’ they replied. ‘*I am he,*’ Jesus said. The words translated ‘Jesus of Nazareth’, literally rendered would be ‘Jesus the Nazarene’, a Nazarene is someone from Nazareth (Matt. 2:23). When the soldiers and temple officials said who they were looking for, Jesus replied, ‘I am he’ (*egō eimi*). This is one of the many uses of *egō eimi* in the Fourth Gospel, construed here by the NIV as having an implied predicate: ‘I am [he]’, by which Jesus simply identifies himself. In parenthesis

the evangelist notes that as this took place, *Judas the traitor was standing there with them*. The evangelist does not include the details of Judas' betrayal of Jesus, either the arrangements made with the chief priests and Pharisees beforehand (Matt. 26:14–16; Mark 14:10–11; Luke 22:3–6) or the kiss with which he identified Jesus for the arresting party (Matt. 26:48–49; Mark 14:44–45; Luke 22:47–48).

6. The response to Jesus' self-identification was dramatic: *When Jesus said, 'I am he,' they drew back and fell to the ground*. In the light of this remarkable reaction, it is possible that Jesus' use of *egō eimi*, as well as being a means of self-identification ('I am he') involved the application of the divine name to himself—a claim to be one with God. Whether or not the Roman soldiers and temple officials understood Jesus' words in this way, it is clear some revelation of his power and authority must have occurred to make them draw back and fall to the ground.

7–9. Jesus took the initiative: *Again he asked them, 'Who is it you want?'* Once more they answered, *Jesus of Nazareth*. Once more Jesus identified himself, *I told you that I am he (egō eimi)*. His authority in this situation was revealed again when he gave orders to the arresting party: *If you are looking for me, then let these men go*. Jesus did not accept the shame of arrest—having his personal liberty curtailed by others. On the contrary, he remained in control. His command to the Roman soldiers and the temple officials with their torches and weapons was, 'let

these men go'. He was referring to the disciples. The evangelist adds, *This happened so that the words he had spoken would be fulfilled: 'I have not lost one of those you gave me.'* In his prayer to the Father for his disciples Jesus said, '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' (17:12; cf. 6:39). The evangelist sees a fulfilment of these words in Jesus' action to prevent the arrest of his disciples.

10–11. Seeing Jesus about to be arrested, *Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant, cutting off his right ear. (The servant's name was Malchus.)* In Luke 22:35–38 we learn that at the Last Supper the disciples had two swords among them, and now the evangelist tells us that Peter stepped forward with one of them to defend his master's honour against the shame of arrest. *Jesus commanded Peter, 'Put your sword away!'* Jesus was not to be shamed by the impending arrest. He had already shown he was in control of the situation. He asked Peter, *Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?* This was an allusion to Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane in which he prayed first that if it were possible the cup of suffering might pass from him, but, above all, that the Father's will might be done (Matt. 26:39; Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42). He did not need his disciples to fight to defend his honour, for he was determined now to 'drink the cup' of suffering.

The other three Gospels also record the fact that one of the disciples cut off the ear of the high priest's servant with a sword (Matt. 26:51; Mark 14:47; Luke 22:49–50), but only the Fourth Gospel names Simon Peter as the disciple who did so, and Luke alone records the fact that Jesus healed the man (Luke 22:51).

Devotion for Monday: READ: 1 Corinthians 15:11-21

As we gaze on a confused and frustrated world, this Scripture comes to mind: “For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe” (1 Corinthians 1:21). The idea of our world being saved by Christ on the cross was foolishness to the proud and boastful Corinthians of the Apostle Paul’s time, who thought that the wisdom of the world was vested in them. And there are many people like them today. But how different it is for those of us who in simple faith know Christ and Him crucified. For us, as the apostle wrote, the cross of Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God. We have been saved by His grace and mercy. We do not deserve it, we did not pay for it, we did not work for it. It has been given to us as a gift. It is by the work of our Lord Jesus Christ on the cross—and by His resurrection—that we can claim any right to the great Kingdom that is yet to come.

When others look at you, do they see the hope that you have in Christ, both for this life and for eternity?

BIBLE Study for Monday: READ John 18:12-18

Jesus taken to Annas (18:12–14)

12–14. Jesus' determination to drink the cup his Father gave him led him to reject the efforts of his disciples to defend him. *Then 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.* 'Commander' translates *chiliarchos*, meaning 'tribune' or 'commander of a thousand', underlining the fact that Roman soldiers were involved, but certainly not their number. After delivering Jesus to Annas they would have returned to their barracks in the Antonia fortress.

Although Caiaphas was high priest that year, they took Jesus first to Caiaphas' father-in-law, Annas. He had been high priest from ad 5 to 15. He was succeeded over time by five sons and by his son-in-law, Caiaphas. While the Romans appointed and replaced the high priests, the Jewish people regarded high priesthood as a life office. While Caiaphas was high priest from ad 18 to 36, Luke, describing John the Baptist's ministry, which took place during Caiaphas' term of office, says it began 'during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas' (Luke 3:2). Annas continued to be regarded as high priest well after his official term of office and continued to function *de facto* as high priest and was regarded as such by many Jews. The evangelist reminds his readers, *Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it would be good if one man died for the people.* This

is a reference back to 11:47–53, where Caiaphas said to members of the Sanhedrin who were at a loss to know what to do about Jesus, ‘You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish’ (11:50).

Peter’s first denial (18:15–18)

15–16a. Following Jesus’ arrest, *Simon Peter and another disciple were following Jesus* as he was led away to Annas the high priest. The other disciple is not identified, but in the only other passage where the evangelist refers to ‘the other disciple’ he is identified as ‘the one Jesus loved’ (20:1–8). The fact that the beloved disciple and Peter are frequently associated with one another supports this identification (13:23–24; 20:3–8; 21:20–22). *Because this disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the high priest’s courtyard, but Peter had to wait outside at the door.* The word ‘known’ (*gnōstos*) denotes not just acquaintance but personal knowledge and friendship (cf. Luke 2:44; 23:49). The ‘other disciple’ must have known the high priest well to gain immediate unchallenged access to the courtyard. It was to Annas’ house (and not the temple) that Jesus was taken, and the ‘courtyard’ would be the atrium of his house. This is confirmed by the description of the doorkeeper as ‘the girl on duty’ (16), rather than a temple official.

If the other disciple was the beloved disciple, and if the beloved disciple is identified as John the son of Zebedee, how do we

account for him, as a Galilean fisherman, being ‘known’ to the high priest? In Jewish society there was not the same division between manual labourers and others as there was in the Hellenistic world (rabbis were expected to have a trade—the apostle Paul was a leather-worker). Someone in the fishing industry could have friends among the chief priests. Also, it should be remembered that Zebedee was prosperous enough to employ hired hands alongside his sons in his fishing business (see Mark 1:20), indicating that the family was reasonably well off.

16b–17. When the other disciple went into the courtyard, Peter was left standing outside, but then *the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, came back, spoke to the girl on duty there and brought Peter in.* This confirms the other disciple was well known in the household of the high priest. As he led Peter in, *the girl at the door asked Peter, ‘You are not one of his disciples, are you?’* The girl’s question is more accurately translated by the nrsv, ‘You are not *also* one of this man’s disciples, are you?’ This implies she knew the other disciple was one of Jesus’ disciples and now asked whether Peter was his disciple as well. It was not necessarily a hostile question. Nevertheless, Peter was thrown off balance. *He replied, ‘I am not.’* Why Peter should deny any association with Jesus at this point is hard to explain. After all, it seems the other disciple was known to be a disciple and was admitted without any problem, and he was the one bringing Peter into the courtyard. Perhaps Peter felt guilty and vulnerable because he had attacked the high

priest's servant with a sword (10). Peter's response was the first of his three denials (17, 25, 27) predicted by Jesus (13:38).

18. After his first denial, Peter was admitted to the courtyard. *It was cold, and the servants and officials stood round a fire they had made to keep warm. Peter also was standing with them, warming himself.* While daytime temperatures during Passover (spring time to March/April) were quite warm, the nights could be cold; hence Peter joined the servants and the officials warming themselves around the charcoal fire.

Devotion for Tuesday: READ 1 Corinthians 15:22-28

Who looks forward to turning on the news these days? All we seem to hear about are problems. People are losing jobs and savings. A person can get depressed listening to it all, and many people are fearful. If you are facing hardship during these tough times, my heart goes out to you. Life isn't always fair or easy. You may feel you do not know where to turn. But one of the Bible's greatest truths is this: God never abandons us when life becomes difficult. He is always with us and wants to help us, even when things seem to be going wrong. He does not guarantee to reverse every misfortune, but if Christ lives in our hearts, we have His promise that nothing "in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:39). What a guarantee! Instead of being fearful about the future, this Easter we can trust and believe that God is working a purpose in our lives. We can have hope!

Despite troubles and bad news, are you able to rejoice in the Gospel—the Good News of your salvation in Christ Jesus?

BIBLE Study for Tuesday: READ John 18:19-27

The high priest questions Jesus (18:19–24)

19. Peter and the other disciple remained in the courtyard. *Meanwhile, the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching.* When he was arrested, Jesus told his captors to let his disciples go, so they were not arrested along with Jesus. The high priest now questioned Jesus about his disciples and also his teaching.

20–21. Jesus did not answer the question about his disciples, but responded to Annas' question about his teaching with a bold riposte: *'I have spoken openly to the world,' Jesus replied. 'I always taught in synagogues or at the temple, where all the Jews come together. I said nothing in secret. Why question me? Ask those who heard me. Surely they know what I said.'* Jesus claimed to have acted in an honourable way, giving his teaching in the public arena openly and boldly. Jesus refused to be cowed by Annas' interrogation. He had nothing to hide. Annas could ask those who heard his public teaching if he wanted to know about it. In fact, this is what he should have done, because, in official proceedings at least, it was not the accused who was interrogated, but the witnesses for and against the accused. Jesus' response, then, appears to have been a rebuke to Annas, for which he had no answer.

22–23. Jesus’ response to Annas’ question was clearly understood as a rebuke: *When Jesus said this, one of the officials near by struck him in the face. ‘Is this the way you answer the high priest?’ he demanded.* This was a counter-challenge accompanied by a slap in the face intended to humiliate Jesus. But once again Jesus refused to be cowed, and challenged the action of the official: *‘If I said something wrong,’ Jesus replied, ‘testify as to what is wrong. But if I spoke the truth, why did you strike me?’* The apostle Paul was later to be struck on the mouth by order of the high priest Ananias, and he responded in much stronger terms, ‘God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! You sit there to judge me according to the law, yet you yourself violate the law by commanding that I be struck!’ However, when challenged for insulting the high priest, Paul acknowledged that he was wrong in speaking evil of the ruler of the people (Acts 23:1–5). Jesus, for his part, did not insult the high priest, but he did challenge the illegality of both the action of his official in striking him and his interrogation of the accused instead of witnesses—there appear to have been no witnesses in this ‘trial’. Jesus demanded an explanation for the actions taken against him.

24. Annas had no answer to Jesus’ challenge to the legality of the treatment meted out to him, and therefore Jesus emerged as the winner in this episode of challenge and riposte—he had not been shamed by Annas or his officials. *Then Annas sent him, still bound, to Caiaphas the high priest.* This appears to be a tacit recognition that they had no case against him.

Peter's second and third denials (18:25–27)

25. The evangelist switches scenes back to the courtyard: *As Simon Peter stood warming himself, he was asked, 'You are not one of his disciples, are you?' He denied it, saying, 'I am not.'* Peter, feeling more threatened, denied for a second time that he was one of Jesus' disciples.

26–27. The third and final challenge to Peter was the most threatening: *One of the high priest's servants, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, challenged him, 'Didn't I see you with him in the olive grove?'* The one who now challenged Peter was not only a member of the arresting party; he was also a relative of the man Peter attacked. *Again Peter denied it, and at that moment a cock began to crow.* In the Gospels of Matthew and Mark we are told when Peter uttered this third denial he swore that he did not know Jesus, invoking curses upon himself if this were not true (Matt. 26:74; Mark 14:71). Despite protestations earlier in the evening that he was prepared to lay down his life for Jesus' sake (13:37), Peter's fear led him to deny him three times, and so fulfilled Jesus' prediction that before the cock crowed Peter would deny him three times (13:38). This was not the end of Peter's discipleship, for following the resurrection he was restored to fellowship with Jesus and recommissioned for service (21:15–17)—an encouragement to all subsequent disciples that their Lord is

willing to forgive, restore and employ them in his service even after the most serious lapses.

Devotion for Wednesday: READ 1 Corinthians 15:29-34

When the devil tempted Jesus, it was a real temptation. He tempted Him to turn stones into bread and feed all the hungry people (see Matthew 4:1–4). Jesus could have done it, but He was here to take people to Heaven, to give them eternal life. And He could do that only by going to the cross and taking their judgment and their Hell. From the cross He was saying, “I love you. I love you, whoever you are.” He would have died on that cross if you had been the only person in the whole world. He loves you. You are important to Him. Outside the influence of the cross there is bitterness, intolerance, ill will, prejudice, hatred, crime, and war. That is why—if the world does not turn to Christ, and Him crucified and raised from the dead—we could see the judgment of God falling upon our world.

Have you met Christ at the foot of the cross, turned from your sins, and put your life completely under His control?

BIBLE Study for Wednesday: READ John 18:28-40

Jesus' trial before Pilate (18:28–40)

This long passage provides, first, the setting for Jesus' trial before Pilate (18:28), and then presents the actual trial in eight scenes in which Pilate repeatedly goes out to talk with 'the Jews' and comes back in to the Praetorium to speak with Jesus (18:29–19:16a).

28. In 18:24 we are told that Jesus was sent bound by Annas to Caiaphas. *Then the Jews led Jesus from Caiaphas to the palace of the Roman governor.* The word translated 'palace' (*praitōrion*) is a Greek transliteration of the Latin (*praetorium*), which was the term used for a military headquarters, or in Pilate's case the residence of the military governor. Pilate normally resided in Caesarea Maritima, but during major Jewish festivals he would take up residence in Jerusalem. *By now it was early morning.* 'Early morning' translates *prōi*, which denoted the fourth watch (3.00 a.m. to 6.00 a.m.) according to the Roman division of the night. If we interpret *prōi* strictly according to the Roman division it would mean that Jesus was brought to Pilate before 6.00 a.m. It was not unusual for Roman governors to begin their duties very early in the morning.

Bringing Jesus to Pilate's praetorium involved problems for 'the Jews': *to avoid ceremonial uncleanness the Jews did not enter the palace; they wanted to be able to eat the Passover.* To enter a Gentile house was believed to cause ritual uncleanness,

which would prevent them eating Passover. Contamination of this sort rendered one unclean for seven days, and would prevent ‘the Jews’ participating in Passover that evening. For this reason they did not enter the palace/praetorium. There is a terrible irony here. ‘The Jews’ were being scrupulously careful not to contract ritual uncleanness, while making themselves guilty of a far worse crime: seeking the death of an innocent man.

29–31. These verses form the first of the eight scenes of the trial: Pilate and ‘the Jews’. Because ‘the Jews’ would not enter the palace, *Pilate came out to them*. He opened proceedings with the formal question *What charges are you bringing against this man?* The whole exchange between Pilate and ‘the Jews’ that followed took the form of challenge and riposte. Pilate’s demand to know what charges they were bringing was met with a riposte from ‘the Jews’: *‘If he were not a criminal,’ they replied, ‘we would not have handed him over to you.’* Apparently they expected Pilate to confirm their decision about Jesus (that he was a criminal) without their advancing any specific charges, and so they answered Pilate in this insolent way. Not accepting their insolent response, and challenging them instead, *Pilate said, ‘Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law.’* In effect he was saying, you have decided in the light of your own law, without any need of my judgment, that he is a criminal, so judge and execute him yourselves. Pilate knew the Jews did not have the authority to do this, and so in

this first exchange he prevailed, as ‘the Jews’ were forced to acknowledge, *we have no right to execute anyone*.

32. Commenting on the inability of ‘the Jews’ to carry out the death penalty, the evangelist says, *This happened so that the words Jesus had spoken indicating the kind of death he was going to die would be fulfilled*. If ‘the Jews’ carried out the execution, it would have been by stoning, but Jesus had already said he was to be ‘lifted up’, a reference to crucifixion (3:14; 8:28; 12:32–33). This would occur only if the death penalty were carried out by the Romans. It may be that ‘the Jews’ wanted Jesus crucified to show he was under the curse of God (Deut. 21:23).

33–38a. These verses form the second trial scene: Pilate and Jesus. *Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, ‘Are you the king of the Jews?’* Up until this point in the narrative no formal charge has been mentioned. Pilate’s question ‘Are you the king of the Jews?’ presumed that ‘the Jews’ had brought the charge of treason against Jesus, i.e. they represented him as a rival to Caesar. Jesus’ response was to ask, *Is that your own idea or did others talk to you about me?* As Jesus was not intimidated by the arresting party (4–9) or by the high priest Annas (20–23), neither was he intimidated by Pilate. Jesus questioned the governor about the source of his information and therefore the nature of kingship he had in mind. Pilate’s first reaction showed his disdain for the Jewish people: *‘Am I a Jew?’ Pilate replied*. Next he pointed out the shameful

situation in which Jesus found himself, shunned by his own people: *It was your people and your chief priests who handed you over to me.* Finally, reflecting a judicial system that presumed guilt rather than innocence, he asked, *What is it you have done?*

Jesus rejected the shame Pilate heaped upon him and the assumption that he had done wrong, and replied, *My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place.* Jesus continued to control the direction of the exchange by returning to the question of kingship and claiming that he did have a kingdom, but not one of this world. In 3:3, 5 Jesus spoke of the kingdom of God to Nicodemus but refused to be made a king by the crowds, following the feeding of the five thousand (6:15). Because his kingdom is not of this world, Jesus rejected the attempt by Peter to prevent his arrest (10–11). His kingdom is ‘from another place’ (lit. ‘not from here’). His kingdom is given by God, not established by human struggle.

Pilate played a reactive role as Jesus continued to determine the direction of their exchange. Seizing upon Jesus’ reference to ‘my kingdom’, Pilate said, *You are a king, then!* If Jesus acknowledged he was a king, Pilate would have something substantial to deal with. Jesus responded directly this time: *You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth.* Here the niv translation obscures the thrust of what Jesus said. Rendered literally it would read, ‘*You say I am a king. I was born and came into the world for this, to bear witness to the*

truth.’ Pilate wanted an acknowledgment from Jesus that he was a claimant to worldly kingship. Jesus refused to be pinned down in this way. Instead, he said he came as a witness to God’s truth, a witness to the coming kingdom of God, and informed Pilate that *Everyone on the side of truth listens to me*. Thus he challenged Pilate to stop listening to the manufactured charges of his accusers and start listening to him. In this exchange of challenge and riposte Jesus emerged as victor and Pilate was reduced to confusion: *‘What is truth?’ Pilate asked*.

38b–40. These verses form the third trial scene: Pilate and ‘the Jews’. Leaving Jesus in the praetorium, Pilate *went out again to the Jews and said, ‘I find no basis for a charge against him.’* This should have been the end of the matter, but Pilate wanted both to release Jesus and to placate ‘the Jews’. He reminded them, *But it is your custom for me to release to you one prisoner at the time of the Passover*. This is the only place we learn of such a custom; there are no extra-biblical references to it. Having come off second best in his preliminary interrogation of Jesus, Pilate was in no frame of mind to be bested by ‘the Jews’. He planned to use the custom of freeing one prisoner at Passover to release Jesus, and chose to needle ‘the Jews’ by asking, *Do you want me to release ‘the king of the Jews’?* The reference to Jesus as ‘the king of the Jews’ would make them angry. Pilate’s plan to use the custom to release Jesus backfired, for *they shouted back, ‘No, not him! Give us Barabbas!’* The evangelist explains, *Now Barabbas had taken part in a rebellion*. In Matthew 27:16 Barabbas is described as a

‘notorious prisoner’ and in Mark 15:7 as one who ‘was in prison with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the uprising’. Pilate probably thought the crowd would choose Jesus over Barabbas, and so he could release Jesus and be finished with the matter. But as Matthew 27:20/Mark 15:11 points out, the chief priests and the elders incited the crowd to ask for Barabbas, not Jesus. This is ironic, for the chief priests and elders had no sympathy for insurrectionists, because they jeopardized the *status quo* with the Romans; yet still they asked for Barabbas instead of Jesus. Having come off second best in this episode of challenge and riposte with ‘the Jews’, Pilate was left with the problem of Jesus.

Devotion for Thursday: READ 1 Corinthians 15:35-43

As we approach the celebration of Good Friday, I'm reminded of the seven sayings of Jesus from the cross and the glory and the power in each saying. Jesus was alone. He had come to His own, and His own did not receive Him. When He was being arrested in the garden of Gethsemane, we are told that "all the disciples deserted him and fled" (Matthew 26:56). The crowds who had so recently shouted, "Hosanna!" would soon shout, "Crucify him! ... Crucify him!" (Matthew 21:9; 27:22–23). Now even His loyal Twelve had left. And at last we hear Him cry out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34). Not only had He been forsaken by His human companions, but now in that desperate and lonely hour, He—because He was bearing our sins in His own body on the cross—had been forsaken by God. Jesus was enduring the suffering and judgment of Hell for you and for me.

How can you show your gratitude to God for allowing His Son to endure the shame and suffering of the cross?

BIBLE Study for Thursday: READ John 19:1-16a

Jesus' trial before Pilate (continued)

19:1–3. These verses form the fourth trial scene: Pilate has Jesus scourged. *Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged.* Flogging was a way of heaping shame upon a person. Flogging by the Romans took one of three forms: *fustes* (a light beating administered as a warning), *flagella* and *verbera* (severe beatings associated with other punishments, e.g. crucifixion). It is difficult to know to which sort of beating the evangelist refers here. It is possible that Pilate ordered a lighter beating (*fustes*) as a warning, hoping it would be enough to satisfy ‘the Jews’, and then he would release him. Luke indicates that this was Pilate’s intention at least at one stage when he has him say to ‘the Jews’ that he will punish Jesus and then release him (Luke 23:16, 22). However, references in Matt. 27:26/Mark 15:15 which say that Pilate had Jesus flogged and handed over to be crucified suggest that Jesus may (also) have been subjected to the severe beating (*verbera*) associated with crucifixion.

Pilate had taunted ‘the Jews’ by referring to Jesus as ‘the king of the Jews’ (18:39), and taking their cue from this, *The soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head. They clothed him in a purple robe and went up to him again and again, saying, ‘Hail, king of the Jews!’ And they struck him in the face.* In these ways they sought to humiliate Jesus and ridicule his claims to have a kingdom. Striking people in the face was another way of shaming them.

4–7. These verses form the fifth trial scene: Pilate and ‘the Jews’. *Once more Pilate came out and said to the Jews, ‘Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no basis for a charge against him.’* Pilate brought Jesus out to the crowd, and publicly declared that he found no basis for a charge against him. *Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe.* Jesus was still wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe the soldiers had put on him to mock him after they had flogged him. He would have been a sorry sight. As he stood there before the crowd, *Pilate said to them, ‘Here is the man!’* (Lat. *Ecce homo!*). It may be that Pilate thought the crowd, having seen that Jesus had been flogged and humiliated, would be satisfied, and then he could release him. However, this was not to be. *As soon as the chief priests and their officials saw him, they shouted, ‘Crucify! Crucify!’* It appears that Pilate was frustrated, but he was not ready to be dictated to by the chief priests and their officials. *Pilate answered, ‘You take him and crucify him. As for me, I find no basis for a charge against him.’* Once again Pilate publicly declared Jesus’ innocence and taunted ‘the Jews’, telling them to crucify him, knowing of course that they could not do so (cf. 18:31). For the moment the Jews had failed in their attempt to have Jesus condemned according to the laws by which the governor worked, so *the Jews insisted, ‘We have a law, and according to that law he must die, because he claimed to be the Son of God.’* This appears to be an echo of the trial before Caiaphas (assumed but not described in this Gospel) in which Jesus was accused of blasphemy (Mark 14:61–64). From the Jewish point of view,

Jesus' claim to be the Son of God was tantamount to a claim to be God, which they regarded as blasphemy, and therefore rendered him liable to death by stoning. Pilate was under no obligation to implement Jewish law, but that Jesus claimed to be the Son of God caused him to reconsider his position.

8–11. These verses form the sixth trial scene: Pilate and Jesus. *When Pilate heard this, he was even more afraid, and he went back inside the palace.* The evangelist implies that Pilate was fearful in his dealings with Jesus, and hearing that he claimed to be the Son of God he became 'even more afraid', wondering perhaps whether the gods had come down to earth in this man whom he had just had flogged (cf. Acts 14:11). Pilate took Jesus with him back into the praetorium. *'Where do you come from?'* he asked Jesus. In the first century a person's identity and honour were closely related to his/her place of origin (as well as family ties). For example, the apostle Paul said of himself, 'I am a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no ordinary city' (Acts 21:39). In seeking to understand Jesus, then, Pilate asked, 'Where do you come from?', wondering perhaps whether he was from heaven, seeing that he claimed to be the Son of God. Readers of the Fourth Gospel know Jesus came down from heaven (see 3:13, 31; 6:33, 38, 41–42, 50–51). To Pilate's consternation, *Jesus gave him no answer.* Normally, to fail to answer a challenge about one's origins was to accept shame, but this does not seem to have been the case with Jesus, for throughout his exchanges with Pilate he called the tune. Perhaps Jesus, having borne his witness to Pilate only to have it set aside

(18:33–38) and then be handed over to be flogged (1), refused to accommodate him further. Pilate interpreted Jesus' silence as a challenge to his authority. *'Do you refuse to speak to me?'* Pilate said. *'Don't you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?'* Pilate reminded Jesus of the powers invested in him by his appointment as procurator of Judea, powers of life and death over provincials like him. *Jesus answered, 'You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above.'* Pilate believed his power originated from the Roman emperor. Humanly speaking, this was true, but Jesus told Pilate that all power comes 'from above', from God. He raises up kings and emperors and deposes them as he wills (cf. Dan. 2:20–21; 4:25, 32). Therefore, Pilate had no power over Jesus, except that given him by God. Jesus recognized that Pilate was carrying out a God-given responsibility (even though he was not doing so with justice and courage), and said to him, *Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin.* It was Caiaphas who handed Jesus over to Pilate (18:28–30) and Jesus said his culpability was greater than Pilate's. It is true that Pilate did not administer justice without fear or favour when Jesus was handed over, but Caiaphas was chief among those responsible for vigorously seeking the death of an innocent man.

12. This verse forms the seventh trial scene: Pilate and 'the Jews'. Hearing Jesus place the greater blame upon 'the Jews' and not on him, *From then on* (lit. 'from this' or 'because of this', referring to what Jesus said about the greater sin), *Pilate*

tried to set Jesus free, but the Jews kept shouting, 'If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar.' This is the second time Pilate sought to release Jesus (cf. 18:38b–40) but once again he was vehemently opposed by 'the Jews'. They shouted that if he released Jesus he would be no 'friend of Caesar'. This title could reflect a political client—patron relationship between Pilate and Tiberius Caesar (*amicus Caesaris*). Pilate's appointment as procurator of Judea was probably a benefice received from Tiberius and he would be required always to act with the honour of his benefactor in mind and deal with any threats to his position. 'The Jews' had brought to Pilate one they claimed was presenting himself as a king, and they reminded Pilate that *Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar*. If Pilate failed to act against one the Jewish hierarchy believed was a threat to the emperor, the suspicions of the paranoid Tiberius could easily be aroused, and Pilate would suffer for it.

13–16a. These verses form the eighth and final scene of the trial: Pilate brings Jesus out and hands him over to be crucified. When 'the Jews' told Pilate that if he released Jesus he was no 'friend of Caesar', they were playing their trump card. There was probably an implied threat: if you release him we will make sure Caesar finds out. *When Pilate heard this, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judge's seat at a place known as the Stone Pavement (which in Aramaic is Gabbatha)*. Taking his place on the judge's seat (*bēma*) signalled he was about to give judgment in the case. The judge's seat was set up on a stone pavement (*lithostrotōs*) outside the praetorium, which in

Aramaic was called ‘Gabbatha’. Many suggestions have been made concerning the meaning of ‘Gabbatha’ (e.g. ‘elevated place’) but we do not know for sure what it meant.

The evangelist notes that *It was the day of Preparation of Passover Week, about the sixth hour* when Pilate brought Jesus out and took his place on the judgment seat. Preparation day was not the day of preparation for Passover but for the sabbath, which followed Passover (cf. Matt. 27:62; Mark 15:42; Luke 23:54). It was a special sabbath because it fell in Passover week.

‘Here is your king,’ Pilate said to the Jews. Pilate was seeking to shame ‘the Jews’ by presenting Jesus as their king for the second time (cf. 18:39). *But they shouted, ‘Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him!’* Jesus suffered the shame of public rejection by his own people as they engaged in challenge and riposte with Pilate. *‘Shall I crucify your king?’ Pilate asked,* presenting Jesus to ‘the Jews’ as their king (cf. 18:39; 19:14). To their everlasting shame *the chief priests answered, ‘We have no king but Caesar.’* In the OT the Lord is the true king of Israel: O Lord, our God, other lords besides you have ruled over us, but your name alone do we honour. (Isa. 26:13)

Jewish people concluded the great Hallel (the recital of Pss. 113–118) with the prayer ‘From everlasting to everlasting thou art God; beside thee we have no king, redeemer, or saviour; no liberator, deliverer, provider; none who takes pity in every time of distress or trouble. We have no king but thee.’ When God gave the Israelites the kings they wanted, they were seen as exercising kingship in the name of the Lord (see 1 Chr. 29:23). For the chief priests to say ‘We have no king but Caesar’ was

both a travesty of the Jewish faith as well as a renunciation of Jesus, their true Messiah. Indeed, 'He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him' (1:11).

In the face of the intransigence of the chief priests, *Finally Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified*. Pilate was not handing Jesus over to the chief priests to carry out the crucifixion. That was done by Roman soldiers (23–24). He was handing him over to the chief priests in the sense that he was yielding to their pressure to have Jesus crucified. As Luke 23:24 has it, 'Pilate decided to grant their demand.'

Devotion for Good Friday: READ 1 Corinthians 15:44-49

Good Friday celebrates the day our Lord died for our sins on the cross. I have often sat by the hour and tried to imagine the agony and suffering He went through because of our sins. At one point He said from the cross, “It is finished” (John 19:30). He meant that God had accepted His work on the cross as the penalty for our sins. Christ’s death on our behalf is the reason God can forgive us and still be just. And His death teaches us the depth and breadth that there should be in our forgiveness of one another. While that holy Friday was tremendous, it was only a prelude to Sunday morning when He was raised from the dead. Godly women had come to see His tomb, but angels made the glorious announcement, “He has risen!” (Luke 24:6). His resurrection guaranteed that we, too, will be raised, if we are believers and obeyers of His Word.

As you celebrate the truth that Jesus came from Heaven to redeem you, are you reflecting His likeness to those around you?

BIBLE Study for Good Friday: READ John 19:16b-27

Jesus is crucified (19:16b–22)

16b–18. After Pilate handed him over to ‘them’ *the soldiers took charge of Jesus*. Four Roman soldiers were commissioned to carry out the crucifixion (23). *Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha)*. Condemned criminals carried the cross beam to the place of crucifixion. Jesus carried his cross at least as far as the gate of the city, where, according to the Synoptic Gospels, Simon from Cyrene, who was coming into the city at the time, was forced to carry it for him (Matt. 27:32/Mark 15:21/Luke 23:26). This gave rise to the tradition that Jesus fell under the weight of the cross because of weakness and loss of blood brought about by the flogging he had received. The execution party made its way towards ‘the place of the Skull’ (Gk. *kranion*, the Aramaic equivalent being *gulgoltâ*, i.e. Golgotha). The site of Golgotha today is to be found in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Gordon’s Calvary near the bus station is not the site, though its appearance may be more like the first-century site of the crucifixion in appearance than what can be seen in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre today. *Here they crucified him, and with him two others—one on each side and Jesus in the middle*. Because his primary focus is upon Jesus, the evangelist says nothing more about the other two. The Synoptic Gospels describe them as

robbers/criminals (Matt. 27:38/Mark 15:27/Luke 23:32), being justly executed for their crimes (Luke 23:39–41).

19–20. In a gesture that was to antagonize the chief priests, *Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross. It read: jesus of nazareth, the king of the jews.* Pilate felt forced, under the implied threat from the chief priests of reporting him to Caesar, to condemn a man he believed was innocent of any capital offence. Now, it seems, he attached this notice to the cross of the condemned man to aggravate the chief priests. Two factors ensured the aggravation. First, *Many of the Jews read this sign, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city.* Jesus was crucified just outside the city of Jerusalem in a place where people would pass by and read the notice. (Although the site of Golgotha, within the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, is inside the walls of Jerusalem today, it was outside the walls of first-century Jerusalem.) Second, *the sign was written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek*, and could therefore be read by all—by Judean Jews, Romans, Jews of the Diaspora and Gentile God-fearers and proselytes.

21–22. Pilate aggravated the chief priests by describing Jesus as ‘the King of the Jews’. Their response was not long coming. *The chief priests of the Jews protested to Pilate, ‘Do*

not write “The King of the Jews”, but that this man claimed to be king of the Jews.’ The chief priests had rejected Jesus as their king, declaring, ‘We have no king but Caesar’ (15), but Pilate was declaring this crucified person to be their king. Having been forced to back down and hand Jesus over for crucifixion under the implied threat from the chief priests that they would report him to Caesar (see commentary on 19:13–16a), Pilate was in no mood to listen to their protest. *Pilate answered, ‘What I have written, I have written.’* He was determined to let the affront stand.

The soldiers divide Jesus’ garments (19:23–24)

23–24. Following the ancient custom that allowed executioners to take the garments of the condemned person as a perquisite, *When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes, dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining.* Jesus’ outer garment was apparently torn along the seams and the cloth divided among the four soldiers. However, they did not tear the undergarment (*chitōn*—a long tunic worn next to the skin) because *This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom.* Seeing the garment was seamless, the soldiers said to one another, *Let’s not tear it. Let’s decide by lot who will get it.* This was a pragmatic action on the part of the soldiers, but the evangelist believed that *This happened that the scripture might be fulfilled which said,*

*‘They divided my garments among them
and cast lots for my clothing.’*

The quotation is from Psalm 22:18 (from which Jesus’ cry of dereliction was also drawn; cf. Matt. 27:46; Mark 15:34). The evangelist includes it here to show that Jesus’ passion and death occurred in accordance with the will of God, something he does repeatedly in this Gospel (2:19–22; 13:18; 19:24, 28, 36, 37). *So this is what the soldiers did.* That Jesus’ clothing was appropriated by the soldiers meant he was left naked, which underlines the extent of humiliation heaped upon him when he was crucified.

Jesus makes provision for his mother (19:25–27)

25. All of the Gospels make mention of the women who stood around the cross of Jesus (25–27; cf. Matt. 27:55–56; Mark 15:40–41; Luke 23:49), but only the Fourth Gospel makes specific mention of the mother of Jesus: *Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.* The niv editors have added the words ‘the wife’ in the phrase ‘Mary the wife of Clopas’. Literally rendered it would read simply, ‘Mary of Clopas’, which could mean that Mary was either the wife or daughter of Clopas. The list of women is then susceptible to three interpretations involving two, three or four women: (1) *two women*, i.e. Jesus’ mother (daughter of Clopas) and her sister

(Mary Magdalene)—unlikely because the two sisters would have the same name (Mary); (2) *three women*, i.e. Jesus' mother, his mother's sister (Mary of Clopas), and Mary Magdalene—again unlikely because the two sisters would have the same name; or the most likely (3) *four women*, comprising two pairs, one unnamed pair (Jesus' mother and her sister) and a named pair (Mary of Clopas and Mary Magdalene). Mary the wife of Clopas appears only here in the NT. Mary Magdalene features prominently in all Gospels, not only at the foot of the cross, but also in the resurrection stories (20:1, 18; cf. Matt. 28:1; Mark 16:1, 9; Luke 24:10), and is described as the one from whom Jesus drove out seven demons (Mark 16:9; Luke 8:2).

26–27. What follows is remarkable. Though experiencing the agonies of crucifixion, *When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing near by, he said to his mother, 'Dear woman, here is your son,' and to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.'* The mother of Jesus appears only twice in the Fourth Gospel: in 2:1–11 at the wedding in Cana and here in 19:25–27 at the foot of the cross. At Cana she demonstrated exemplary faith in Jesus, telling the servants to do whatever he told them. Here we see Jesus, in extremity, acting as an exemplary son, making provision for his mother by entrusting her to the care of the disciple whom he loved. His mother was henceforth to regard this disciple as her son,

and the disciple was to regard her as his mother, thus taking over the responsibility that had belonged to Jesus during his lifetime. The reason why he entrusted her to the beloved disciple instead of one of his own brothers was probably because at that time they did not believe in him as his mother did (7:2–5) and were not present at the crucifixion. The beloved disciple proved to be an exemplary disciple: *From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.* Tradition has it that the beloved disciple, identified as the apostle John, came to live in Ephesus, and accordingly the traditional sites of the tombs of Mary and John are both in Ephesus.

Some see in Jesus' words to the beloved disciple 'Here is your mother' the elevation of Mary as the mother of all disciples, but this goes well beyond the intention of the evangelist, and ignores the significance of the evangelist's final words, 'From that time on, this disciple took her into his home,' which suggest that Jesus' mother was placed in the disciple's care and not *vice versa*.

Devotion for Saturday: READ 1 Corinthians 15:50-54

From Genesis to Revelation, we are warned that “it is later than you think.” Paul writes to Christians in Romans 13:11–12: “The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.” There are millions of people around the world who do not have peace at this moment because they have never found the secret of peace. Some of them may have riches today as a result of greed and covetousness; but their souls are lean, their hearts are cold toward God, their consciences are dulled, and their minds are blinded. They need to know that there is a God of marvelous love who sent His Son Jesus Christ to this world. And as a demonstration of His mercy, Christ—who is the Prince of Peace—went to the cross to make a way for peace between God and mankind.

Are you living in the reality of Jesus’ victory over death? In what tangible ways can you share that victory with others so that they, too, can have life?

BIBLE Study for Saturday: READ John 19:28-42

The death of Jesus (19:28–30)

28. Jesus had taken care of his mother, and *Later, knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, ‘I am thirsty.’* As he hung now upon the cross Jesus knew that he had completed the works God had sent him into the world to do (cf. 4:34; 5:36; 17:4).

The evangelist saw in Jesus’ words ‘I am thirsty’ a fulfilment of something foreshadowed in Scripture. The allusion may be to Psalm 22:15, where the sufferer says:

My strength is dried up like a potsherd,
and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth.

The evangelist cited this psalm earlier in relation to the dividing of Jesus’ clothes among the Roman soldiers (23–24). By drawing attention to the way Scripture was being fulfilled in what took place during Jesus’ crucifixion, the evangelist shows again that all was being accomplished in accordance with the divine plan.

29–30. The evangelist describes the response to Jesus’ thirst: *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.* There may be an allusion here to Psalm 69:21:

They put gall in my food
and gave me vinegar for my thirst.

Wine vinegar was cheap wine for the soldiers, and was probably diluted with water. Most likely it was one of the soldiers who offered Jesus the wine vinegar, an unusually kind gesture suggesting that this soldier might have been the one who later confessed Jesus as the Son of God (Mark 15:39). The wine vinegar was offered to Jesus in a sponge placed on (a stalk of) hyssop (*hyssōpō*). Roman crosses were not tall and the stalk of hyssop, which was weak, would not need to be very long to accomplish the task. Only the Fourth Gospel identifies hyssop; the other Gospels simply refer to a stick (*kalamos*). There may be here an allusion to the hyssop used to daub the lintels and doorposts with blood to protect the Israelites when the angel of death ‘passed over’ at the time of the Exodus, thus connecting Jesus’ death with the death of the Passover lamb.

While Jesus refused the wine mixed with myrrh (which would have deadened somewhat the pain of crucifixion) offered to him on the way to the cross (Matt. 27:34/Mark 15:23), he accepted the wine vinegar offered now. *When he had received the drink, Jesus said, ‘It is finished.’* Earlier, when Jesus knew his work had been completed, he said, ‘I am thirsty’ (28). Now he said, ‘It is finished.’ To understand the significance of these words we need to remember that in Matthew and Mark the offer of wine vinegar followed Jesus’ cry of dereliction, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’ (Matt. 27:46–49; Mark 15:33–37), which signaled the fact that he was bearing in his own person the awful consequences of human sin. When, in the Fourth Gospel, having received the drink, Jesus said, ‘It is finished,’ he was referring, not only to the work of revelation

through word and sign, but also to the great work of redemption. *With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.* In 10:18 Jesus insisted that no-one would take his life from him and that he would lay it down of his own accord, and here he did just that—bowing his head, he gave up his spirit. He had finished the work he came to do. He had given his flesh for the life of the world (6:51), as the good shepherd he had laid down his life for the sheep (10:11, 14), he became the one man who died for the nation (11:50), he was the seed that had fallen into the ground, and would now produce many seeds (12:24), and he had shown the love greater than any other—he had laid down his life for his friends (15:13).

Jesus' side is pierced (19:31–37)

31. What follows Jesus' death is understandable, but deeply ironic. The evangelist first explains, *Now it was the day of Preparation, and the next day was to be a special Sabbath.* Preparation day, as already mentioned, was not the day of preparation for the Passover meal but for the ensuing sabbath (cf. Matt. 27:62; Mark 15:42; Luke 23:54). It was a special sabbath because it fell in Passover week. The evangelist adds, *Because the Jews did not want the bodies left on the crosses during the Sabbath, they asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken down.* According to Deuteronomy 21:22–23, to leave the dead body of an executed man hanging on a tree overnight desecrated the land. 'The Jews' wanted to have the bodies of Jesus and those crucified with him removed before

sunset, which would usher in the sabbath. Breaking the legs of those crucified hastened death by preventing the victims supporting themselves with their legs; the arms alone cannot take the weight for long and the victims soon die of asphyxiation. The irony was that ‘the Jews’, rightly seeking to ensure no desecration of the land, were at the same time desecrating themselves by pursuing to death an innocent man, their true Messiah.

32–34. With orders from Pilate, *The soldiers therefore came and broke the legs of the first man who had been crucified with Jesus, and then those of the other. But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs.* Jesus had already given up his spirit (30), so when the soldiers came to break his legs they found him dead. Instead of breaking his legs, *one of the soldiers pierced Jesus’ side with a spear.* Presumably, the spear thrust was to ensure that Jesus was dead, but the spear penetrated quite a way, *bringing a sudden flow of blood and water.* Medical experts have suggested a couple of explanations for this phenomenon. One is that the spear penetrated Jesus’ heart and the flow was made up of fluid (like water) from the pericardial sac and blood from the heart itself. Another explanation is that severe injury to the chest can result in haemorrhagic fluid gathering between the rib cage and the lung. This can separate into clear serum and red fluid, both of which flow out when the chest cavity is pierced.

35. No matter how we understand the physical explanation for the flow of blood and water, the phenomenon itself was regarded as very important: *The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe.* Here we encounter either a claim to be a truthful witness on the part of the one testifying, or an editorial comment supporting the veracity of the testimony of the one who witnessed this event. His testimony is intended, like the whole of the Gospel (20:31), to engender faith on the part of the reader. It would appear the flow of blood and water was seen as evidence for the reality of Jesus' death, something that was soon to be questioned (cf. 1 John 5:6–8).

Some regard the reference to the blood and water flowing from Jesus' side as an allusion to the sacraments of the Lord's Supper (blood) and baptism (water). While it is easy to see how later Christians might make such a connection, it is more likely that the evangelist mentions the blood and water to emphasize the reality of Jesus' death at a time when this was being questioned.

36–37. Reflecting upon the significance of Jesus' legs not being broken but his side being pierced with a spear instead, the evangelist says, *These things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled: 'Not one of his bones will be broken,' and, as another scripture says, 'They will look on the one they have pierced.'* The first quotation is from Psalm 34:20, with possible allusions to the Passover lamb, whose bones were not to be broken (Exod. 12:46; Num. 9:12). The second quotation is from

Zechariah 12:10, and drawn from a passage that speaks of the mourning of Israel preceding their restoration. The evangelist probably had in mind the last day, when the tribes of the earth will look on the one who was pierced and lament (Rev. 1:7). For the evangelist, the fact that Jesus' sufferings were foreshadowed in the Scriptures shows that all this took place in accordance with the divine plan; it was not simply a terrible miscarriage of justice.

The burial of Jesus (19:38–42)

38. According to Roman custom, the bodies of executed criminals were not buried, but left to be devoured by vultures. The Mishnah indicates that it was Jewish custom to bury criminals' bodies in common graves provided by the Sanhedrin (*Sanhedrin* 6:5). Neither was to be the fate of Jesus' body. *Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jews. With Pilate's permission, he came and took the body away.* Joseph of Arimathea is described elsewhere as 'a rich man' (Matt. 27:57), 'a prominent member of the Council' [Sanhedrin] and one who was 'waiting for the kingdom of God' (Mark 15:43). Only the Fourth Gospel says he was a secret disciple of Jesus, one of those many leaders who believed in Jesus but were afraid to confess him openly lest they be put out of the synagogue (12:42). But that was about to change. When he went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus to give it an honourable burial, this would certainly become known to the

other members of the Sanhedrin, and he would then bear the reproach of being a disciple of Jesus. We cannot be sure why Pilate granted his request. Perhaps it was because Joseph was a prominent member of the Sanhedrin; perhaps because Pilate still felt that Jesus did not deserve to die as a criminal, and therefore his body deserved better treatment than that of a criminal.

39. Only the Fourth Gospel says that Joseph had assistance: *He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds.* Nicodemus was also one of those members of the Sanhedrin (3:1; 12:42) who was a secret disciple. He had come to Jesus at first by night (3:1–15), and then courageously raised a point of law in Jesus' favour in the Sanhedrin (7:50–51). Now, with Joseph, he was making his discipleship public, as together they ensured Jesus' body received an honourable burial. As the Fourth Gospel unfolds, therefore, we see Nicodemus, an influential teacher of Israel, moving gradually but surely from inquiry through tentative support to public confession of faith in Jesus. He functions as another example of the sort of belief that the evangelist hoped his Gospel would evoke in readers.

Nicodemus brought with him a large amount of spices, 'a mixture of myrrh and aloes'. In the OT, myrrh was used as a perfume (Ps. 45:8; Song 3:6; 4:6, 14; 5:1, 5, 13) and as one of the ingredients in the anointing oil produced by the perfumer for use in the tabernacle (Exod. 30:23). Its only other mention

in the NT is for one of the gifts brought to the Christ child by the Magi (Matt. 2:11). While there is no evidence in the Bible for the use of myrrh as a burial perfume, there is in extra-biblical sources (e.g. Herodotus, *History* ii.86). Aloes is mentioned only here in the NT. In the OT, like myrrh, it was used as a perfume (Ps. 45:8; Prov. 7:17; Song 4:14), but there is no mention of its use for burials. Seventy-five pounds of myrrh and aloes is a very large amount, sufficient for a royal burial.

40–42. *Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen.* Joseph and Nicodemus wrapped Jesus' body with strips of linen, applying the mixture of spices as they did so. The evangelist explains, for the benefit of non-Jewish readers, *This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs.* Then he adds, *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.* The mention of a 'new tomb' heightens the sense of the honour being paid to Jesus' body, as did the large amount of spices used. All this served to counteract the humiliation involved in his crucifixion.

The reason for the use of this tomb was quite pragmatic: *Because it was the Jewish day of Preparation and since the tomb was near by, they laid Jesus there.* It was necessary to get Jesus' body into the tomb hastily because evening would usher in the sabbath. Hence a nearby tomb was used. Matthew 27:60 explains that it was Joseph's own new tomb into which Jesus' body was placed.

Devotion for Resurrection Sunday:

READ 1 Corinthians 15:55-58

Easter is a season of great gladness for those who know Christ. But for those who are without “the light of the knowledge of God’s glory” (2 Corinthians 4:6), there is nothing to rejoice over. Jesus left us with the great hope and certainty that He is going to return to bring a new Heaven and a new earth where, we are told, there will be no more sorrow, trouble, or death for those who have believed and followed Him. There will be trouble, sorrow, and suffering for those who have neglected or rejected Him. As Christians, our great task is to obey the command to tell the whole world about Christ crucified, buried, yet risen again. My prayer for you during this season of the year, when we meditate on our Savior’s great sacrifice for us on the cross, is that you will be filled with great peace and hope, because “He is risen!” That is the Good News.

As you follow Christ, are you obeying His command to tell others that He is risen indeed?

BIBLE Study for Resurrection Sunday:

READ John 20:1-18

The morning of the first day of the week (20:1–18)

1–3. Jesus' body was placed in the tomb on the evening of the day of preparation for the sabbath, and it remained there during the sabbath; and then, *Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance.* The passive form of the clause 'the stone had been removed' suggests divine intervention. Seeing the stone removed (and the tomb empty), Mary Magdalene was distraught: *She came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!'* There are earlier references to 'the other disciple' (18:15, 16), but only here he is identified as 'the one Jesus loved' (cf. 13:23; 19:26; 21:7, 20), who, as already mentioned, is traditionally identified with the apostle John. Finding these two disciples, Mary Magdalene expressed her distress: 'we don't know where they have put him'. The first-person plural 'we' suggests Mary Magdalene was not alone in her early morning visit to the tomb, though her companions are not mentioned (cf. Matt. 28:1; Mark 16:1; Luke 24:1). Seeing the tomb empty, she assumed 'they' (probably Jesus' enemies) had taken his body. Stealing bodies from tombs was a serious

offence. Hearing Mary Magdalene's report, *Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb.*

4–5. They set out together: *Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first.* On arrival, the other disciple *bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in.* Jesus' body had been wrapped in strips of linen by Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus (19:40) and placed in the tomb. When the other disciple looked in, all he could see was the strips of linen, but no body. For some reason he did not enter the tomb for closer inspection.

6–7. Peter showed no such reticence: *Then Simon Peter, who was behind him, arrived and went into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen.* No mention is made of the burial cloth in the account of the burial (19:38–41), but it was common to use one for the face of the deceased (11:44). The main point is that the linen strips were just lying there with no body, and the burial cloth was folded by itself, no longer covering the face of Jesus' body. Clearly, the body of Jesus had not been stolen by his enemies, nor removed by his friends. In either case, the linen strips and the burial cloth would not have been removed at the tomb.

8–9. Following Peter's example, *Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside.* When he had a

closer look at the linen strips and the facial burial cloth just lying there without any trace of Jesus' body, *He saw and believed*. This must mean that he believed that Jesus had been raised from the dead, even though, the evangelist adds in parenthesis, *They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead*. It was to take some time before even 'the other disciple' understood that Scripture foreshadowed the resurrection of Christ. According to Luke, the risen Jesus himself opened the eyes of his disciples to understand the Scriptures, i.e. what was written about him 'in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms' (Luke 24:25–27, 44–46).

It is important to note the emphasis John and other NT writers place upon the importance of the empty tomb. For them the resurrection of Jesus was certainly not just 'spiritual' survival after death; it involved a real resurrection of the body.

10–12. The reaction of these two disciples is puzzling: *Then the disciples went back to their homes*. Presumably, Peter did not understand the significance of what he had seen, but the other disciple did understand, yet for some reason kept it largely to himself, though he must surely have told Mary the mother of Jesus whom he had taken into his own home (19:26–27).

Like Peter, Mary Magdalene did not understand the significance of the empty tomb. She was still grief-stricken, so when they returned to their homes, *Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at*

the head and the other at the foot. Mark mentions ‘a young man dressed in a white robe’ (Mark 16:5), Luke refers to ‘two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning’ (Luke 24:4), Matthew speaks of ‘an angel of the Lord’ whose ‘clothes were white as snow’ (Matt. 28:2–3) and John here refers to ‘two angels in white’. The overall impression is of angels in appearance like men stationed at the place where Jesus’ body had lain, the first at one end of the rock ledge in the tomb where the head of Jesus’ body had been, the second at the other end where the feet had been. The presence of angels at the tomb testifies to the fact that the disappearance of Jesus’ body has been caused by divine, not human, intervention.

13. The two angels asked Mary, *Woman, why are you crying?* Mary, not yet understanding the significance of the empty tomb, replied, *They have taken my Lord away, and I don’t know where they have put him.* She had already spoken to Peter and the other disciple, and clearly they knew nothing about any of Jesus’ disciples removing the body. This confirms that the ‘they’ she supposed had removed the body must be Jesus’ enemies; hence the compounding of her grief. The other Gospels say that Mary (with others) came with spices to anoint Jesus’ body (Mark 16:1; Luke 23:56; 24:1), doing what was expected to honour him and at the same time to express grief. But even this activity had been denied her by what she supposed was the removal of his body by enemies.

14. Having said this, and apparently aware there was now someone outside the tomb, *she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.* Perhaps she did not immediately recognize him because her eyes were filled with tears, and the last person she expected to see was Jesus, and so she did not realize it was him, or perhaps there was something about Jesus' resurrection body that hindered immediate recognition.

15. Jesus addressed Mary Magdalene, '*Woman,*' he said, '*why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?*' Still she did not recognize him, and *thinking he was the gardener, she said, 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.'* Now she wondered whether this 'gardener' had removed Jesus' body from its garden tomb, and not his enemies. She wanted to know where he had put it so she could ensure that it received a proper burial. This suggests, as Luke 8:2–3 confirms, that Mary Magdalene was a woman of substance.

16–17. In response, *Jesus said to her, 'Mary.'* Once she heard him utter her name she recognized him immediately. The shepherd had called his sheep by name and she recognized his voice (cf. 10:3–4). *She turned towards him and cried out in Aramaic, 'Rabboni!'* The only other place in the NT where the expression 'Rabboni' is found is Mark 10:51, where blind Bartimaeus says to Jesus, 'Rabboni, I want to see.' The

evangelist explains for readers who do not speak Aramaic that ‘Rabboni’ *means Teacher*.

Jesus’ next words to Mary Magdalene are difficult to understand. *Jesus said, ‘Do not hold on to me’*. Why should Jesus not want Mary Magdalene to touch him? It is unlikely that it was a rejection of natural affection. Prior to his death and resurrection Jesus showed no reticence about being touched or receiving affection. He allowed Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, to anoint his feet with perfume and wipe them with her hair (12:3). After his resurrection he encouraged Thomas to put his finger in the nail prints in his hands and his hand into the spear wound in his side (27). In Matthew 28:9, when Jesus met Mary Magdalene and ‘the other Mary’, he did not discourage them when they ‘clasped his feet and worshipped him’.

The reason Jesus gave Mary Magdalene for not touching him on this occasion was, *for I have not yet returned to the Father*. Two related things beg explanation: what did Jesus mean here by saying he had not yet returned to the Father, and why was that a reason for Mary Magdalene not to touch him? In his farewell discourse Jesus spoke repeatedly of his return to the Father (13:1, 3; 14:28; 16:17, 28; 17:1, 5, 11) and this invariably meant his return to the Father’s presence through death, resurrection and exaltation. Now, after his death and resurrection, Jesus said, ‘I have not yet returned to the Father,’ meaning apparently that he had not yet finally left this world in which he was appearing to his disciples to return to the Father.

Why was this a reason for Mary not to touch him? Perhaps the reason is to be found in the next thing Jesus said to her: *Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'* Mary Magdalene had an immediate task to perform. She had to inform Jesus' 'brothers', i.e. Jesus' disciples (cf. 20:18), that he was now returning to the Father. This was not a time to be dwelling in Jesus' presence, touching or holding him; there was a job to do. When Jesus said, 'I am returning to my Father,' it did not mean he was at that precise moment actually departing to the Father, but rather that the process of his return to the Father was under way. In fact, that process began with the betrayal and continued through the cross and resurrection and would culminate in his exaltation.

By referring to God as 'my Father and your Father' Jesus not only implied some distinction between his relationship with the Father and his disciples' relationship with the Father, but also included them with himself as children of God.

18. Accepting the commission Jesus gave her, *Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: 'I have seen the Lord!' And she told them that he had said these things to her.* She told them first the amazing news that she had seen the Lord, and then communicated his message to them. In the course of just a few verses (11–18), the evangelist has chronicled Mary Magdalene's movement from grief to joyous belief. The evangelist does not say how the disciples received her message,

but according to Mark 16:10–11/Luke 24:9–11 they regarded it as an idle tale.¹

¹ Kruse, C. G. (2003). [*John: an introduction and commentary*](#) (Vol. 4, pp. 343–373). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.