



Man of Sorrows

A Collection of Easter Devotionals by Redeemer



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“For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures...”

I Corinthians 15:3-4

I

Pierced for Our Transgressions

by Connor Francis

Isaiah 52 is a powerful passage with a powerful promise. God tells His people to wake up, to be ready and prepared, for the day when Jerusalem will no longer be bound. Soon the people will be redeemed without money (Isaiah 52:1–3). No earthly creation or possession will be used to redeem God’s people from bondage. Even though the people sinned, God resolved to bring salvation to them.

Break forth together into singing,
you waste places of Jerusalem,
for the Lord has comforted his people;
he has redeemed Jerusalem.

Isaiah 52:9

What an amazing thing! We are able to sing, knowing that God has redeemed us, and we know that He is a God who comforts us. We celebrate redemption because of the righteousness imparted to us by Christ, but this salvation came through a story of pain. To understand how joy can come out of this sorrow, you first need to see the problem. The joy in this message is found first in knowing our need for salvation. Mankind is lost, and it has been for a long time. Yet God appeals to us from the very beginning to make us aware, one might say to wake us up, from our state of ignorance. He asks Adam a

pivotal question in Genesis 3, “Where are you?” This showed Adam that he was indeed lost.

Once we know that we are lost, we can realize what the word redeemed actually means. Compensation or payment must be made to bring us back from our sin. God established that redemption wouldn’t happen through money or earthly possessions, instead God would make the payment Himself, since only someone outside of sin has the ability to rescue someone who is still in sin. Redemption is more than just a transaction; it is an act of love and mercy. This is Jesus’ story: the suffering servant who did not sin.

He was despised and rejected by men,
a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;
and as one from whom men hide their faces
he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

Isaiah 53:3

God allowed Himself to suffer for His people. Jesus makes it very clear that if He appealed to the Father, legions of angels would be sent to protect Him. However, He had resolved to follow the Father’s will, bring salvation, fulfill the Scriptures, and die for His people. Even though He was despised, He still was set to prove His love.

Later in the passage, we learn even more from how Jesus acted in the face of suffering. Isaiah 53:7 says, “like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.” Jesus tells us to love our enemies, and here He lives out that command. In love, Christ allowed them to torment and crucify Him. His life was marked by His ministry and love as He forgave and healed sinners in their fallen condition. Yet fallen humanity did not esteem Him when they saw Him, because they sought to take the inheritance for themselves (Luke 20:9–19). It is eye-opening for us to consider that our sin was the cause of the grievance that required justice, but God undertook the weight of His wrath in place of those who claim Christ’s name. God’s nature in being absolutely just and absolutely merciful is shown perfectly in this act.

Even during this suffering, the Father also provided for the Son in their

perfect love. Jesus knew the Scriptures and that He must die, but He also knew the assurance that was in them as well. Have you ever considered the security and reassurance the Father provided the Son through the words of Isaiah?

Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many,
and he shall divide the spoil with the strong,
because he poured out his soul to death
and was numbered with the transgressors;
yet he bore the sin of many,
and makes intercession for the transgressors.

Isaiah 53:12

The Father assures that the Son will have a portion and be the ultimate victor, because He poured out His soul unto death. Jesus' assurance in the Father's words was the reason He had the resolve to set His eyes on Jerusalem, even knowing the coming dread He would have to bear. No matter the suffering, it was only a step toward the glory to come.

This also remains true for us today. Suffering is only a step before the coming age of peace, when we finally get to be in the presence of God. Paul writes a very simple phrase in Philippians 1, stating, "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain," meaning that continuing to live is continued labor for the kingdom, and to pass away is to pass into God's glory. This assurance remains for us today too, knowing that a continued life is continued ministry, and the loss of earthly life is actually the gain of heavenly life.

So take heart when you face trials! God is still working His will to this day. Do not try to take control, because you are only building anxiety for yourself. His will cannot be hindered, so trust in the same way Jesus did—have the assurance of hope and the resolve to work for the kingdom.

Remember that the promise has already been fulfilled. If you stumble, do not fear that you are too sinful for God to save. God came to save the lost, not the people who believe they are perfect. You cannot be perfect on earth, and that statement is reaffirmed by this story—if we could become perfect and rid ourselves of sin, why must Jesus have suffered? When you fall down, wipe the dirt off and look forward again. If you have Christ, you are no longer dead, dry

ground, but have been imparted the righteousness that allows growth like a plant springing out of it (Isaiah 53:2).

Isaiah laid out the full story of Jesus around 700 years before He was born. For us, the promise has already been fulfilled, but the story still serves two purposes.

First, if you are reading this and do not have faith in Jesus Christ, then this passage is a warning. God's wrath is on full display, and you can see that judgment is absolute. Jesus did not suffer lightly, but rather, He endured ultimate punishment ending in death. This warning is for sinners to know that judgment will come, but if you have faith in Jesus, He will take your place and impart righteousness to you instead.

Secondly, If you do have faith in Jesus Christ, then it is an assurance. You do not have to hold any worry because death has been defeated, God is still working His will, and your suffering will come to an end. When we stumble, God is still sovereign. His resolve was salvation for us then, and His resolve is still salvation for us now.

This is a fantastic promise, sealed by an all-powerful God. Jesus holds all authority and dominion, which includes both the easy and hard times you might be facing right now. God's intricate plan, from prophecies to fruition, was for His glory and our benefit.

●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●● **Questions for Reflection** ●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●

- *How does Isaiah 52 and 53 deepen our understanding of Christ's suffering?*
- *Why is it comforting to know that the Father strengthened the Son even in the midst of suffering?*
- *How does Christ's resolve in the face of suffering call us to respond to our trials and temptations??*

2

Jesus in the Garden

by Austin DeArmond

The account of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane is mentioned in the each of the four gospels in Matthew 26:36–46, Mark 14:32–42, Luke 22:39–46, and John 18:1–11. What I want to do is draw together some of the themes in the three synoptic accounts under five headings that start with “S” (like a good Baptist!). What do we see within this story?

His Sorrow

First, we see the deep sorrow of our Savior. This passage truly highlights the humanity of Jesus in ways that few other accounts accomplish. The writers highlight Jesus’ distress both by showing us and by telling us. Matthew says Jesus “...began to be sorrowful and troubled” in verse 37. Mark amplifies the description, saying He was “greatly” distressed (v. 33). Jesus cries out in dreadful desperation that His soul is very sorrowful, even to the point of death (Matt. 26:38; Mark 14:34). He does not sit quietly or serenely in prayer but “falls on his face” (Matt. 26:39; Mark 14:35). What is coming is so terrible, so horrendous, and so revolting that it causes the Lord great torment within His soul. He feels as though it is a flood that will quite possibly drown Him. He literally feels so burdened by what is coming that He is going to die. Luke the physician tells us that the suffering within even produces a physical manifestation in His body:

“And being in agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground” (Luke 22:44). Jesus is not pictured as some stoic rock, unaffected by what is coming. He is not a martyr unflinchingly facing His demise with a smile or a smirk. He deeply feels the pain of what is coming. It debilitates Him.

His Substitution

What exactly is Jesus so pained about? Is it the physical experience of Roman crucifixion, a torture method they had perfected to create prolonged torment? Is it the fact that His friends and closest loved ones will abandon Him in His greatest time of need (Matt. 26:56)? Is it the experience of feeling the psychological effects of sin within and upon His unstained soul and body (Isa. 53:6, 12; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet. 2:24)? I think all of that weighs heavily upon Jesus, but Matthew, Mark, and Luke all tell us that Jesus prays for the removal of the cup (Matt. 26:39; Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42). The cup is what is most daunting and damning. The cup is a well-known metaphor for God’s wrath poured out upon others (Pss. 11:6; 60:3; 75:8; Isa. 51:17–23; Jer. 25:15–29; 49:12; 51:57; Lam. 4:21; Ezek. 23:31–34; Hab. 2:16; Zech. 12:2). The staggering cup is mixed with the wine of God’s holy and just displeasure against human sin and wickedness. Those who drink it become drunk on His wrath and stumble into judgment. Jesus is not simply wincing at the variegated physical and psychological pains of His end. He is painfully aware that He goes forth as a substitute, ready to stand in the gap for His beloved people and take the wrath they so justly deserve. He will not leave that piece of wood until the last drop is emptied from the cup.

His Submission

How does Jesus respond in the garden? “...nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will” (Matt. 26:39), and “My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done” (Matt. 26:42). Courage is often described as doing the right thing no matter the cost, no matter what you feel, and no matter the outcome. Is this not the greatest example of courage and submission in human history? He could have ended it all and called a legion of angels to His side to defeat His

earthly enemies (Matt. 26:53–54). In the end, Jesus submits to the plan of God, resulting in our very salvation. He stays. His soul is sorrowful even unto death, but He loves us to death and stays.

His Sustenance

What sustains Him in this garden? I see three things. First, Jesus' intimate relationship with the Father upholds Him. Mark's Gospel tells us that He prays, "Abba, Father," in the garden called the oil press (Mark 14:36). Luke reminds us that it was Jesus' custom (Luke 22:39) to go spend time with God the Father. Before the cross, Jesus prays. This sustains Him. Second, Scripture is on the very lips of Jesus throughout the whole horrid ordeal of His crucifixion, especially Psalm 22. The language of His grieving soul comes from the righteous sufferer in Psalms 42 and 43. Jesus is praying the lament Psalms in the garden. Third, Luke tells us that an angel appears to Him and strengthens Him (Luke 22:43). Relationship, revelation, and a rightly timed angelic messenger sustain Jesus.

Their Sleeping

Throughout the three accounts, one thing is clear—the disciples fail their Lord and Friend. Jesus brings the inner three into the garden so they can "remain and watch with me" (Matt. 26:38; Mark 14:34). In His greatest time of need, what does He need? Watchful disciples who remain with Him in prayer. He instead finds sleeping disciples. Jesus says, "Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." Three times He goes back and forth and finds His disciples failing to keep watch, both physically and spiritually. Mark records their embarrassment, saying, "...they did not know what to answer him" (Mark 14:40). Only Luke humanizes the disciples, saying that He "...found them sleeping for sorrow" (Luke 22:45). We often think of the disciples as uncaring, unmoved, and unaffected, but perhaps they are so bone-deep grieved as well that sleep offers them the only relief they can imagine. Regardless, we see the disciples failing their Friend in His time of need.

What do we do with such a passage? Again, permit me five words of encouragement that begin with the letter “S.”

Security

Because Jesus dies in your place, you are eternally secure. No power of hell, no scheme of man, can ever pluck you from His hand. Why? Because His hands hold the cup to His lips until the very last bitter drop is swallowed. Hebrews 12 describes this moment as joy-creating for Jesus: “...who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross...” (Heb. 12:2). The joy is obviously the joy of submission and glorifying God, but also the joy of what this moment will do for His people. His people are His inheritance (John 17:6, 9, 12, 24). They are forever His. They are eternally safe.

Supplication

We ought to pray, but also rest in God’s infinite goodness and wisdom. If we knew what He knows, we would make the same decisions that He makes every single time. Moreover, having our prayers unanswered aligns us with Jesus Himself, who prayed before the cross in Gethsemane, “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done” (Luke 22:42). Can you imagine the fallout for us had Jesus’ prayer been answered and the cup been removed? The good of the cross would never have come to fruition. We would have been utterly ruined had Jesus gotten His request answered on the front end. Our prerogative is to pray, and His is to answer. We have preferences, but He has plans.

Stand

How quickly we give in to temptation and roll over into sin! Gethsemane calls us to remain here, watch with Jesus, pray, and fight temptation. To the degree that I am watchful, vigilant, and prayerful, I have greater victory over my besetting sins. When I am sluggish and spiritually lazy, the Enemy easily ensnares me as if I am a sitting duck. Fight for your relationship with the Lord as you

seek to honor Him. In gratitude and joy over the fact that He took your cup of wrath, seek to resist and fight your temptations daily until you see His face.

Strength

Jesus said to Satan, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4). Elsewhere He said, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work” (John 4:34). Our strength as disciples flows from the same source: the Word and will of God. In the crucible of suffering and loss, suffering Christians find that their need for sound theology and doctrine becomes urgent and profound. Why? Because the great truths of Scripture comfort, console, and sustain the believer as they are tested in this dark world. You need your best theology in your darkest night. You need deep truths when the waves are fiercest. Do you want strength? Get in the Word of God and swim in it like Jesus did, so it naturally flows out of you during your trials.

Surrender

Jesus died not so we do not have to, but to teach us how to. “A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master.” We too have our crosses to pick up. We too have our gardens of Gethsemane. We too need to submit to the wise plan of God. We draw back, thinking that surrendering is too dangerous. Elisabeth Elliot, who knew suffering all too well herself, encourages us here:

“With what misgivings we turn over our lives to God, imagining somehow that we are about to lose everything that matters. Our hesitancy is like that of a tiny shell on the seashore, afraid to give up the teaspoon of water it holds lest there not be enough in the ocean to fill it again. Lose your life, said Jesus, and you will find it. Give up, and I will give you all. Can the shell imagine the depth and plenitude of the ocean? Can you and I fathom the riches, the fullness, of God’s Love?”

Surrendering to the Lord is the very essence of discipleship. He can be trusted. Even if the cup is bitter, the Lord’s kindness remains sweet.

3

Arrest and Betrayal

by Thomas Newman

Have you ever wondered why God allows suffering? Or, to put it more bluntly: if a good God exists, why is the world so broken? We have all experienced suffering. We know that it is real, it is deeply personal, and for many, it remains the greatest barrier to faith. The logic of the skeptic often goes like this:

- If God is all-powerful, He could stop suffering.
- If God is all-good, He would want to stop suffering.
- Since suffering exists, God must either be weak, cruel, or non-existent.

The Bible is not a book that avoids the topic of pain. From Job losing his children to Ruth losing her husband, from Joseph's betrayal by his own flesh and blood to the Psalmist crying out in Psalm 88, "Darkness has become my only companion." Scripture is soaked in tears. Even Moses, the great deliverer, once begged God to take his life as an act of compassion because the burden of leadership was too heavy to bear.

Perhaps you find your own story in those pages today. Maybe you are facing a chronic illness, mourning a loss, or feeling the crushing weight of financial uncertainty. In those moments, it seems like God is not in control.

But consider this: after the Last Supper, Jesus leads His disciples to the Garden of Gethsemane. John includes an interesting detail: "Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place." Jesus went willingly to the very spot where He knew His betrayer would find Him. In other words, even when it seems like God is not in control, He is.

When the arrest party arrives—a "cohort" of potentially 500 soldiers—Jesus

does not hide. He steps forward and asks, “Whom do you seek?” When they answer, He says, “I AM HE.” At the sound of the divine name—the same name that God gave to Moses at the burning bush—the entire crowd falls to the ground.

The One who had the power to knock 500 men to the ground with three words allowed Himself to be bound. Sometimes, it does not look like God is all-powerful when He really is. Throughout the trials, the beatings, and the mockery, Jesus remained sovereign over all. When Pilate claimed to have the power to crucify Him, Jesus corrected him by saying, “You would have no power over me at all unless it had been given you from above” (John 19:11).

God is always in control. It is no coincidence that the climax of this story takes place in a garden. To understand our suffering, we have to look back at the first garden—Eden. In Eden, man’s rebellion brought the curse: the reality of cancer, pandemics, and death. But in Eden, God also made a promise: the “seed of the woman” would one day come to crush the head of the serpent. Gethsemane is the fulfillment of that promise.

In this second garden, we see the supreme goodness of God on display. Even as the soldiers approach, Jesus is thinking of others. He tells the guards, “If you seek me, let these men go” (John 18:8). He protects His disciples while surrendering Himself. When Peter, in a fit of misplaced zeal, cuts off the ear of Malchus, Jesus reaches out and heals His enemy. This is the heart of the gospel: while we were yet enemies, Christ died for us.

The high priest Caiaphas unknowingly prophesied the central truth of the gospel when he said, “It is better that one man die for the people.” He meant it as a political maneuver to appease Rome, but God meant it as a substitution for sin. Jesus took the cup of suffering—the cup of the curse from the first garden—and drank it so that we would not have to.

If you are suffering today, you might be tempted to think, “God must not love me.” But, Christian, the cross is the proof of God’s love for you. Horatio Spafford knew this love well. In 1871, Spafford lost his fortune and his young son in the Great Chicago Fire. Hoping to find rest, he sent his wife and four daughters ahead of him on a ship to England. Halfway across the Atlantic Ocean, their ship collided with another and sank. Tragically, all four of his daughters died. His wife, Anna, survived and sent the famous, heartbreaking

telegram: “Saved alone. What shall I do?”

As Spafford sailed across the same waters to reach his grieving wife, the captain called him to the deck to point out the spot where his daughters had drowned. It was in that place of profound sadness that Spafford wrote the lyrics of the song, “It Is Well.”

When peace like a river attendeth my way
When sorrows like sea billows roll
Whatever my lot Thou hast taught me to say
It is well, it is well, with my soul.

What allowed Spafford to say, “It is well,” in the midst of such tragedy? It was the third verse of that hymn:

My sin, oh, the bliss of this glorious thought!
My sin, not in part but the whole,
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!

What comforted Horatio Spafford most in the midst of his suffering? It was the cross. Spafford realized that the worst thing that could ever happen—our eternal separation from God—had been dealt with at Calvary.

On this Good Friday, let us look to the cross. Let the wounds of Jesus remind you that you are not forgotten. Because He was pierced for our transgressions, we can have a peace that passes all understanding. And because He was crushed for our iniquities, we can have a hope that the grave cannot hold.

..... Questions for Reflection

- *Why is it important that Jesus went knowingly and willingly to the place of His betrayal?*
- *In what ways are we tempted to conclude that God is not in control simply because we cannot see what He is doing?*

4

The Trial of Jesus

by Howard Hornsby

Following Jesus' betrayal and arrest at Gethsemane, the council of Pharisees and chief priests brought Him before them in order to carry out the prearranged punishment they desired: His death. Merriam-Webster defines a kangaroo court as either a mock court in which the principles of law and justice are disregarded or perverted. Another definition calls it a court characterized by irresponsible, unauthorized, or irregular status or procedures.

Both definitions fit this council's proceedings well. At this point in history, given Christ's popularity with the people of Jerusalem, securing His conviction in such a "court" would have been a risky proposition. The council would have had to pull out all the stops to make it succeed, because failure without the support of the ordinary citizens of Jerusalem could have led to serious consequences for them.

This is because Rome was always quick to snuff out rebellions, and they were even quicker to put an end to a riotous people. So, with the people of Jerusalem leaning toward the riotous, this would have been especially important.

The council, and Rome, would have been all too aware that Jesus had come into town. They would have known about His triumphal entry into Jerusalem just a few days earlier. In other words, they would have been very motivated to:

- Stop at no cost to see their wishes through to the end.
- Stop the crowds following our Lord.
- Stop Rome from wanting to wipe their nation out.
- Stop Rome from holding the council responsible for not controlling the people of Jerusalem

So, knowing that the people of Jerusalem had just celebrated Jesus' entry into town, the council was left with a simple task that would give them their desired result: arrest Christ and frame Him so they could hand Him over to Rome and have Him murdered. But actually accomplishing this would be no small feat. They would have had to convince the Romans that this was in their best interest. So how would they achieve such a change of heart in the people mere days after Christ's triumphant entry into town? They had to follow the Law of Moses, or at least make a good attempt at acting as though they followed the Law of Moses.

In Deuteronomy 19, there are very specific directions concerning court proceedings. First, there must be two or three witnesses to the accused's wrongdoing. These witnesses must agree. If they did not agree, there would be no case, and then

“...the judges shall inquire diligently, and if the witness is a false witness and has accused his brother falsely, then you shall do to him as he had meant to do to his brother. So you shall purge the evil from your midst.”

So, the first failing of the council was that these witnesses should have been judged by the council. Then, if they proved to be false witnesses, they should have had to suffer the same fate they intended for the accused, in this case: death.

But the second and more sinister failing of the council was that, despite their failure with the witnesses, they did not give up. They just brought witness after witness in for failure after failure, all the while remaining defiant about actually following the Law of Moses. After all, they could not possibly allow such minor details to interfere with their plan of having Jesus stopped at any cost.

Then they finally found someone to testify that Jesus had said He would destroy and rebuild the temple in three days. This witness perverted what He said in John 2:19: “Jesus answered them, ‘Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.’” Jesus told the leaders of the temple this the first time He cleansed the temple, so they likely all remembered it when this eyewitness offered false testimony. Yet, even with all of these false witnesses, and even with

the exaggeration of the things He said, Christ quietly remained faithful to the Word of God:

“He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth” (Isaiah 53:7).

So, growing tired of their failures, they presented the one question that Jesus would answer, even though the answer would have grave consequences:

“Are you the Christ, the Son of God?”

“And Jesus said, ‘I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.’”

This is chaos erupts. The beginning of the end for Jesus, or at least what the council thought. Jesus’ life had led Him to this place at this time, and, knowing the cost that lay before Him (Hebrews 12:2), He chose to endure the wrath for our sins. He knew that “by oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people?” (Isaiah 53:8).

This path was not easy. Jesus had to refrain from defending Himself in order to keep His word. He knew He was about to be “cut off out of the land of the living.” Yet He still bore our shame. This path cost our Savior His comfort, His dignity, His life, and, for the first and only time in all eternity, it momentarily cost Him the loving gaze of His Father. Unfortunately for our Savior, this time before the council was just the beginning of the most horrible death sentence He could be given. But He counted it all as joy. This was the price He would pay for His bride, and, just like any other bridegroom, He willingly paid it all for her with joy.

For us, though, unlike His disciples, we know the outcome of this council’s plans. We know how God, in His infinite wisdom and sovereignty, bent the wills of men to see His plan carried out. When we read the full account of the Passion story in God’s Word, we are reminded that our sin put Him there. We should then mourn our sin for causing our Savior to be struck, spat on,

tormented, and ultimately killed. Christ's death, burial, and resurrection make the way for us to know the Father and experience the riches of His grace now because of what Christ endured at Golgotha.

This kangaroo court was the beginning of our King's glorious march to Calvary, where He bore our sin and shame, defeating death, hell, and the grave. This is where He made a path for any who would confess with their "mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved."

So, this Easter season, let us remember to share the truth with the lost. Our Savior experienced not just the shame of a false trial, the betrayal of His friends, the torment of the scourge, the agony of the cross, and the loss of His Father's gaze, but He did all of this because...

"the Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

He desires to see all come to repentance. Let us share that truth with the world this Easter season.

5

Jesus and Pilate

by Andy Thaxton

Pilate then called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people, and said to them, “You brought me this man as one who was misleading the people. And after examining him before you, behold, I did not find this man guilty of any of your charges against him. Neither did Herod, for he sent him back to us. Look, nothing deserving death has been done by him. I will therefore punish and release him.” (Luke 23:13-16)

I have long considered this to be one of the most tragic, yet sobering, scenes in all of Scripture. If you’ve been around the Christian faith for even a short time, you know it well. Pontius Pilate, the first-century Roman prefect of Judea, found himself centerstage in history’s greatest drama: the trial and crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth. Standing there in the cold halls of his praetorium, Pilate was face to face with the very embodiment of truth and righteousness, yet he missed it. He interrogated Jesus, questioned His kingship, and even admitted, “I find no guilt in him.” But ultimately, we read that the crowd’s cries of “Crucify him!” proved too strong.

But they all cried out together, “Away with this man, and release to us Barabbas”— a man who had been thrown into prison for an insurrection started in the city and for murder. Pilate addressed them once more, desiring to release Jesus, but they kept shouting, “Crucify, crucify him!” A third time he said to them, “Why? What evil has he done? I have found in him no guilt deserving death. (Luke 23:18-23)

Pilate caved to expediency, delivered Jesus over to be crucified, and, in doing so, authorized the most evil act ever carried out by man—the killing of the Son of God.

So Pilate decided that their demand should be granted. He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, for whom they asked, but he delivered Jesus over to their will. (Luke 23:24-25)

Yet, as Easter draws near and we once again walk through the darkness of Good Friday, we encounter one of the Passion's most profound paradoxes: Pilate acted with full wickedness, injustice, and cowardice. He sinned grievously—yet, in it all, God was sovereignly orchestrating every detail according to His purposes.

The Role of Pilate

When reading the Gospel accounts of the final hours of Jesus' life, it is hard to miss that Pilate stands out as unique. Of all the characters present—Caiaphas, Annas, Herod, the Sanhedrin—Pilate alone is named in all four Gospels. Of the conversations between Jesus and the various authorities from the time of His arrest to His crucifixion, no other figure has as much recorded dialogue with Jesus. And the scenes are vivid—his hand-washing charade, his “Behold the man!” pronouncement, his “What is truth?” retort. It all feels so memorable, so real. Even centuries later, the church fathers saw fit to include him in the liturgies. From the Apostles' Creed, with roots as early as the second century, to the Nicene Creed, dating to AD 381, and even to the Orthodox Catechism of 1680, which we recite together every Sunday at Redeemer, the Church has kept Pilate's name before us. But why?

Scripture and theologians alike ground Jesus' death on the cross in its actual historical context. In doing so, they remind us that the foundations of our faith are real—Christianity is no myth. Pontius Pilate lived and breathed. He was the public face of first-century Roman authority over the Jewish people. His decisions carried the full weight of the empire. And yet, those decisions were also his own.

Pilate Confronts Jesus

Then Pilate said to him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.” Pilate said to him, “What is truth?” (John 18:37-38)

As Pilate confronted Jesus in the early hours of that Friday morning, he alone bore responsibility for his actions. Additionally, if we read the account afresh, it seems that things could have gone the other way. Three times, Pilate declared Jesus innocent. “See, I am bringing him out to you that you may know that I find no guilt in him.” Pilate spoke the truth, and his public verdict of innocence serves as historical and legal confirmation of the injustice of the Cross. Jesus would suffer not for His own guilt, but for the sins of His people. As Calvin wrote, “God would have the innocence of his Son attested by the mouth of a profane man.” Even still, as Pilate looked Truth in the eyes, he chose the lie. He handed Jesus over to death. But let us not miss this: in that moment, the King was not losing; He was laying down His life for His sheep.

The sovereignty of God over the cross is profound, thoroughly biblical, and essential to seeing our salvation rightly. Many years before Pilate stood before Jesus, Isaiah the prophet declared, “...it was the will of the Lord to crush him; he has put him to grief.” After Jesus’ resurrection, on the day of Pentecost, Peter attested, “...this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God.” Later still, in Acts 4, believers prayed, “for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.” The book of Proverbs tells us, “The king’s heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will.” The hidden hand of God was guiding the heart of Pilate even as Pilate acted according to his own self-serving motives.

Thus, here lies the tension. But it is a tension we must embrace. Do not fall for the notion that this is mere theological fancy. It is foundational to how we persevere to the end in a fallen world. God is sovereign, even over evil, even

over pain, even over suffering. Joseph knew this well when he looked upon his brothers and said, “As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good” (Gen. 50:20).

Know this, Christian: the same God who refused to let Pilate’s cowardice derail redemption is the God who refuses to let your cancer, your depression, your divorce, your rebellious child, the injustice you suffer, or a thousand other tear-soaked problems derail His good plan for you. God used the actions of a wicked ruler to bring about His glorious plan of salvation, and He wields no less power over the lives of His children. Pilate thought he was closing the case on Jesus. Three days later, the stone was rolled away, and the case was closed on death itself. Jesus walked out of the grave. Victorious. So this Easter, lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees. The sovereign Lord who turned the worst evil in history into the greatest rescue is still ruling today. Jesus is risen. He is risen indeed.

••••• Questions for Reflection •••••

- *How does Pilate’s failure to act justly expose the danger of fearing people more than fearing God*
- *Why is it important that Jesus was publicly declared innocent before He was crucified?*
- *How does the sovereignty of God at the cross strengthen faith in the middle of suffering, confusion, or evil?*

6

We Are All Barabbas

by Kirk Miller

The scene unfolds with stark irony: the innocent is condemned. The charge nailed above His head belongs to the guilty man who goes free.

Mark intends for us to feel the perversion of justice. But he also intends for us to see, beneath the injustice, something more profound. Mark tells us this story not merely as background to the crucifixion, but as a window into its meaning. And the longer we look through that window, the more we recognize ourselves in it.

The Scene

The Jewish religious establishment has delivered Jesus to Pilate for trial (Mark 15:1). Yet Pilate realizes Jesus is innocent, that the religious leaders have handed Jesus over not out of genuine concern for Roman law, but out of envy (Mark 15:10). Jesus's popularity with the people had become a threat to their authority and influence (see Mark 11:18; cf. 3:6; 12:2; 14:1–2).

So Pilate reaches for Passover's annual amnesty tradition as a convenient pretext to release Jesus. Every year at Passover, the Roman governor, as a means of pacifying his subjects, would let a prisoner go free (Mark 15:6)—a fitting tradition, given that Passover itself celebrated Israel's emancipation from slavery in Egypt. Pilate is hoping the crowd will pick Jesus, so he does not have to condemn an innocent man and, at the same time, can keep from upsetting the

Jerusalem establishment by declaring Him guiltless.

Enter Barabbas. The text describes him as an insurrectionist and murderer (Mark 15:7). Judea had been seething with anti-Roman sentiment for decades. This one called Barabbas was likely a Jewish nationalist, a freedom fighter who had taken up arms against the Roman overlords.

According to Matthew's account, Pilate has the crowd choose between Jesus of Nazareth and another Jesus, called Barabbas (see Matt. 27:16–17; cf. Mark 15:8–9). In other words, Pilate asks, Which Jesus will you choose: Barabbas, meaning “son of the father,” or Jesus of Nazareth, whom the reader knows is the true Son of the Father?

Pilate's plan backfires, though, when the chief priests stir up the crowd to call for Barabbas instead (Mark 15:11). Asking what then should be done with this Jesus, called “king of the Jews,” the crowd demands his crucifixion (Mark 15:12–13). Pilate knows Jesus is innocent: “Why? What evil has this man done?” he asks (Mark 15:14). Yet he goes along with it. Wishing to satisfy the crowd (Mark 15:15), he caves to the pressure. He has Jesus scourged and delivers Him over to be crucified (Mark 15:15).

Pilate makes the cowardly but politically pragmatic choice. He would rather crucify an innocent man than risk causing a disruption, one that could threaten his governorship. He is as spineless as he is selfish. For Pilate, this perversion of justice is a small price to pay in order to keep the peace and placate these influential leaders of Jerusalem. The death of one eccentric Jewish teacher is preferable to provoking a riot and jeopardizing his governorship. He washes his hands to rid himself of guilt, as if he can (Matt. 27:24).

The Significance

Two interlocking themes emerge in this scene that together reveal the meaning of Christ's death. First, we see the king who reigns by dying. Pilate distinguishes Jesus as one called “king of the Jews” (Mark 15:9, 12). In fact, in the span of just thirty-two verses, this epithet appears six times: on the lips of Pilate (15:2, 9, 12), in the soldiers' mockery (15:18), in the inscription of his charge nailed above his head on the cross (15:26), and sneered by the religious leaders as he hangs dying (15:32). This title, of course, is given disingenuously.

It specifies Jesus's alleged charge as a failed revolutionary. The soldiers and religious leaders mock Him with it, sarcastically ridiculing Him. And yet Mark intends for his audience to see the irony: they are all, despite their intentions, telling the truth.

The crowd's preference for Barabbas over Jesus reveals the type of messiah they were looking for. They wanted someone who would answer Roman occupation with violent resistance, who would take the kingdom by force. Barabbas was that kind of man.

Jesus represents a different type of Messiah. He is Israel's true Messiah, the one the prophets said would establish an eternal throne, crushing every opposing kingdom under His feet (Ps. 2:1–9; Isa. 11:4–5; Dan. 2:44–46). But He does not achieve that kingdom the way Barabbas tried to seize it. Rather, He comes to suffer for His people. The crowd chose the wrong messiah, not because Jesus was not a king, but because they could not imagine a king who reigns by dying (so too Peter: Mark 8:31–33; 14:47–48).

The cross, therefore, is not where Jesus's kingdom mission comes to its tragic end, but where His kingship is most revealed. Whereas they meant to mock Him, calling Him a “king” as He hung on a cross, Mark's readers know it is actually true: Jesus reigns from the cross. It is precisely in being crucified that Jesus is enthroned and establishes His kingdom.

The second theme we see in this sin is the innocent who dies in place of the guilty. Additionally, this king is a king who dies in place of the guilty. Observe the irony. Jesus is charged with challenging Caesar's rule by setting Himself up as “king of the Jews” (John 19:15). Whereas Jesus is falsely accused of insurrection, crucified with two would-be revolutionaries at either of His sides (Mark 15:27), Barabbas, who goes free, is actually guilty of that very thing. Jesus is condemned for crimes in the place of one who is actually guilty of them.

Manifestly guilty, Barabbas deserves to die. In contrast, the passage stresses Jesus's innocence. When Pilate asks, “Why [crucify him]? What evil has he done?” (15:14), the crowd is unable to provide an answer, because Jesus has done no evil; He does not deserve to be crucified. Jesus quite literally dies as the innocent in place of the guilty. Added to this, Mark may in fact include allusions to Isaiah's Suffering Servant, who suffers on behalf of God's people, bearing their guilt.

- Jesus's blood is "poured out for many" (Mark 14:24; cf. Isa 53:12).
- As he stood before Pilate, he made no answer (Mark 15:4–5; see also 14:61). As Isaiah 53:7 says, "He opened not his mouth."
- Repeatedly across his Gospel, including this passage, Mark says Jesus was delivered to die (Mark 3:19; 9:31; 10:33; 14:10, 11, 18, 21, 41, 42, 44; 15:1, 10, 15), the same word used in Isa 53:6, 12 (LXX).
- Jesus repeatedly foretold that he would suffer many things (Mark 8:31; 9:12; cf. Isa 53:10), be rejected (Mark 9:12; cf. Isa 53:3), and give his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45; cf. Isa 53:10).
- He is crucified between two criminals (Mark 15:27), "numbered with the transgressors" (Isa 53:12).

In other words, even before we arrive at this scene, Mark has prepared us to understand Jesus's forthcoming death as guilt-bearing and on behalf of others (see esp. Mark 10:45). The passion narrative is not where these themes first emerge—it is where they lead.

In this way, Barabbas's release becomes an exemplification of the effects of Christ's forthcoming substitutionary death. As David Mathis explains,

[Barabbas] embodies our plight as rebels deserving death, in need of saving. Jesus, the innocent, is delivered over to the punishment of death; while [Barabbas] the guilty one, deserving of death, is released and given new life. This was a foretaste of the grace that will be unleashed at the cross. ... As Pilate releases Barabbas, the guilty, and delivers over to death Jesus, the innocent, we have a picture of our own release effected by the cross through faith. In Barabbas, we have a glimpse of our death-deserving guilt and a preview of the astonishing grace of Jesus and his embrace of the cross, through which we are set free. Here, as Jesus is delivered to death and Barabbas goes free, we have the first substitution of the cross. The innocent Jesus is condemned as a sinner, while the guilty sinner is released as if innocent.

Thus, Barabbas represents each of us. We are all Barabbas—deserving of death, with the innocent Jesus dying in our place so that we may have life. As the Reformer Benedictus Aretius put it,

Christ must die so that the robber may live; and so he lives by Christ's gift, and rightly so. For we are the image of that robber—children of wrath, children of Adam, ministers of sin, instruments of Satan—and we could not be released if the innocent Son of God had not been made a sacrifice for us. Thus he is handed over for our great good.

The story of Barabbas invites us to see in Christ's death a deeply personal exchange, his taking our place. Jesus is a king who reigns by dying—and that on behalf of his people.

••••• Questions for Reflection •••••

- *How does this scene expose both the injustice of man and the sovereign purpose of God?*
- *How does the cross redefine power, kingship, and victory?*
- *In what ways does Barabbas serve as a mirror for my own spiritual condition apart from Christ?*
- *What does the crowd's preference for Barabbas over Jesus reveal about the kind of savior fallen people naturally want?*

7

The Sacrificial Lamb

by Julian Morgan

And Isaac said to his father Abraham, “My father!” And he said, “Here I am, my son.” He said, “Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” Abraham said, “God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.” So they went both of them together. (Genesis 22:7-8)

Throughout Scripture, the Lord uses many images to help us understand His purposes. These images and analogies are meant to give us as clear a picture of divine truth as we, in our humanity, can comprehend. One such image appears in Genesis. There, God tests Abraham by telling him to sacrifice his son, Isaac. Abraham was willing to obey. However, just as Abraham was about to sacrifice Isaac, God provided a ram in a thicket to take Isaac’s place. In that moment, Abraham’s obedience foreshadowed God’s redemptive plan for humanity. God intended to save His people by providing a lamb.

During Israel’s captivity in Egypt, God instituted the Passover, which served as another image to reveal His redemptive plan. In preparation, each household was to set apart a male lamb that was without blemish, one fit for sacrifice. On the appointed night, the lamb was killed, and its blood was spread on the doorposts of the house. Then, as the Angel of Lord passed through Egypt in judgment, He passed over the homes marked by the lamb’s blood, sparing the firstborn.

We see this same image continuing into the New Testament at Jesus’ birth. The Magi come to Jerusalem seeking the new king. King Herod asks the priests and scribes about the birthplace of the Christ. They answer with Bethlehem, citing the prophet Micah.

But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days. (Micah 5:2)

This detail is important, because it highlights the connection between Jesus' birth and mission. God the Son came into the world in Bethlehem, a town that had long been associated with raising lambs for temple sacrifice. It is also telling that the Lord chooses to reveal the birth of "Christ the Lord" to shepherds in Luke 2. These connections—sacrificial lambs, Bethlehem, Jesus' birthplace, and the announcement of the Savior's birth to shepherds—are images that show us the Father's eternal plan of redemption through a sacrificial lamb. Even more, John the Baptist announced the beginning of Jesus' earthly ministry not by proclaiming that Jesus was the King of Israel, but that He was "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" Just like other lambs that were without blemish, Jesus was also spotless and without sin, perfectly fit to be the sacrifice for His people. Like the other lambs, Jesus would also be offered up in death.

The events leading to the crucifixion were brutal. Jesus suffered shame at the hands of a mocking crowd. He was flogged by Roman soldiers with weapons that tore through His flesh with ease. He was punched, slapped, while onlookers spit on Him. Then, the soldiers derided and crowned Him the "King of the Jews," coroneted with a crown of thorns. Beaten and exhausted, Jesus was still required to carry His cross to a hill named Calvary, which was nearly a half-of-a-mile walk. This demand was so brutal that Roman guards had to employ a man from the crowd to carry the cross for Jesus.

Finally, bruised and disfigured after hours of physical abuse and torture, Jesus was nailed to a cross and hoisted into the air. During His final hours on the cross, His elbows and shoulders would have dislocated at the weight of His body. Due to the position of His body, Jesus' chest would have been fixed in a position of inhalation. In order to exhale, He would have to push off of His feet, which were already nailed to the cross. Gasping for air, His body would scrap against the rough wood, while the pace of His heartbeat increased until cardiac arrest was inevitable. The crucifixion was a practice in barbarous ruthlessness, and Jesus chose to endure it in order to lay down His life for our sake.

God's plan for our redemption was never an afterthought. From Abraham

and Isaac to the Passover, from Bethlehem to Calvary, the Lord was revealing the same glorious truth: He would provide a Lamb worthy of sacrifice. Jesus is the sacrificial Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. On the cross, He bore our sin and shame. In His resurrection, He secured our salvation. When we look to the crucifixion, we do not see a tragic end. We see the Father's eternal plan of redemption unfolding, painfully illustrating the severe nature of our sin. Our response should be one of gratitude, awe, and hope, knowing that through the Lamb, redemption has been accomplished.

..... Questions for Reflection

- *How does Abraham's statement, "God will provide the Lamb," deepen the way we understand Jesus and the cross?*
- *How does knowing that Jesus' death was part of the Father's eternal plan strengthen faith in seasons of confusion or sorrow?*
- *What does it look like in daily life to gladly follow the Shepherd who gave Himself to save us?*

8

It Is Finished...

by Joseph Holland

Among all the moments in God's marvelous plan to restore shalom to the kosmos, this is the moment above all others. The moment when the work is finished and propitiation is made for our sins. The wrath of God against us is fully absorbed. This is a moment in time that somehow transcends time: Christ crucified saved us, Christ crucified is saving us, and Christ crucified will save us. It is the moment that raises us from children of wrath to those seated with Christ Jesus in the heavenly places (Eph. 2:6).

How can we grasp the mystery of the cross? How can we fully understand the majesty of the eternal God of the kosmos taking on flesh, lowering Himself to the ultimate place of suffering—consummated here in His death—in order to call us His beloved? That He drank His own cup of wrath, the cup meant for us?

In one sense, we cannot. It is too wonderful for us. We will never exhaust the depths of the mystery before us. And that is logical. How a sinful mortal such as I, with no merit of my own, fully grasp the eternal? This mystery of redemption is the plan of the almighty Sovereign who is without beginning or end. I will never fully comprehend Him, or the majesty of His redemptive work.

And yet, in another sense, the Holy Scriptures provide what we need to know about this mystery that reconciles us to the Father. This mystery is foolishness to the perishing world, but to those of us who are being saved it is the power of God (1 Cor. 1:18). So let us marvel together at the details of Christ's death as they are given to us in Scripture.

Darkness Over the Land

We pick up around noon on Golgotha. Jesus has been hanging on the cross for three hours when a mysterious darkness begins to cover the land. Luke records that “the sun’s light failed.” First John 1:5 tells us that “God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.” This darkness signals separation from the Father and judgment—akin to the ninth plague in Egypt.

Jesus is now drinking the full cup of God’s wrath—the cup of which He inquired in Gethsemane, “If it be possible, let this cup pass from me.” Scripture records this period of darkness lasting about three hours—the time during which Christ, in His flesh, absorbs the wrath of God to pay for the sins of His people. He is accomplishing a particular redemption, eternally purchasing a people for Himself with His own precious, perfect blood.

This wrath of God, deserved by you and me, would eternally destroy us. It is devastating to Jesus. The physical pain is beyond what we can imagine, but it is the spiritual pain—separation from the Father—that extends Christ’s suffering into a dimension impossible for our limited minds to fully comprehend. And Jesus cries out with a loud voice, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” The Greek word describing His cry is *meegas*, meaning a great cry. Jesus is overcome with distress as He bears the full weight of sin and experiences the horror of abandonment. Jesus is overcome with distress from His separation from the Godhead as He bears the full weight of sin.

Think of your dearest earthly relationship, perhaps a spouse, child, parent, or close friend. Now imagine the most dreadful separation from them possible, while they endure physical cruelty from evil men and spiritual torment from demonic forces. Even this horrific picture only begins to hint at the pain of both Father and Son as our spotless Lamb bears the reproach of sin that belongs not to Him, but to us.

Christ’s Final Moments

The hour is now nearing three in the afternoon. The darkness still lingers. Jesus fulfills Scripture by saying, “I thirst,” and He receives sour wine. Our eternal Davidic King is bringing to completion moments of thirst and suffering that were foretold in Psalm 22:15, and 69:19–21. These are David’s words, but Christ endures the reality of them to an infinitely greater degree. And in this, Jesus is a sympathetic High Priest for you and I.

You know my reproach, and my shame and my dishonor; my foes are all known to you. Reproaches have broken my heart, so that I am in despair. I looked for pity, but there was none, and for comforters, but I found none. They gave me poison for food, and for my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink. (Psalm 69:19–21)

We now approach the end, the death of Christ. The exact order of His final statements is not entirely clear in Scripture, but we know what He said. John records that after receiving the sour wine, Jesus said, “Tetelestai,” meaning “It is finished” or “Paid in full.” This is not the utterance of a defeated man, but the victorious declaration of our Lion and Lamb at the end of a brutal contest against sin itself. He has taken the worst of sin and felt the full wrath of God against it. Our debts are wiped clean. It is finished. Paid in full.

Then, in Luke, we see yet another perspective. Jesus—His voice likely strengthened by the sour wine—musters a final *me gas* cry: “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!” And having said this, He breathed His last. Matthew and Mark record similarly, “And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit.” Even to the end, Christ models for us the ultimate trust we can have in the Father. He is a good Father. While Jesus bore a temporary separation from the Father on our behalf, those of us in Christ know that nothing can separate us from the love of God.

For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:38–39)

After Christ’s Death

The curtain of the temple is torn in two. What we know of this curtain is that it was massive, with estimates measuring it around sixty feet high and several inches thick. Yet it was supernaturally torn from top to bottom, signifying the open access God’s people now have to His presence because the ultimate sacrifice for sin has been made. No more need for ritual sacrifices, offerings, or washings in order to directly commune with the Spirit of the Lord. Hallelujah!

Then, the earth quakes. Rocks split. Tombs open. Saints who had fallen asleep are raised to life and appear to many in Jerusalem. A centurion who witnesses Christ's death and all that follows proclaims Him innocent and exclaims, "Truly this was the Son of God!" The crowds—who only hours earlier demanded His crucifixion—begin beating their breasts. And Jesus' followers look on from a distance.

Jesus' body is examined to ensure His death. Prophecy is fulfilled as His side is pierced, while His legs remain unbroken. Joseph of Arimathea, a disciple of Christ and a respected council member who had not consented to Jesus' condemnation, receives permission from Pilate to remove the body of our Lord from the cross. He lays it in his own tomb and rolls a great stone in front. And because it was the day of Preparation, they hurried to bury Jesus before sunset.

For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him. (Colossians 1:19–22)

As we reflect on the death of Jesus and await His resurrection, let us both beat our breasts over the sins that contributed to the cup of wrath He drank on our behalf, and rejoice in the mystery of the victory He achieved. What indescribable joy to know that we partake of His victory. We have been reconciled by His death, so we may now be presented holy, blameless, and above reproach. Tetelestai.

..... Questions for Reflection

- *Where do you feel the mystery of the cross most strongly in this passage—and what part do you find hardest to grasp?*
- *How does the pain of separation within the Godhead reshape the way you think about the Father's heart toward sinners He saves?*
- *If "Tetelestai" is true—paid in full—what changes about how you pray, confess sin, or face death?*

9

Resurrection Hope in a Dying World

by Brandon Ash

But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. (1 Corinthians 15:20–21)

Easter morning speaks into the deepest need of the human heart. We live in a world full of beauty, yet also full of sorrow. We know laughter, but we also know tears. We know love, but we also know loss. We know moments of delight, but we also know that everything in this present age seems touched by weakness, decay, and death. The older we grow, the more plainly we see it. Our bodies tire. Our hopes are bruised. Our loved ones suffer. Graves multiply. This world, for all its gifts, is a dying world, which is why the resurrection of Jesus Christ is such glorious news.

The resurrection is not merely the happy ending to the story of the cross. It is not simply proof that Jesus was powerful. It is not one beautiful doctrine among many. The resurrection is the great declaration that sin has been answered, death has been conquered, and life has been secured in the Son of God. Easter tells us that Christ has done what we could never do for ourselves. He has entered the misery brought by sin and has emerged victorious from the grave.

The Bible teaches us that death did not come with God's good creation in the beginning (Gen. 1:31). Death entered through sin. By one man, Adam, death came into the world (Rom. 5:12). Through his fall, the whole human race was plunged into misery. What God had made upright became corrupted. What

had been marked by peace became marked by pain. The communion with God for which man was made was broken, and the curse spread outward into every part of life. We still live with the ache of that first fall.

We feel it in the restlessness of our hearts. We feel it in our disordered loves. We feel it in our fears, our guilt, our shame, and our grief. We feel it when relationships break, when sickness comes, when prayers are prayed through tears, and when the grave reminds us that “in Adam all die.” We were not made for death. We were made for life with God. And yet, apart from Christ, death reigns over us all.

This is why Easter is not a sentimental celebration or a religious spring-time tradition. It is the announcement that God has acted in history to save His people from the curse brought upon us through Adam. What was lost in the first man has been restored, and far more than restored, in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus came into this world as the true and better Adam. He came as the obedient Son, the faithful Savior, the covenant head of a new humanity. Where Adam failed, Christ obeyed. Where Adam grasped, Christ submitted. Where Adam brought condemnation, Christ came to bring righteousness, peace, and justification. He entered our world of suffering, not as one untouched by grief, but as the Man of Sorrows. He took on flesh. He walked among sinners. He bore our weakness without sinning Himself. He loved the Father perfectly. He loved His neighbor perfectly. In every place where we have failed, He stood fast. But He did not come only to live for us. He also came to die for us.

At the cross, Jesus did not merely suffer at the hands of men. He offered Himself up as the sin-bearing substitute of His people. He bore our guilt. He took our judgment. He stood where we should have stood. The curse that belonged to us fell upon Him. The wrath our sins deserved was poured out upon Him. The Holy One was treated as guilty so that the guilty might be counted righteous in Him. This is the wonder at the heart of the gospel: the Son of God loved His people and gave Himself for them. Then, He was laid in a tomb.

For a time, it seemed as though death had won. The body of Jesus lay still. The disciples were broken and afraid. The hopes of many seemed buried with Him. The silence of that long Saturday must have felt unbearable. Yet even then, God was not absent. Even then, His purpose had not failed, because the

grave was not the end of the story. On the third day, Christ rose!!

The stone was rolled away. The tomb was empty. The crucified Jesus stood alive again, never to die again. Death could not keep Him. The grave could not hold Him. Sin had been atoned. Justice had been satisfied. The curse had been exhausted. The work the Father had given the Son to accomplish had been finished, and the resurrection was heaven's declaration that the work was complete.

The Resurrection is Our Comfort

This is why the resurrection is such comfort to the believer. It tells us that our hope is not fragile. It does not rest upon our feelings, our performance, or our strength. It rests upon a living Christ who has already passed through death and broken its power. The empty tomb means that forgiveness is real. It means that justification is secure. It means that peace with God is not a wish, but a purchased reality for all who are in Christ. It also means that death is no longer the final word for the Christian.

Death remains painful. It still wounds and causes weeping. Jesus Himself wept at the grave of Lazarus. Christianity does not teach us to pretend that death is harmless. It is an enemy. But because Christ has risen, the enemy is now defeated. For those who belong to Jesus, death does not lead to condemnation, but to the nearer presence of Christ, while they await the resurrection of the body. Because He lives, His people shall live also. This is not only a future hope. It is present comfort.

The risen Christ does not leave His people to themselves. Even now, He gives resurrection life to weary souls. He still brings dead hearts to life, while drawing near to the brokenhearted, strengthening the faint, restoring the wandering, and giving peace to troubled consciences. In the covenant mercy of God, the blessings Christ secured are not distant promises only. They begin even now. Sins are forgiven. Hearts are renewed. Fellowship with God is restored. Hope begins to rise where despair once ruled. How many of us need that reminder?

There are seasons when life feels like a long Holy Saturday. We know God's promises, but the darkness feels heavy. We believe Christ is faithful, but we

walk through grief, weakness, confusion, and waiting. We pray, and sometimes heaven seems silent. We ache for relief, for clarity, for joy, for rest. Easter reminds us that silence is not abandonment, and delay is not defeat. God often does His deepest work where we can scarcely see His hand. The tomb itself became the place where death was overthrown forever.

The Resurrection is Our Hope

So the resurrection teaches us to hope again:

- It teaches the grieving saint that sorrow will not last forever.
- It teaches the ashamed sinner that mercy is greater than sin.
- It teaches the weary believer that Christ is still alive and able to save to the uttermost.
- It teaches the church that our labor is not in vain.

And it teaches every trembling heart that the last chapter for those in Christ will not be death, but life.

One day, the full harvest of Easter morning will come. The trumpet will sound. The dead in Christ will be raised imperishable. What is sown in weakness will be raised in power. What is mortal will put on immortality. The bodies laid to rest in hope will be raised in glory. The curse will be no more. Sin will not trouble us. Tears will not fall any longer. The risen Christ will dwell with His people, and His people will dwell with Him in joy that cannot fade.

Until that day, we live by faith in the risen Lord.

- We come to Him with our sin, because He is the crucified and risen Savior.
- We come to Him with our grief, because He has conquered the grave.
- We come to Him with our fear, because He is Lord over death and life.
- We come to Him with our weakness, because His power is made perfect there.

And we come to Him with worship, because He is worthy of all praise.

Easter calls each of us to reckon with this question: Are we still in Adam, or are we in Christ? To remain in Adam is to remain under sin, curse, and death. To be united to Christ by faith is to receive forgiveness, righteousness, peace, and resurrection hope. The risen Christ still receives sinners. He is gentle

toward the weak, merciful toward the needy, and mighty to save. No one who comes to Him in faith will ever be cast out.

So let us come to Him again with humble hearts and believing eyes. Let us look to the empty tomb and hear once more the good news our souls so desperately need: in this dying world, life has broken in through Jesus Christ. He is risen, and because He is risen, hope is alive. Because He is risen, sin is not the end, death is not the end, and all who belong to Him shall also live. This is the glory of Easter, the comfort of the gospel, and the unshakable hope our dying world still needs today.

••••• Questions for Reflection •••••

- *In what ways does the contrast between Adam and Christ deepen our understanding of humanity's natural condition and our only hope of salvation?*
- *In what ways does the resurrection function as heaven's declaration that Christ's atoning work was fully accepted, and why is that essential for Christian hope?*
- *How does the Resurrection help us hold together both the present reality of suffering and the future certainty of resurrection glory without minimizing either one?*

But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen...

Matthew 28:5

