



A SAVIOR APPEARS: ARREST AND CRUCIFIXION

SERIES: EPIC

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Matthew 26-27; Mark 14-15;
Luke 22-23; John 13-14, 16-19
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We have been on an ‘EPIC’ expedition through all the passages of the Bible. The climax of this expedition is the life of Jesus. The climax of Jesus’ life is his final visit to Jerusalem. In fact, the gospels devote about a third of their written testimony to describing events that took place from Palm Sunday onward.

Righteous Jews were expected to travel to Jerusalem to worship three times each year. And these yearly pilgrimages ‘up to Jerusalem’ can be seen as a metaphor for the Lord’s entire life. Jesus’ birth, baptism, temptation, his healings and preaching, the attention of his enemies and friends constitute a journey—a journey that concludes with his arrival in the holy city. One final time he entered Jerusalem, now with a singular purpose—‘the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.’

In the final week of his life, we observe that though Jesus was always in the company of others, he was consistently misunderstood and alone. Taking note of Jesus’ loneliness can encourage us to turn to him for help when we are cut off with no one who understands or cares for us.

We pick up the story on the Sunday before Passover.

Luke 19:36-42:

³⁶As he went along, people spread their cloaks on the road.

³⁷When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen:

³⁸“Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!”

“Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”

³⁹Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples!”

⁴⁰“I tell you,” he replied, “if they keep quiet,

the stones will cry out.”

⁴¹As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it ⁴²and said, “If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes.

The scene is loud and energetic. Crowds shout loud praises. Some of the Pharisees utter objections. In the midst of events Jesus alone is heart-broken, crying. His tears are not for himself. The nation he loved and beloved Jerusalem with its magnificent temple are in jeopardy. The cheering crowd does not understand the nature of the salvation he offers (having preferred not to see) and his enemies are determined not just to rebuke him, but to kill him. And so Jesus weeps.

Later we find the Lord in Bethany just outside Jerusalem at a dinner with his disciples in a private home. A follower of his named Mary anointed him with costly perfume—an act that was both socially awkward and financially extravagant. When she is rebuked, Jesus defends her and again calls attention to his own lonely journey. The ointment is received by him as a preparation for burial. Looking a short distance into the future Jesus sees a corpse, dead by crucifixion and validates Mary’s act of love. His reference to death isolates Jesus. No one wants to hear of his imminent execution.

Two days further on, Jesus again gathered with his disciples for dinner—the Passover meal, Jesus’ last supper. Though 13 men were present we again see Jesus alone, engaged in a private conversation with Judas (and the devil who had entered him)—“what you do, do quickly.” The hourglass is nearly empty, yet the other disciples continue the meal with no awareness of what is transpiring.

After dinner, they left the upper room where they had eaten and crossed the valley to the Mount of Olives. As they walked, Jesus told his disciples that all of them would run in fear (“strike the shepherd and the sheep will scatter”). Peter is remembered for his proud claims and his repeated denials, but all of the disciples ran from danger

and left Jesus to face execution by himself.

On the Mount of Olives was a garden, Jesus entered to pray, again in the company of his friends, again alone.

Mark 14:32-36:

³²They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, “Sit here while I pray.” ³³He took Peter, James and John along with him, and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled.

The two verbs that are used here, ‘deeply distressed and troubled’ are rare in the New Testament. They are very disturbing words and they are especially disturbing when they’re taken together.

³⁴“My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death,” he said to them. “Stay here and keep watch.”

³⁵Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him. ³⁶“Abba, Father,” he said, “everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.”

Jesus was becoming the sin bearer and for the first time in his life a request made to his Father in prayer was denied. The disciples again had failed him, falling asleep instead of keeping watch. And his prayers made clear his growing distance from God—now his desires were contrary to the Father’s will.

And as the night progressed, the darkness deepened. Jesus was arrested and subjected four times to interrogation by arrogant authority figures—Annas, Caiaphas, Herod, and Pilate. He was beaten with rods by Jewish temple guards and then scourged with whips by Roman soldiers.

Matthew 27:27-31:

²⁷Then the governor’s soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers around him. ²⁸They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, ²⁹and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand. Then they knelt in front of him and mocked him. “Hail, king of the Jews!” they said. ³⁰They spit on him, and took the staff and

struck him on the head again and again. ³¹After they had mocked him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.

Again, the Savior’s loneliness is profound. Though he prays for his tormentors to be forgiven, no one utters a syllable of concern or comfort for him.

And the darkness grows darker still.

Matthew 27:45-46:

⁴⁵From noon until three in the afternoon darkness came over all the land. ⁴⁶About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?”

Which means “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

Jesus had been alone in the crowd on Palm Sunday. He was isolated when he was with his friends, denied his entreaty as he prayed in the garden, and tortured by his enemies. But this is worst of all: ‘My God, dear Abba, why have you forsaken me?’ What we cannot hear is the heavenly heartbreak of the Father cut off from his beloved Son. Jesus was made “to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21). Changed from sinless one to sin bearer, the Son was divided from the Father. This singular event should take our breath from us, should frighten and amaze us.

A line from Charles Wesley’s hymn, *And Can It Be*, comes to mind: “’Tis mystery, all: the immortal dies . . . ’Tis mercy all! Let earth adore, let angel minds inquire no more. . . . Amazing love! How can it be, that thou, my God, shouldst die for me?”

We conclude this study with a text from Hebrews where Jesus’ loneliness and suffering are seen as a source of blessing for us when we are in greatest need.

Hebrews 1:18, 4:15-16 JBP:

By virtue of his own suffering under temptation he is able to help those who are exposed to temptation . . .

For we have no superhuman High Priest to whom our weaknesses are unintelligible—he himself has shared fully in all our experience

of temptation . . .

. . . except that he never sinned. Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with fullest confidence, that we may receive mercy for our failures and grace to help in the hour of need.

God's holiness can intimidate us. Our sin has no place in his presence. Most frightening of all is the possibility that a once vital relationship has ended, that God no longer hears a cry for help, that he has forsaken us.

It is critical to remember that Jesus comes to our aid as a faithful High Priest; that he has experienced sin's sorrows and the pain of distance from a holy God. He has been ravaged by temptation and laid low by weakness of body and spirit. Pain and rejection in the present, fear of the future, struggles in prayer, silence from heaven—all these have been experienced by the Savior.

Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with fullest confidence, that we may receive mercy for our failures and grace to help in the hour of need.