

CHAPTER 30: The Gospels Part 8

It is Day 5 of Passover week. It is on this day the people from Galilee traditionally observe the Passover meal. This will take place after sundown. Being Galileans, Jesus and His disciples make their final preparations. The lamb that they have selected is taken to the temple complex where it is slain by the priests on the altar.

The location where Jesus and the Twelve will eat the Passover meal must now be made ready. Jesus appoints Peter and John to handle this task. He tells them to go into Jerusalem where they will meet a man carrying a jar of water. They are to follow this man to his house. There, in a large fully furnished guest room located on the top floor of the house, they are to get everything set up for the Passover meal. Peter and John head into Jerusalem and they find everything exactly as Jesus said. They follow the man carrying a jar of water. He leads them to his house where they prepare the room. They gather the necessary food and supplies. Everything is ready.

Early that evening, Jesus while the disciples are seated around the table... **A dispute also started among [the disciples] over which of them was to be regarded as the greatest.** (Luke 22:24) If you will recall, this same argument had occurred among the disciples a year before while they were in Capernaum. Jesus seizes this moment to teach His disciples a lesson in humility and service.

Jesus gets up from the table, takes a towel, and pours water into a basin. He proceeds to wash each one of His disciples' feet. **So when Jesus had washed their feet and put His outer clothing back on, He took His place at the table again and said to them, "Do you understand what I have done for you?"** (John 13:12) He explains that His actions model the kind of servant attitude that they should have for each other – for the brothers.

Later, while they are eating, Jesus drops a bombshell. He says that one of them – one of the Twelve – is going to betray Him. The disciples are stunned! They look around the room at each other in total disbelief. John, who is sitting next to Jesus, leans over and asks Jesus who this person is. **Jesus replied [to John], "It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread after I have dipped it in the dish." Then He dipped the piece of bread in the dish and gave it to Judas Iscariot...** (John 13:26) Only John catches the significance of this. None of the other disciples are aware of it.

And after Judas took the piece of bread [from Jesus], Satan entered into him. Jesus said to [Judas], "What you are about to do, do quickly." (John 13:27)

Because Judas is the group treasurer the disciples all think Jesus is telling Judas to go buy something needed for the dinner. They really don't think much about Judas leaving.

Jesus tells the remaining eleven disciples: **“I give you a new commandment – to love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. Everyone will know by this that you are My disciples – if you have love for one another.”** (John 13:34-35)

Jesus then informs the disciples: **“This night you will all fall away because of Me, for it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’ But after I am raised, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.”** (Matthew 26:31-32) Again Jesus mentions His resurrection. At this point Peter speaks up and says, **“If they all fall away because of You, I will never fall away!”** (Matthew 26:33) “Not me, Lord!” Peter reinforces his loyalty to Jesus by saying that he is willing to go with Jesus to prison or even to die with Him if he has to. These are very bold words! **Jesus replied, “I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow today until you have denied three times that you know Me.”** (Luke 22:34) Peter must have been shocked by Jesus's words.

As Jesus and the disciples are finishing their meal Jesus does something unexpected that is not normally part of the Passover celebration. **While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after giving thanks He broke it, gave it to His disciples, and said, “Take, eat, this is My body.”** (Matthew 26:26) Jesus is speaking symbolically. He often did this when He taught. Jesus before had used ordinary everyday things to describe Himself – water, a door, a shepherd, and light. He had even referred to Himself before as “living bread.” Jesus's use of symbolism is not new. He tells the disciples that the broken bread represents His body, indicating what is to come.

Jesus then holds up a cup of wine. **And after taking the cup and giving thanks, He gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you, for this is My blood, the blood of the covenant, that is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”** (Matthew 26:27-28) Jesus again uses symbolic language. The wine is a deep crimson color, like blood. It vividly portrays Jesus's blood being poured out. It's appropriate imagery on this particular night. Fresh on the disciples' minds from earlier in the day is their lamb being killed on the altar and its life blood being poured out. This pictures what will soon happen to Him.

For the next hour or so Jesus talks openly and frankly with the remaining eleven disciples. Judas never returns to the room. Jesus has much to tell His disciples and He knows that time is short. Even though the disciples don't know what Judas is up to, Jesus knows. Jesus is aware that this is His last chance to address His faithful

followers. It is, in fact, “The Last Supper” as a group. One-sixth of the Gospel of John records Jesus’s final words to His disciples. Here’s a summary of what He tells them...

The disciples are distraught at the idea of Jesus leaving them. He has told them He is going away and now He explains why He MUST leave. **“There are many dwelling places in My Father’s house. Otherwise, I would have told you, because I am going away to make ready a place for you. And if I go and make ready a place for you, I will come again and take you to be with Me, so that where I am you me be too.”** (John 14:2-3) Well, this is certainly good news.

Jesus promises to provide His followers with the resources they will need to carry on His mission after He’s gone. Jesus promises that the Holy Spirit will come. **“But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, will teach you everything, and will cause you to remember everything I said to you.”** (John 14:26) This too is good news.

Jesus uses more symbolic language, this time to describe His unique relationship with His disciples. **“I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in Me – and I in him – bears much fruit, because apart from Me you can accomplish nothing.”** (John 15:5) This relationship between Jesus and His followers is quite intimate. It is one of direct connection. Those who follow Jesus MUST remain connected to Jesus. A branch that is located in close proximity to the vine will die. It has to be connected to the vine in order to survive and thrive. Likewise, to “abide” in Jesus, to be connected to Him is more than just having knowledge about Him. It’s knowing what He said and then doing it. Faith, trust and obedience go hand in hand.

Jesus offers His disciples full disclosure of their future. Their lives are about to change. He reminds them how He had sent them out in pairs to preach; how they had relied on God to provide for their needs; and how those needs were met through many generous people. But after tonight, Jesus says that things are going to be much different. He tells His disciples that they must be prepared for increased opposition and rejection. **Remember what I told you, ‘A slave is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they obeyed My word, they will obey yours too.”** (John 15:20) Jesus knows that most of the men listening to Him will eventually be martyred for their faith. But He also knows that their message, the truth of the Gospel that they are going to preach, will never be silenced.

Jesus tells the disciples what they can expect both short term and long term. **“Look, a time is coming – and has come – when you will be scattered, each one to his own home, and I will be left alone. Yet I am not alone, because My Father is with Me. I have told you these things so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have trouble and suffering, but take courage – I have conquered the**

world.” (John 16:32-33) Things may be tough in this world for those who choose to follow Jesus. But in the end, because He is victorious, so are we. We win!

The last words Jesus speaks to His disciples are in a prayer. **When Jesus had finished saying these things, He looked upward to heaven and said, “Father, the time has come. Glorify Your Son, so that Your Son may glorify You.”** (John 17:1) Part of Jesus’s mission has already been completed. He has conveyed God’s message. He has revealed His Father to the people. What lies ahead is one final act of love that will complete His mission and glorify His Father.

Jesus then prays for His disciples: **“I am not asking You to take them out of the world, but that You keep them safe from the evil one. They do not belong to the world just as I do not belong to the world. Set them apart in the truth; Your word is truth. Just as You sent Me into the world, so I sent them into the world.”** (John 17:15-18)

Finally Jesus prays for all believers, everyone who has followed Him and those who will follow Him in the future. **“I am not praying only on [the disciple’s] behalf, but also on behalf of those who believe in Me through their testimony, that they will all be one, just as You, Father, are in Me and I am in You. I pray that they will be in Us, so that the world will believe that You sent Me.”** (John 17:20-21)

With that they sing a hymn. They make their way out of the house and into the dark quietness, through the streets of Jerusalem, out the city gate, across the Kidron Valley and up the Mount of Olives. They arrive at their favorite spot, a peaceful and secluded garden where Jesus has met with His disciples many times. Jesus leaves eight of the disciples at the entrance and takes Peter, James and John with Him into the garden.

When He came to the place, He said to them, “Pray that you may not enter into temptation.” He went away from them about a stone’s throw, knelt down, and prayed. (Luke 22:40-41) Jesus pours out His heart.... **“Father, if You are willing, take this cup away from Me. Yet not My will but Yours be done.”** (Luke 22:42) The Gospel writers tell us that Jesus’s sweat is like great drops of blood falling to the ground. His soul is deeply troubled. He’s overwhelmed with sorrow. But as He has always done, Jesus submits to His Father’s will.

Jesus knows the pain and suffering that awaits Him. It was all predicted by the prophet Isaiah in those Suffering Servant passages. Isaiah said, **“Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him; He has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt... and he shall bear their iniquities.”** (Isaiah 53:10-11) So, making a guilt offering and bearing the sins of sinful humanity – this is the reason Jesus came.

Let's pause here for a moment. The obvious question before us is "Why is Jesus in such anguish and deep sorrow?" Jesus knows that He MUST go to the cross and die. He knows this IS the plan. He has said this repeatedly to His disciples. He even predicted it publicly two days before – "**Now my soul is greatly distressed. And what should I say, 'Father, deliver Me from this hour?' No, but for this very reason I have come to this hour**" (John 12:27). So, Jesus knows what He MUST die. So then, the question is what's going on here? Why this struggle?

The answer is that there is a spiritual battle taking place. The forces of darkness are very real and they are working full force on Jesus. Satan is attacking Jesus, tempting Him. It's the same temptation that took place in the wilderness three years earlier. "Jesus, You don't have to go to the cross and suffer humiliation and agonizing pain. You're the Son of God! Certainly God's plan can be accomplished some other way." Satan is doing everything he can to try and thwart God's plan.

Earlier that evening Jesus had told His disciples... "**I will not speak with you much longer, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no power over Me, but I am doing just what the Father commanded Me, so that the world may know that I love the Father.**" (John 14:30-31) Jesus knew that in the final hours leading up to His death, Satan was going to fiercely attack Him and His disciples. Jesus prepares for this spiritual battle. This is why Jesus brought His disciples here to this place in the middle of the night -- to pray.

Jesus returns to Peter, James and John. Are they praying like He told them to do? No. Jesus finds them sleeping! **So He said to them, "Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray that you will not fall into temptation!"** (Luke 22:46) This same scene repeats itself a second and then a third time. Both times Jesus tells the disciples to stay awake and pray. Both times He goes off and prays to His Father. And both times Jesus returns to find them asleep. The third time Jesus arouses the sleepy disciples and announces, "**Get up, let us go. Look! My betrayer is approaching!**" (Mark 14:42)

It is around midnight, Day 6 of Passover week. The silence of the darkness is broken. The muffled sounds of voices and footsteps can be heard. Hundreds of men carrying lanterns and torches make their way up the Mount of Olives. Judas leads the way. He knows this place they are going well. The large contingent with him – a squad of Roman soldiers and many temple guards – are fully armed and expecting resistance. Judas has briefed the group. He will give them a sign to identify which figure in the darkness is Jesus -- **Now the betrayer [Judas] had given them a sign, saying, "The one I kiss is the man. Arrest Him and lead Him away under guard."** (Mark 14:44)

Through the trees Jesus and the disciples can see the flickering of lights. The sounds are getting louder. The lights are getting brighter. If Jesus wants to, He can

easily slip away into the darkness completely unnoticed. But Jesus doesn't do that. He knows what He must do, and so He waits.

Judas and the men with him approach the remote location where Judas is certain that Jesus and the other disciples will be. **Then Jesus, because He knew everything that was going to happen to Him, came and asked them, "Who are you looking for?" They replied, "Jesus the Nazarene." He told them, "I am He." Now Judas, the one who betrayed Him, was standing there with them.** (John 18:4-5) When Jesus says "I am He," something very strange occurs. This armed group of men suddenly draws back away from Jesus and falls down to the ground!

After everyone has picked themselves off the ground Judas walks up to Jesus and greets Him, saying, "Rabbi!" He then kisses Jesus on the cheek. Jesus says, "**Judas, would you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?**" (Luke 22:48) The guards recognize their cue. They reach out to grab Jesus. Peter and the other disciples realize what's happening. Though badly outnumbered, they prepare to defend Jesus. They ask, "**Lord, should we use our swords?**" (Luke 22:49).

Peter, ever the impulsive one, doesn't wait for Jesus to answer. He pulls out his sword and begins swinging away at the crowd. In the process he winds up striking the high priest's servant, Malchus, cutting off his ear. **But Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword back into its sheath! Am I not to drink the cup the Father has given Me?"** (John 18:11) Jesus reaches down and touches Malchus and restores his ear. No surgery is required!

The temple guards arrest Jesus. **Then all the disciples left Him and fled.** (Matthew 26:56) This is exactly what Jesus predicted would happen. Even Peter runs away. He follows the group at a safe distance to see where they will take Jesus.

Jesus is brought to the house of Caiaphas, the high priest. Gathered inside are the Jewish religious leaders. These are the same guys who have confronted Jesus on a regular basis – the Pharisees, the Sadducees and the scribes. They are familiar with Jesus's claims and His teachings. They interrogate Jesus secretly in the middle of the night. They do this so as not to stir up the people who view Jesus as their Messiah. The proceeding is neither legal nor is it fair.

Their interrogation of Jesus lasts all night long. He's blind-folded, beaten, spit on, mocked and cursed. The Jewish leaders parade in a series of false witnesses. Based on their testimony the leaders levy a whole series of charges against Jesus. They say that Jesus threatened to destroy the Temple. They call Jesus an evildoer. They say He's perverted the nation; that He forbade the payment of a tax tribute to Caesar and that He stirred up the people. They claim that Jesus presented Himself as a king. Of course none of these accusations are true.

Meanwhile back outside Peter has managed to enter the courtyard of the house. It's a chilly night, so a campfire burns. People are seated around the fire warming themselves. Peter stands inconspicuously among them, or so he thinks. He can see and hear Jesus being questioned inside. The tension builds as Peter waits to see what will happen to Jesus.

Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. A slave girl came to him and said, "You also were with Jesus the Galilean." But Peter denied it in front of them all: "I don't know what you're talking about!" (Matthew 26:69-70)

When [Peter] went out to the gateway, another slave girl saw him and said to the people there, "This man was with Jesus the Nazarene." He denied it again, "I do not know the man!" (Matthew 26:71-72)

An hour later someone related to Malchus (he's the one who had his ear cut off) spots Peter. He says, **"You really are one of them too – even your accent gives you away!" At that [Peter] began to curse, and he swore with an oath, "I do not know the man!" At that moment a rooster crowed.** (Matthew 26:73-74)

Peter looks up. From across the courtyard His eyes meet Jesus's eyes. Peter remembers what Jesus had told him earlier that evening – **"The rooster will not crow today until you have denied three times that you know Me."** (Luke 22:34) Peter realizes that Jesus knows what he has just done. Peter is overcome with sorrow and shame at having let his Lord down. How could he do this to Jesus, his best friend? **And he went outside and wept bitterly.** (Matthew 26:75)

At first light, early in the morning, the Jewish ruling council, the Sanhedrin, is convened. It is the fifth day of Passover week. A weary, battered and bruised Jesus is brought in. This meeting is a sham. The Jewish religious leaders have already determined Jesus' fate. He is guilty of blasphemy because He claims to be the Son of God. As they see it Jesus deserves to be put to death for uttering such a blasphemy.

They said, "If you are the Christ, tell us." (Luke 22:67) Let's flash back a few hours. When Jesus had been asked whether He was the Christ during His interrogation at the high priest's house He had replied, "I am." The reaction to Jesus had not been good. The high priest had screamed, tore his robe, and accused Jesus of blasphemy. Someone struck Jesus across the face! Now Jesus is standing in front of the Sanhedrin and is asked the very same question. **But He said to them, "If I tell you, you will not believe, and if I ask you, you will not answer. But from now on the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the power of God."** (Luke 67-69)

In His response Jesus references Psalm 110, a messianic psalm: **Here is the Lord's proclamation to my Lord: "Sit down at my right hand until I make your**

enemies your footstool!” (Psalm 110:1) The more scholarly members of the council understand that Jesus is applying this passage in Psalms to Himself and is thereby claiming to be the Messiah.

They ask Jesus a follow-up question. **So they all said, “Are you the Son of God, then?”** (Luke 22:70) OK, so here is Jesus’s chance to set the record straight if He is NOT the Son of God. All Jesus has to say is “No, you guys have it all wrong. That’s NOT what I’m saying.” Instead, Jesus looks His accusers in the eyes and says, **“You say that I am.”** (Luke 22:70) Jesus never refutes this claim. He owns up to it. He tells them, in essence, that He IS the Messiah. He IS the Son of God! And this is precisely what they understand Jesus to be saying. **Then they said, “Why do we need further testimony? We have heard it ourselves from His own lips!”** (Luke 22:71) With that the Sanhedrin convicts and condemns Jesus.

The Jewish leaders’ goal all along has been to kill Jesus. They have wanted to do this for the past three years. But they don’t have the legal authority to put someone to death. Only the Roman government can do that. So their next step is to bring Jesus to the Roman governor of Judea. His name is Pontius Pilate. **Early in the morning, after forming a plan, the chief priests with the elders and experts in the law and the whole Sanhedrin tied Jesus up and led Him away, and handed Him over to Pilate.** (Mark 15:1) They know that they have to come up with a charge other than blasphemy – a charge that actually violates Roman law. And so they do. **They began to accuse Him, saying, “We found this man subverting our nation, forbidding us to pay the tribute tax to Caesar and claiming that He Himself is Christ, a king.”** (Luke 23:2)

Let’s go back to Judas for a moment. Upon hearing that the Sanhedrin has condemned Jesus, Judas is deeply remorseful. He regrets what he has done. He takes the money that he was paid by the Jewish religious leaders and throws it into the temple. Judas then goes outside the city of Jerusalem and hangs himself. What a sad commentary on a man who has spent the last three and half years with Jesus!

Meanwhile Pontius Pilate has just heard the charges brought against Jesus. But it’s all here-say from this group of Jewish religious leaders. So Pilate begins his own interrogation of Jesus. **So Pilate went back into the governor’s residence, summoned Jesus, and asked Him, “Are You the King of the Jews?” Jesus replied, “Are you saying this on your own initiative, or have others told you about Me?” Pilate answered, “I am not a Jew am I? Your own people and Your chief priests handed You over to me. What have You done?”** (John 18:33-35)

Jesus knows that Pilate’s idea of a king is a political king. But Jesus is not that kind of king and He proceeds to explain this. **Jesus replied, “My kingdom is not from this world. If My kingdom were from this world, My servants would be fighting to**

keep Me from being handed over to the Jewish authorities. But as it is My kingdom is not from here.” (John 18:36) In other words, Jesus’ kingdom is not tied to the national identity of Israel nor is it a political threat to Rome. Jesus’s kingdom is not a physical kingdom. It’s a spiritual kingdom.

Pilate’s response to Jesus is a bit derisive. **Then Pilate said, “So You are a king!”** (John 18:37) Jesus just told Pilate that He has a kingdom. In Pilate’s mind this means that Jesus must be some sort of king. Pilate is puzzled by this man Jesus. He doesn’t look anything like any king he’s ever seen before. And on top of that, just look at the way Jesus has been treated by His own people! None of this adds up. Pilate questions Jesus a little longer and then brings Him back outside to the Jews. He announces his verdict – **“I find no basis for an accusation against [Jesus].”** (John 18:38)

But this is not the end of the matter. The Jewish religious leaders refuse to accept Pilate’s answer. They continue with their accusations against Jesus. **But they persisted in saying, “He incites the people by teaching throughout all Judea. It started in Galilee and ended up here!”** (Luke 23:5) Pilate is relieved to learn that Jesus is a Galilean. This gives him an excuse to send Jesus to Herod Antipas because Galilee is technically in HIS jurisdiction. So Pilate turns Jesus over to Herod who just happens to be in Jerusalem for the Passover. Pilate is more than happy to let someone else deal with this “King Jesus” issue. So Jesus is taken over to Herod.

King Herod is actually glad to meet Jesus. He’s heard many stories about Him. He hopes that Jesus will perform some miracle for him. But that is not happening. Herod questions Jesus at length, but Jesus never answers him. Soon Herod grows tired of Jesus. He and his soldiers poke fun of Jesus and mock Him. Aware of Jesus’s claims to be a king, Herod dresses Jesus up in a king’s robe and then sends Him back to Pilate.

Pilate is face with a serious dilemma. On the one hand he knows that Jesus has not done anything deserving of death, at least based on Roman law. His own wife has even advised him, **“Have nothing to do with that innocent man.”** (Matthew 27:19) On the other hand Pilate wants to keep the peace in Jerusalem. His job depends on it. So how does he maintain this balance?

Pilate comes up with an idea to solve this problem – a prisoner release, a good will gesture. One of the prisoners being held by the Roman government in Jerusalem is a Jewish rebel named Barabbas. He has been accused of killing someone during an insurrection in the city. Pilate gives the people their choice. He will either release for them Jesus, an innocent man who claims to be some sort of king, or Barabbas, a dangerous well-known murderer. Pilate feels fairly certain that now he can rid himself of his problem. But as we will soon see, Pilate has horribly misjudged the situation!