

Alone

April 23 – Mk: 14:43-52; Matt. 26:47-56; Lk. 22:47-53; Jn. 18:3-11

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Day 113 – 252 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

Judas betrayed Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. He arrived with armed guards in the cover of night and delivered Jesus into the hands of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Jesus' disciples abandoned Him to His accusers, as He foretold. All these things, of course, were prophesied in the Old Testament. There are several things to note in this scene.

First, Jesus' arrest happened at night. The religious leaders wanted to seize Him for months, even years, but they feared the people. Arresting Him during the day would've started a riot. Thus, they waited for an opportune moment. Jesus pointed out their cowardice, for He had taught in the Temple repeatedly during the day.

Second, when Jesus asked the mob, "Whom do you seek," they responded by telling Him Jesus the Nazarene. When Jesus said, "I am He," everyone "drew back and fell to the ground" (Jn. 18:5, 6). They could not stand in the awesome presence of God's Son. What was the point? Jesus was not defenseless or weak. He even could've called upon the angels to assist Him (Matt. 26:53). He was not taken by men against His will. He could've easily escaped if He wanted, but despite displaying the power of God, He willingly surrendered to arrest. Simply put, Jesus was not a victim but a willing sacrifice. He gave up His power to give in to the Father's will.

Third, Judas betrayed Jesus with a kiss. While a kiss on the cheek was a common greeting, this identified to the mob who was to be arrested. What's worse is that Jesus called Judas a friend (Matt. 26:50). One of His disciples, who had followed Him for three years, watched His miracles, seen Him change lives and give salvation to thousands, gave Him over to His enemies for a little money and a kiss. That kiss had to be more painful than any slap, punch, whip, or nail.

Third, notice that even in that moment, Jesus was selfless. When His life was on the line, He was thinking about and protecting His disciples. He asked the mob to let them go to fulfill His purpose and promise (Jn. 18:8, 9). Even then, after Peter rashly responded by swinging his sword at one of the guards and cutting off his ear, Jesus made amends for Peter's error. Had Jesus not healed Malchus' ear, Peter would've certainly been arrested or killed.

Finally, once Jesus was seized, **the disciples fled and left Him alone**, just as He said. "The shepherd would be struck down and the sheep would scatter," another fulfillment of prophecy (Matt. 26:31, 56).

Did you catch the strange description of a naked man running away into the night? He was a young man, not one of the disciples, wearing his night garment. When the guards threatened to seize him, his linen sheet tore off, and he escaped (Mk. 14:51, 52). Why are these verses included in the Bible? Perhaps this was a subtle way of telling the reader that John Mark was present in the garden that night. The writers of the New Testament don't always include their names in their works (Jn. 13:23).

Daily Reflection

What is the point of this passage? The key is this — **they all left Him** (Matt. 26:56; 14:50). Jesus was betrayed by one disciple and abandoned by the others; even the young man who followed fled. **It had to be that way.**

Imagine if Jesus and the eleven disciples (or even just Peter) were arrested and crucified. Could we say that Jesus alone died in our place when there were eleven others with Him? Imagine the confusion surrounding His sacrifice and our salvation. No, **the point is Jesus had to drink God's cup of wrath or judgment on His own.** "He Himself bore our sins in His body..." **alone** (1 Pet. 2:24).

Trials and Denials

Today in Your Reading

As the religious leaders condemned Jesus in trials, Peter fulfilled Jesus' prediction with denials. The story moved from the Garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus was betrayed and arrested, to Jerusalem where He stood before the Jewish notables for questioning.

The first person to question Jesus was Annas, the previous high priest and the father-in-law to Caiaphas, the current high priest. Though Annas was no longer in leadership, he still had a great deal of influence regarding religious matters. By the end of the night, Caiaphas and several other dignitaries had interrogated Jesus.

These trials were illegal and unjust even by Jewish standards. Trials were not supposed to be at night nor held in secret. False witnesses (probably bribed) presented false evidence. They were looking for a reason to put Jesus to death, but they were not finding any (*Mk. 14:55*). The defendant (Jesus) was physically abused during the trials, and the death penalty was declared within minutes. Obviously, these men were not interested in truth or justice. Jesus was a threat to their rule, and they did whatever was necessary to ensure that He was eliminated.

Meanwhile, two of Jesus' disciples had followed Him into Jerusalem to see what would happen. One was Peter, of course, but the other was not named, which indicates that it was probably the author, John (*18:15, 16*). While Jesus was being abused by the religious leaders, Peter endured his own predicament. Three times, people questioned him about being one of His disciples, and three times Peter denied it. Around the time of his third denial, Jesus had been led back into the courtyard. As soon as the words were on Peter's lips, he looked eyes with Jesus and a rooster crowed (*Lk. 22:60, 61*). Immediately, Peter remembered what Jesus had predicted, and he fled the scene weeping bitterly.

Daily Reflection

These scenes remind us of an important truth. Jesus was innocent. In fact, the chief priests had to distort the truth to incriminate Him. In their eyes, Jesus was guilty of death whether he was innocent or not. They were just looking for a "good" reason to justify their decision. Our Savior went to the cross a sinless man, falsely framed by His accusers.

But I would like to take a second look at Peter. To his credit, when the other guys ran off, he stuck around to see what would occur. **But Peter was not prepared for what happened that night.** Even though he was the loud and bold disciple, the one who briefly walked on water and the one who took a swing at a Temple guard, he was not yet whom God wanted him to be.

Peter was prideful. Remember, he scolded Jesus for speaking of His arrest and death. He also told Jesus that he would follow Him no matter what, even if it led to death. Peter was brave and daring, but he wasn't ready for the challenges that night.

The key to understanding Peter is found in Jesus' statement in the Garden, **"Keep watching and praying so that you may not come into temptation, for the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak"** (*Mk. 14:38; Matt. 26:41*). Peter wanted to be a hero and a tough guy, the one to follow Jesus to the end, but he couldn't even stay awake for an hour to pray.

In our spirit we may talk the talk, but can we get our flesh to walk the walk? Like Peter, we are weak. The fear of trials leads us to denials. In the weakness of our flesh, we will betray Jesus (like Judas), abandon Him (like the other disciples), and deny Him (like Peter).

What's the answer? How do we avoid denial in a trial? **Keep watching and praying.** After failing, God enabled Peter to be stronger than ever, even giving strength to others (*Lk. 22:32*).

Remorse or Repentance?

April 25 – Mark 15:1a; Luke 22:66-71; Matt. 27:1-10

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Day 115 – 250 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

The Sanhedrin condemned Jesus to death, and Judas hanged himself. The word *Sanhedrin* means “sitting together” or “council.” It is the supreme Jewish judicial and administrative authority in the New Testament, comprised of 71 chief priests, scribes, and elders (originating in *Num. 11:16, 17*). The High Priest (Caiaphas) was the presiding officer. The Sanhedrin’s decisions were binding and official. However, under Roman occupation, even this high council did not have the authority to execute someone. Therefore, members had to appeal to Pilate.

Since trials were not to be held at night, the Sanhedrin met in the morning to condemn Jesus. While they couldn’t find anything that He did wrong, they focused on His claim to be the Messiah (Christ). Since they rejected Jesus’ claim to be the Son of God, they condemned Him for blasphemy. Blasphemy is a direct offense to God, maligning His name or character. By claiming to be God’s Son and forever sitting at His right hand (*Lk. 22:69*), in their minds, Jesus was committing blasphemy, which was a bridge too far for the Jewish leaders. Even though Jesus was telling the truth, that was all they needed to condemn Him to death.

Meanwhile, having considered his part in Jesus’ arrest, trials, and condemnation, Judas felt remorse and returned the payment he had received to the chief priests. He realized that He had betrayed an innocent man, but it was too late. The Jewish leaders got their man and laid the blame at Judas’ feet. The guilt was too much for him to bare. After throwing the money into the Temple, he took his own life.

Knowing they had used the money to capture and condemn “a criminal,” the chief priests could not use it for the purposes of the Temple, so they bought a field to use as a cemetery. Without knowing it, they had fulfilled an age-old prophecy (*Jer. 19:1-13; Zech. 11:12, 13*).

Daily Reflection

Judas felt remorse for his part in Jesus’ death (*Matt. 27:3*), but as far as we know, he never repented of his actions. What’s the difference? Remorse is the pain or anguish caused by a sense of guilt. Judas was convicted by his conscience that he had done something wrong. Repentance, however, is a step beyond remorse. Repentance does include sorrow or regret for wrongdoing, but it also entails a change of heart or mind and making amends for one’s actions. **A person only feels remorse because of the consequences of his actions, but it does not lead to change.** Repentance leads one to ask forgiveness and to make a course correction, a change in behavior.

Read *2 Corinthians 7:10*. What does Paul say is different between worldly sorrow (remorse) and godly sorrow (repentance)?

Apply Paul’s words to Judas and Peter’s betrayals (*Matt. 26:75; Jn. 21:15-17*).

Many times, we feel remorse for our wrongdoing but never do repent or change. What does that communicate to God? How would you describe your attitude towards sin? Are you remorseful or repentant? Godly sorrow leads to repentance. Where will worldly sorrow lead you?

His Blood Is on Our Hands

Today in Your Reading

Pontius Pilate and King Herod questioned Jesus. This passage has some important conversations, most of them involving Pilate, the Roman Governor at the time. Let's take a closer look.

The chief priests brought Jesus to Pilate because they needed his permission to kill Him. Pilate questioned Jesus privately but found no guilt in Him. He understood that the religious leaders were envious of Jesus and wanted Him dead.

Here are some comments to note in Jesus' conversation with Pilate. First, Jesus told the Governor that His kingdom was not of this world (*Jn. 18:36*), a subtle hint of the spiritual nature of heaven. Second, Pilate was seeking truth like everyone else (*v.38*). Jesus answered Pilate's inquiry when He said, "I was born and have come into the world to testify of the truth" (*v.37*). Jesus was the Truth in the flesh (*Jn. 14:6*). Third, as God, Jesus told Pilate that he had no authority over Him unless it was given to him by the Father (*19:11*). Even civil government derives its authority from God.

Fourth, Pilate's wife told him not to have anything to do with Jesus, as she had dreamt of "this righteous man." This dream confirmed what Pilate knew to be right, that Jesus was innocent. Three times, Pilate told the Jewish leaders that he had found no guilt in Him. He even washed his hands of Jesus, meaning that he was not responsible for His death.

Pilate also had an interesting conversation with the people, who were stirred up by the religious leaders. While Jesus hadn't done anything wrong, the crowd wanted to crucify Him. Why? They were simply shouting what they were being told by members of the Sanhedrin. They were desperate to get a conviction, so desperate they brought false charges and prodding the people to shout, "We have no king but Caesar," something they would never admit.

Daily Reflection

There are some subtle storylines occurring in the backdrop of Jesus' trials today. First, did you notice that these trials helped build a stronger alliance between Pilate and Herod, who were political enemies (*Luke 23:12*). Second, Jesus was traded for the life of Barabbas, a rebel and a murderer (*v.19*). In other words, because Jesus (innocent) was slain, Barabbas went free (sinner), a picture of our salvation.

Third, when Pilate recognized that the crowd was getting angry and wanted Jesus dead, Pilate had a towel brought out and washed his hands. **He did not want Jesus' blood on his hands.** In essence, Pilate was saying that he didn't want to be held responsible for murdering an innocent man. But it doesn't work that way. **We don't get to wash our hands of Jesus' blood. His blood stains our hands whether we like it or not.** All of us are sinful and guilty of death. The sins of mankind (even Pilate's) killed Jesus.

While the Jews yelled terrible things at Jesus and demanded Jesus' crucifixion, they made a sobering comment. **"His blood shall be on us and on our children"** (*Matt. 27:25*). Little did they know that this comment would curse the Jews for quite a while.

What do we have in common with Pilate, the Sanhedrin, the Jewish people, and Barabbas?

No one is clean. We are all stained with blood.

By His Stripes

April 27 – Mt. 27:27-32; Mk. 15:16-21; Lk. 23:26-32

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Day 117 – 248 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

Jesus began the long walk to the hill where He will be crucified. Normally, condemned men were forced to carry the crossbar to the execution site. However, though Jesus began carrying His own cross (*Jn. 19:17*), He could not go very far without help. With the sleepless night before and the torture of the morning, Jesus couldn't carry on.

What happened that morning? Though Jesus was mistreated during His trials, that was nothing compared to how He was treated after being sentenced to die. First, Jesus was scourged (*Matt. 27:26; Mk. 15:15*). Since there is not much said about the scourging, this event is often overlooked. What Jesus endured here was gruesome, so let's pause a minute.

A Roman flagrum was a tool of torture, a wooden handle with several straps of leather and bits of metal or bone tied at the end. A professional soldier could use the flagrum to tear into and under the skin of the back, sides, stomach, and legs. To save time, the Romans used two guards, one on each side. They used the flagrum to gain information from suspects. It wouldn't take long for men to change their minds or tell the truth. Some even died. **However, Jesus didn't die, and He didn't change His mind.** But no wonder He didn't have the strength to carry His cross up the hill.

After the flogging, the guards mocked Jesus for being called the King of the Jews. They covered him in a robe, put a phony scepter in His hand, and beat a crown of thorns onto His head. They knelt before Him, spit on Him, punched Him, then took the reed and beat Him with it.

To read what happened and imagine it in my mind was painful. Was all this really necessary? Yes. It was foretold by the prophets (*Isa. 50:6; 53*) and linked Jesus to the sin in the Garden. **Remember, one of the curses of sin was the thorns in the field (*Gen. 3:17, 18*).**

Let's go back to the road to the hill. Because Jesus needed help with His crossbar, a man named Simon of Cyrene was pressed into helping Him. Simon was coming into Jerusalem with his two sons, Alexander and Rufus. Since Mark used their names, it is possible that either he or the reader knew the family (*Rom. 16:13*). He may not have known it at the time, but Simon would one day tell people that He had the privilege of carrying Jesus' cross.

There were others mentioned on the walk to the hill. For example, there was a crowd of women weeping, to whom Jesus prophesied about the destruction of Jerusalem (*Lk. 23:27-31; 21:20-24; Hos. 10:8*). There were also two criminals on the path carrying their crossbars. They will be crucified on either side of Jesus.

Daily Reflection

Take a minute to read *Isaiah 53:3-10*. What images or thoughts did you have when reading these words?

Jesus had already endured so much, yet He wasn't even to the cross. Every time He was beaten with a fist, kicked with a foot, slapped with a hand, smacked with a reed, pierced with a thorn, thrashed with a flagrum, or covered with spittle, He was thinking of us. "He was pierced through for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. The chastening of our wellbeing fell upon Him, and **by His stripes (scourging) we were healed**" (*Isa. 54:5*).

It Is Finished

April 28 – Mt. 27:33-56; Mk. 15:22-41; Lk. 23:33-49; Jn. 19:16-30

BiAY.org | Daily Reflections NT
Day 118 – 247 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

Jesus died on the cross at Golgotha or Calvary, which means “the Place of the Skull.” **All that we have read for these past four months came to a climax on the cross, and just like that, His work was done, and His life was over.**

So much happened while Jesus hung on the cross that it would take a week of devotions to cover it all. Here is a brief recap of events.

After crucifying Jesus, soldiers mocked Him, then cast lots for His clothes (*Ps. 22:18*). They hung a sign above His head that said, “King of the Jews.” They also gave Jesus sour wine to drink, which He refused.

Jesus cared for His mother Mary by asking John to look after her once He was gone.

People passing by hurled abuse at Jesus, daring Him to come down from the cross. Jesus prayed, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (*Lk. 23:34*).

One of the robbers mocked Jesus, while the other defended Him. He then asked Jesus to remember him in His kingdom. Jesus told him, “You will be with Me there” (*Lk. 23:43*).

Darkness covered the land, and Jesus shouted, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me” (*Mk. 15:34; Ps. 22:1*).

Just before He died, Jesus said, “**It is finished**” (*Jn. 19:30*).

When Jesus gave up His spirit and breathed His last, the ground shook, rocks split, and the Temple veil tore in two from the top to the bottom. Dead people even came to life.

One of the Roman soldiers on the scene proclaimed, “Surely, this was the Son of God” (*Mk. 15:39*).

Daily Reflection

Of all the things Jesus said on the cross, perhaps the most important were the words, “**It is finished!**” What exactly did Jesus mean when He said that? First, the phrase, “It is finished,” is an accounting reference, meaning “**paid in full.**” The ransom that He came to pay for sinners was fulfilled (*Mk. 10:45*). Our debt to sin was satisfied by His sinless sacrifice.

Second, by His death on the cross, Jesus fulfilled the prophecies about the Messiah. One in particular was the first prophecy, *Genesis 3:15*, when Adam and Eve were promised that **one of her offspring would crush the head of the serpent and end the curse of sin.** “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us. For it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree’” (*Gal. 3:13*).

Third, **Jesus obeyed the Father’s will and drank the cup of His wrath and judgment for our sin** (*Lk. 22:42*). He took everything that was meant for us upon Himself (*1 Pet. 3:18*). “He made Him, who knew no sin, to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (*2 Cor. 5:21*).

Fourth, when Jesus died on the cross, the Temple veil was torn. The inner veil to the Holy of Holies separated men from the presence of God. Only the High Priest could enter. Jesus, our Great High Priest, tore the veil, which means that **all can come into the presence of God through Him** (*Jn. 14:6; Heb. 10:19, 20*).

Finally, by saying, “It is finished,” **Jesus had accomplished all that the Father had given Him to do** (*Jn. 17:4; 19:28*). He was done with His work. In the Jewish sacrificial system, the priests’ work was never finished. But, with Jesus’ sinless sacrifice, He was able to sit down at the right hand of the Father, having completed the work for all time (*Matt. 22:44; Acts 2:33*). It was finished!

Jesus Was Dead

April 29 – Mt. 27:57-66; Mk. 15:42-47; Lk. 23:50-56; Jn. 19:31-47

BiAY.org | Daily Reflections NT
Day 119 – 246 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

Followers of Jesus cared for His body after His crucifixion. The Romans would've thrown Jesus' body into an open grave on a pile of other corpses; but for Scripture to be fulfilled, He had to be buried in a rich man's tomb (*Isa. 53:9*).

Two members of the Sanhedrin, Joseph and Nicodemus, came forward and asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Though they had secretly believed that Jesus was the Messiah, they were now ready to identify with Him. Pilate, of course, was surprised, since they were part of the group that condemned Jesus to death. However, Luke pointed out that Joseph had not consented to their plan or actions (*Lk. 23:51*).

Before releasing Jesus' body to these men, Pilate ensured that He was dead. With the Sabbath approaching, he did not want to leave the men on the cross, so he ordered that their legs be broken to hasten suffocation and death. However, Jesus had already died, so the guards did not break His legs (another fulfillment of prophecy, *Ex. 12:46; Ps. 34:20*). Instead, one of the guards pierced Jesus' side with a spear (*Isa. 53:5; Zech. 12:10*).

John, who was an eyewitness to this scene (*20:35*), noted that when Jesus was pierced by the spear, blood and water came out (*v.34*). While there is great debate over why he included this detail in his account, clearly John thought the blood and water were significant (*1 John 5:6-8*). Perhaps, this detail was mentioned to refute those who did not believe Jesus died in the flesh. Or maybe this detail was meant for the Jews. In their sacrificial system, before a priest can enter the holy place and atone for the sins of the people, he must wash his hands at the water laver and shed blood at the altar of sacrifice. Jesus, by laying down His own life and shedding His blood and water, is eligible to provide atonement for the sins of man and make a way for us to enter the presence of God (*Lev. 16*).

There are two other details to note about Jesus' burial. First, His enemies were afraid that His disciples would steal the body in the night and claim that He had risen from the dead. Thus, they asked Pilate to set his seal on the tomb and place guards there to prevent any claims of resurrection (*Matt. 27:66*).

Also, notice that there were women watching the burial process. Because the Sabbath was upon them, the men had to hurry and did not get to complete the burial properly. The ladies will return after the Sabbath to finish the job.

Daily Reflection

What should we take away from this passage? **These verses dispute claims that Jesus did not die or that His resurrection was a hoax.** Note how many times people verified Jesus' death.

Joseph and Nicodemus were convinced that Jesus was **dead** and asked for His body. They took Him down from the cross and laid His **dead** body in a tomb and used spices.

Pontius Pilate ensured that Jesus was **dead**.

The Roman soldiers made sure that Jesus was **dead** (piercing His side with a spear).

John (the disciple) was at the scene and verified that Jesus was **dead** (blood, water).

Women present at the crucifixion and the tomb believed that Jesus was **dead**.

The chief priests and other members of the Sanhedrin were convinced Jesus was **dead** and even took measures to keep it that way.

Other witnesses (passersby) watched Jesus **die**. They also experienced the earthquake and saw dead people come to life.

Jesus was dead. Period. End of story. Or was it?