

"In the Glory of God"

Just hours before His arrest, trial and crucifixion, Jesus went to the garden of Gethsemane and poured out His heart to His Father in heaven. The words He would utter at this particular time are among the most poignant ever recorded. It is simply impossible to truly grasp what was taking place in the stillness of that evening. However, it is clear that this was a very special moment.

The events that were about to cascade down upon the Messiah bore tremendous weight and stand as a pivotal point in God's Plan. For this reason, He sought the strength and virtue of the only person in the entire universe who could lead him through it. Kneeling before His Father in heaven was something that defined so much of the Jesus' life. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that this is what He would be doing as He prepared for His death.

The immense love and devotion these two Beings had for each other is simply beyond human comprehension. For all eternity this Father and Son had shared life's greatest mysteries. They were together when the angelic realm was created. They were together when the universe was fashioned. They were together when Lucifer rejected God's sovereignty and moral leadership. They were together when man was formed out of the dust of the earth. They were together when the Destiny of all mankind was first envisioned. They were together when the Plan that would bring that Destiny to fruition was crafted.

Now, once again, they are together. They are intimately connected as the most selfless act in history is about to play out. With this said, there is something else taking place at this moment. As they share this final evening of Jesus' life, the time is now rapidly approaching when they will no longer be together. Imagine being cut off from the one Being in the universe who meant everything to you. This is what these two Wonderful Champions would experience in just a matter of hours.

As Jesus cried out to His Father, the agony He was going through was very apparent. The gospel of Luke states that the perspiration that fell from Him "became as it were great drops of blood" (Lk. 22:44). So intense was this moment that an angel was dispatched from heaven to strengthen Him. However, at this point, for the next precious minutes it would be just Jesus of Nazareth and His Eternal Father.

An Extraordinary Appeal

The gospel of John records words of extraordinary power spoken by Jesus as he approached the garden of Gethsemanaee. Here, in a prayer that may very well have been in the presence of all His disciples, the Messiah reveals that He was fully aware that something horrible was looming over Him. He knew that His end was near.

John 17:1-4

These words spoke Jesus, and lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify your Son, that your Son also may glorify you. As you have given him power over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as you have given Him. And this is life eternal, that they might know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. I have glorified you on the earth: I have finished the work which you gave me to do.

It is interesting that Jesus said He had “finished” the work His Father had given Him. This, even though He had not yet been crucified. At this point, it is important to understand that Jesus was fully aware of the significance of His impending death as well as its method (crucifixion). Clearly, the Messiah knew that His sacrifice represented a critical part of the work He had been given (1Jn. 3:5). Yet He still uttered these words. This being the case, it is obvious that Jesus was speaking in a very assumptive tone. He was declaring that His sacrifice was already fixed in His Father’s will and He knew that He would carry it out. In other words, it was as good as done.

Jesus would then appeal to the Father to restore to Him the glory He possessed prior to His incarnation, even prior to the time the earth came into existence. Notice what He said.

And now, O Father, glorify you me with thine own self with the glory I had with you before the world was. (Jn. 17:5)

The Greek word “glory” used by the apostle John when recording Jesus’ prayer, is *doxa* and can be translated: “dignity,” “honor,” “praise,” or “worship.” Here, Jesus was importuning the Father to return to Him the great dignity He surrendered when He came to earth as a man. Consider what Jesus willingly left behind in order to become flesh.

Prior to His birth, the Messiah was infinitely powerful. Even time and space could not subdue Him (Psa. 90:1-2). His strength was endless. His beauty and majesty was unmatched. His wisdom and virtue was pristine.

Jesus was the God of the Old Testament. It was He who spoke and earth existed. It was He who fashioned the heavens by His Wisdom. Jesus was the One who spoke to Abraham in Haran and to Moses on Mount Sinai. He was El Shaddai, the Almighty.

But now he was just a man. He had all the weaknesses that come with being human. Jesus could tire and even become exhausted. He could suffer hunger and thirst as well as pain. Furthermore, all the love and mercy He possessed could not insulate Him from the excruciating agony He would soon experience at the end of His life. His body was literally going to be ripped apart in a brutal ritual called “scourging.” He was then going to be nailed to a stake and left to die in the presence of His own mother. This is not something anyone would normally look forward to. But Jesus gave up eternity to be in this very spot. And He had no illusions regarding what was about to occur at a place called Golgotha. He was well aware of the numerous prophecies describing the gory details of His death. He inspired the twenty-second Psalm and the fifty-third chapter of the book of Isaiah. With this in mind, consider how this perfect Savior’s life would come to an end.

The Death of the Lamb

No single event in all the Bible consumes more room in the scriptures than the last twenty-four hours of Jesus’ life. In the gospels alone, thirteen chapters are dedicated to this moment. Here, God’s only begotten Son will be offered up as a perfect sacrifice to atone for the sins of all who will accept this great gift.

This period would begin with Jesus and His disciples partaking of the Passover in accordance with God’s command (Lev. 23:5). At this time, the Messiah would reveal that He was the true Passover Lamb whose body would be broken and whose blood would be shed (Mt. 26:27-29). Additionally, during this meal, Jesus would indicate that He would be betrayed by one of His own disciples (Jn. 13:21). This must have been one of the saddest announcements the Messiah would ever make.

After the meal, Jesus and His disciples, less Judas Iscariot, journeyed toward the garden of Gethsemanaē. It is here that He would spend His last precious hours of freedom. As the Messiah agonizingly prayed over what was about to take place, His three closest friends, Peter, James, and John were sleeping just a stone's throw away (Lk. 22:41-46)

The Arrest of the Messiah

The gospels indicate that as Jesus concluded praying to His Father in the garden, a contingent of armed soldiers representing the chief priests and the Pharisees could be heard approaching. Leading this group was none other than His betrayer, Judas Iscariot. According to John's account, Jesus would then go forth to meet them (Jn. 18:4). At this point, an important but often overlooked fact takes place. Jesus went out to meet Judas and his party – as opposed to waiting for them to come to Him. This extraordinary act of courage speaks volumes about the Messiah and reveals Him as one who was totally prepared to advance toward the enemy of the faith even if it would mean His death.

At this point, events would begin to accelerate. For the next several hours Jesus would be tried by the Jewish leadership under the direction of Caiaphas, the high priest, and his father-in-law, Annas. Annas had also served as high priest from 6 A.D. to 15 A.D. At that time he was removed from office by the Roman procurator, Valerius Gratus. Some authorities have suggested that Annas was involved in Jesus' trial because he may have been instrumental in formulating the actual charges against Him. However, despite their greatest effort, Annas and Caiaphas had to rely on the testimony of false witnesses in their attempt to secure a guilty verdict. Their hostility toward the Messiah became so warped that they would do anything to destroy Him.

Meanwhile, as Jesus was being slandered and condemned in a kangaroo court presided over by the great "moral leaders" of God's people, His most loyal disciple was publicly forsaking Him. The apostle Peter, who had once rebuked the Messiah for even thinking he would allow his Savior to be abandoned (Mt. 16:21-22; Lk. 22:33), was now denying that he even knew Him. Peter did this at three different times. So adamant was his third denial that he actually pronounced a curse on himself to prove he had never been one of Jesus' disciples (Mt. 26:72-74). In this moment of great weakness, Peter abandoned his Lord just as Jesus said he would (Mt. 26:75). Now, consumed with fear and guilt, he would depart in grief, leaving his Savior alone. However, for Jesus, things would only get worse.

After being formally condemned by the high court of the Jews, the Messiah was bound and brought before Pontus Pilate, the governor of Judea at that time. His accusers informed Pilate that Jesus was guilty of the highest crimes against Rome. These crimes included 1) perverting the nation, 2) tax evasion, and 3) insurrection and treason (Lk. 23:2). John's gospel indicates that Jesus was also accused of being "an evil doer" (Jn. 18:30).

Although Pilate did not have a reputation as a just man, even he could tell Jesus was innocent of the charges being leveled against Him (Lk. 23:14-16). Pilate even understood the motivation these religious leaders had for trying to destroy the Messiah (Mt. 27:18). However, the pressure applied on him to execute Jesus was growing greater by the minute. While all his sensibilities told him to walk away from this situation, the fear of a public uprising told him he could not (Mt. 27:24).

After several maneuvers to absolve himself from having to pass judgment in this matter, Pilate found himself cornered by a growing crowd, crying out for Jesus' blood. The

instigators of this pressure even challenged the governor's loyalty to Caesar and Rome. They suggested that if Jesus was released, Pilate would be, for all intents and purposes, complicit in treason (Jn. 19:12).

With his options running out, Pilate made one final move. In a last ditch effort to spare Jesus' life, he presented a choice to the mob that was gathering outside. He would at this time invoke a Passover custom in which a condemned man would be set free (Mt. 27:15). In accordance with this custom, he would allow the Jews outside his palace to choose who would be released.

At this point, Pilate sought out the most despicable criminal he could find, and his search led him to a man named Barabbas. Barabbas was sentenced to die for high crimes against Rome. He was convicted of insurrection, murder and robbery (Lk. 23:19, 25). Matthew's gospel refers to him as "notorious" (Mt. 27:16 NIV). By today's standard, Barabbas could easily be likened to a violent terrorist. He was a first century sociopath with no redeeming qualities.

Pilate then ordered that this vile man be brought before the crowd. With this final stroke, the governor places before his growing audience two men; Jesus of Nazareth and Barabbas. He then invites his audience to determine who should live and who should die.

To Pilate the choice seemed obvious. However, he was gravely mistaken. When he asked the crowd who should be released, Jesus or Barabbas, the crowd, in a near frenzy, cried out, "Give us Barabbas!" The irony of their appeal was unquestionably lost on them, but it was truly remarkable. The name Barabbas means "son of the father." Here at this precise moment, a pseudo "son of the father" would be released while the real "Son of the Father" would be put to death.

As the cry of the mob was still echoing through Pilate's courtyard, the fate of Jesus was sealed. The last appeal for clemency had been denied. Here, the Great God of the Old Testament is about to become the Lamb of New Testament. With a death sentence now passed, Pilate orders Jesus to be prepared for execution. What would take place next was truly sickening. Pilate ordered Jesus delivered up to be "scourged," a ritual that was totally devoid of mercy (Mt. 27:26).

Scourging was a form of beating in which the thongs of a whip were weighted with jagged pieces of bone or metal to make the blows more effective. This practice was used to wrest confessions and secrets from enemies. Unlike beatings that were performed by the Jews ("forty lashes"), the Roman practice left the number of blows up to the whim of the one commanding the affair.

During this gory ritual, victims were tied to a stake with back bare, and generally fainted from the blows if they didn't die outright. Furthermore, a special scourging was designed to prepare a person for crucifixion. Under this practice, the administrator would "artfully" bring his victim to the brink of death, then pause to allow him to gain some strength. He would then sadistically resume the beating which would nearly skin his victim alive. This scourging was appropriately referred to as the "half death," and is undoubtedly what Jesus was subjected to.

After being mercilessly beaten and bruised, an exhausted Messiah was marched to the site of His execution. As He limped toward Golgotha, He could hear the taunts and jeers of the crowds that followed Him. Then, at about 9:00 am Jesus was nailed to a beam that would suspend His bloody body for the next six hours. The pain he was now suffering was unbearable.

A Torturous Death

Crucifixion was one of the most barbarous forms of punishment known to man. It was practiced in times of war by the Phoenicians, Carthaginians, Egyptians, and later by the Romans. It was unspeakably cruel and degrading. The agony of crucifixion was brought about by the painful character of the wounds inflicted, the great suffering caused by the position of the body, and the traumatic fever induced by hanging for such a long time. This is how God's beloved Son would spend the final hours of His life.

As Jesus' ravaged body was exposed for all to see, His love for mankind was not abated. The first words He spoke were "Father forgive them: for they know not what they do" (Lk. 23:34). Imagine the enormity of love that inspired such words. Here hung a man more innocent than any child. Never once did He consider evil as an option. He never spoke a vile word nor pondered a wrong thought. The crucifixion of Jesus stands as the greatest act of injustice ever committed by man. And Jesus' response stands as the most merciful utterance in history. So committed was this Great King to the forgiveness of sin that He offered His own life so that man would not have to suffer the eternal consequences of his actions.

To Die Alone

The scriptures reveal that as Jesus was suffering the final moments of His torturous execution, he would experience the greatest horror of His life. In order for Him to pay the price for the sins of all mankind, He would have to shoulder them on His own. All the evil ever perpetrated by the human family was now going to be conveyed to the Messiah.

At this moment, Jesus became sin. He now felt the ugliness of every act of depravity as well as every nuance of error. At this moment, Jesus was very imperfect. As He hung suspended in this state, His Father turned away, leaving Him to die alone. All the intimacy they had shared throughout eternity was, in a moment, gone. The horror the Messiah was going through is simply beyond belief. He had now become everything He despised. At this point, He cried out to His Father in heaven, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" that is: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken Me?" (Mt. 27:46). Noticeably absent was any answer.

Moments after Jesus' cry of anguish, a soldier would drive a spear into his side causing massive hemorrhaging (Mt. 27:49 Moffatt Translation). As His blood poured forth from His body, Jesus was now only seconds away from becoming the Savior of the world. His final utterance before commending His spirit back to the Father was, "It is finished" (Jn. 19:30). With these words, Jesus was declaring that he had accomplished what He purposed in His heart before the world was even formed. He had reconciled God's children back to the Father (Ro. 5:10). With this marvelous act of love a door to eternity was opened. Through it, God's human family would have an opportunity to become His spiritual Family and to share eternity with Him.