

I'M DYING TO SEE YOU

“I’d give anything if only I could” How often have you silently uttered that Faustian bribe, resigned to trade some treasure for what you desperately desire? At stake was life and limb, or a prized relationship, or financial failure. Whatever, it was a piece of your heart for which you’d readily sacrifice a valued possession. Thus today’s BIG QUESTION:

How far would you go to spare the life of one dear to you? Have you already done that? With what repercussions?

Many donate blood. A few give bone marrow or an organ. Some put life on hold to care for a helpless loved one. Some forfeit a career for the sake of a spouse. Many leave singleness to share life with another person. But can we ever know, until “high noon,” if we’d actually die for someone? What is one life worth?

The first four books of the New Testament were written c. AD 55-AD 95 to memorialize the incomparable 33-year era when God wore an earth suit. The authors were Matthew, a once-despised tax collector/extortionist who became a devoted disciple of Jesus Christ. Next, Mark, a kid when Jesus was crucified, and, later, an evangelist with Paul. Next, Luke, a Gentile physician in what’s now western Turkey whom Paul introduced to Christ on his first of three missionary trips. Dr. Luke accompanied Paul to Rome where Paul was executed for “talkin’ Jesus” across much of the Roman realm. John had had a fishing business with his brother James, but left his net profits behind when Jesus beckoned, “Follow me.”

The Jewish Passover is also Easter. Let’s relive the world-shaping events of that first Easter, reading chronological excerpts from all four Gospel writers. As we check in, Jesus has been sold down the river by His pretend friend Judas, arrested and now faces six, mock trials in less than six hours, en route to an execution too brutally inhumane for Rome to mete out to its own citizens.

Jesus and the Supremes

53 Jesus was led to (Caiaphas) the high priest's home where the leading priests, other leaders, and teachers of religious law had gathered. 54 Meanwhile, Peter followed far behind and then slipped inside the gates of the high priest's courtyard. For a while he sat with the guards, warming himself by the fire.

55 Inside, the leading priests and the entire (Sanhedrin) high council were trying to find witnesses who would testify against Jesus, so they could put him to death. But

their efforts were in vain. 56 Many false witnesses spoke against him, but they contradicted each other. 57 Finally, some men stood up to testify against him with this lie: 58 "We heard him say, `I will destroy this Temple made with human hands, and in three days I will build another, made without human hands.' " 59 But even then they didn't get their stories straight!

60 The high priest stood before the others and asked Jesus, "Well, aren't you going to answer these charges? What do you say for yourself?" 61 Jesus made no reply. Then the high priest asked him, "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the blessed God?" 62 Jesus said, "I am, and you will see me, the Son of Man, sitting at God's right hand in the place of power and coming back on the clouds of heaven."

63 The high priest tore his clothing to show his horror and said, "Why do we need other witnesses? 64 You have heard his blasphemy. What is your verdict?" And they all condemned him to death. 65 Some began to spit at him, and they blindfolded him and hit his face with their fists. "Who hit you that time, you prophet?" they jeered. Even the guards were hitting him as they led him away. (Mark 14:53-65)

Take Me to the Pilate

1 The entire council took Jesus over to Pilate, the Roman governor. 2 They began at once to state their case: "This man has been leading our people to ruin by telling them not to pay their taxes to the Roman government and by claiming he is the Messiah, a king."

3 So Pilate asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus replied, "Yes, it is as you say." 4 Pilate turned to the leading priests and to the crowd and said, "I find nothing wrong with this man!" 5 Then they became desperate. "But he is causing riots everywhere he goes, all over Judea, from Galilee to Jerusalem!"

6 "Oh, is he a Galilean?" Pilate asked. 7 When they answered that he was, Pilate sent him to Herod Antipas because Galilee was under Herod's jurisdiction. Herod happened to be in Jerusalem at the time.

Jesus before Herod

8 Herod was delighted to see Jesus because he had heard about him, hoping for a long time to see him perform a

miracle. 9 He asked question after question, but Jesus refused to answer. 10 Meanwhile, the leading priests and teachers of religious law stood shouting accusations. 11 Herod and his soldiers began mocking and ridiculing Jesus, put a royal robe on him and sent him back to Pilate. 12 Herod and Pilate, who had been enemies before, became friends that day.

Bounce Pass Back to Pilate

13 Pilate called the leading priests and other religious leaders, along with the people, 14 and announced his verdict. "You brought this man to me, accusing him of leading a revolt. I examined him thoroughly on this point in your presence and find him innocent. 15 Herod came to the same conclusion and sent him back to us. Nothing this man has done calls for the death penalty. 16 So I will have him flogged, then release him." (Luke 23:1-16)

6 Now it was the governor's custom to release one prisoner each year at Passover time--anyone the people requested. 7 One of the prisoners was Barabbas, convicted with others for murder during an insurrection. 8 The mob began to crowd in toward Pilate, asking him to release a prisoner as usual. 9 "Should I give you the King of the Jews?" Pilate asked. 10 (For he realized by now that the leading priests had arrested Jesus out of envy.) 11 But the leading priests stirred up the mob to demand the release of Barabbas instead of Jesus. 12 "But if I release Barabbas," Pilate asked them, "what should I do with this man you call the King of the Jews?"

13 They shouted, "Crucify him!" 14 "Why?" Pilate demanded. "What crime has he committed?" But the crowd roared louder, "Crucify him!" 15 Pilate, anxious to please the crowd, released Barabbas to them. He ordered Jesus flogged with a lead-tipped whip, then turned him over to the Roman soldiers to crucify him. (Mark 15:6-15)

QUESTION: What crime(s) was Jesus alleged to have committed? Who brought the charges and why?

"Weep No More, My Ladies"

27 Some of the governor's soldiers took Jesus to headquarters and called out the entire battalion. 28 They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him. 29 They made a

crown of long, sharp thorns, put it on his head, and placed a stick in his right hand as a scepter. Then knelt before him in mockery, yelling, "Hail! King of the Jews!" 30 They spit on him, grabbed the stick and beat him on the head. 31 When they tired of mocking him, they took off the robe, put his clothes on him again, then led him to be crucified.

(Matthew 27:27-31)

26 As they led Jesus away, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming from the country then, was forced to follow Jesus and carry his cross. 27 Great crowds trailed behind, including many grief-stricken women. 28 Jesus turned and said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, don't weep for me; weep for yourselves and your children. 29 For the days are coming when they will say, 'Fortunate indeed are women who are childless, the wombs that have not borne a child and the breasts that have never nursed.' 30 People will beg mountains to fall on them and hills to bury them. 31 For if these things are done when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry? "

(Luke 23:26-33)

Uncommon Compassion

25 It was nine in the morning when the crucifixion took place. (Mark 15:25) 32 Two criminals were led out to be executed with him. 33 Finally they came to a place called The Skull. All three were crucified there--Jesus on the center cross; the two criminals on either side. 34 Jesus said, "Father, forgive these people because they don't know what they are doing." The soldiers gambled for his clothes by throwing dice. (Luke 23:32-34)

QUESTION: If you saw Mel Gibson's "The Passion of the Christ," you got a glimpse of the excruciating agony Jesus endured for you and me. What could possibly have moved Him to forgive His executioners and that mob? Is there anyone you've wounded, or who's wounded you? How can you begin the healing process?

35 The crowd watched; the leaders laughed and scoffed. "He saved others; let him save himself if he is really God's Chosen One, the Messiah." 36 Soldiers mocked him, too, offering him sour wine. 37 They called to him, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" 38 A signboard was nailed to the cross above him with these words: "This is the King of the Jews."

39 One of the criminals hanging beside him scoffed, "So you're the Messiah, are you? Prove it by saving yourself-- and us, too, while you're at it!" 40 But the other criminal protested, "Don't you fear God even when you are dying? 41 We deserve to die for our evil deeds, but this man hasn't done anything wrong." 42 Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom." 43 And Jesus replied, "I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise."

QUESTION: Two thieves, both under a death sentence, both with the choice to make peace with the Savior nearby. Yet only one chooses Jesus and is promised immediate entry to heaven. No time for church, baptism, communion, or living a "good" life. No, he's moments from forever being with God, just because he chose Jesus. What kept his sidekick from making that choice?

Finished But Only Just Begun

44 By this time it was noon; darkness fell across the whole land until three. (Luke 23:44) 46 At about three o'clock Jesus called with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46; Psalm 22:1)

28 Jesus knew everything was now finished. To fulfill Scriptures, he said, "I am thirsty." (Psalms 22:15; 69:21) 29 A jar of sour wine was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put it on a hyssop branch, and held it up to his lips. 30 When Jesus tasted it, he said, "It is finished!" Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. (John 19:28-30) 46 Then Jesus shouted, "Father, I entrust my spirit into your hands!" With those words he breathed his last. (Luke 23:46; Psalm 31:5)

51 At that moment the curtain in the Temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, rocks split apart, 52 and tombs opened. The bodies of many godly men and women who had died were raised from the dead 53 after Jesus' resurrection. They left the cemetery, went into the holy city of Jerusalem, and appeared to many people. 54 The Roman officer and the other soldiers at the crucifixion were terrified by the earthquake and all that happened. They said, "Truly, this was the Son of God!" (Matthew 27:51-54)

48 And when the crowd that came to see the crucifixion saw all that had happened, they went home in deep sorrow. 49

But Jesus' friends, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance watching. (Luke 23:48-49)

Not Your Average Joe

50 Now there was a good and righteous man named Joseph. He was a member of the Jewish high council, 51 but had not agreed with the decision and actions of the other religious leaders. He was from the town of Arimathea in Judea, and had been waiting for the Kingdom of God to come. 52 He went to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. 53 Then he took the body from the cross and wrapped it in a long linen cloth and laid it in a new tomb carved out of rock. 54 This was done late on Friday afternoon, the day of preparation for the Sabbath.

55 As his body was taken away, the women from Galilee followed and saw the tomb where they placed his body. 56 They went home and prepared spices and ointments to embalm him. When they finished, it was the Sabbath. They rested all day as required by law. (Luke 23:50-56)

Can't Keep a God-man Down

Very early on Sunday the women came to the tomb, taking spices they had prepared. 2 They found that the stone covering the entrance had been rolled aside. 3 They went in, but couldn't find the body of the Lord Jesus. 4 They were puzzled, trying to think what could have happened to it. Suddenly, two men appeared in dazzling robes. 5 The women were terrified and bowed low. The men asked, "Why are you looking in a tomb for someone who is alive? 6 **He isn't here! He has risen from the dead!** Don't you remember what he told you in Galilee, 7 that the Son of Man must be betrayed into the hands of sinful men and be crucified, and that he would rise again the third day?" 8 They remembered he had said this. 9 So they rushed back to tell his eleven disciples--and everyone else--what had happened.

10 The women who went to the tomb were Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James and several others. They told the apostles what had happened, 11 but the story sounded like nonsense, so they didn't believe it. 12 However, Peter ran to the tomb to look. Stooping, he peered in, saw the empty linens, then went home again, wondering what had happened. (Luke 24:1-12)

QUESTION: "He's not here! He's alive again!" This is the continental divide of all time and eternity. Paul says if Jesus had not risen, we'd all be left hopeless, condemned in our sins (1 Corinthians 15:17). If you'd lived back then, how would you have been affected?

On The Road Again

13 That day two of Jesus' followers were walking to Emmaus, seven miles from Jerusalem. 14 They were talking about what happened. 15 Suddenly Jesus joined them and began walking. 16 But they didn't know who he was because God kept them from recognizing him. 17 "You seem to be in deep discussion," he said. "What are you concerned about?" They stopped, sadness written on their faces. 18 One of them, Cleopas, replied, "You must be the only person in Jerusalem who hasn't heard what happened the last few days."

19 "What things?" Jesus asked. "The things that happened to Jesus, the man from Nazareth," they said. "He was a prophet who did wonderful miracles. He was a mighty teacher, highly regarded by God and all the people. 20 But our leading priests and other religious leaders arrested him and handed him over to be condemned to death, and they crucified him. 21 We thought he was the Messiah who had come to rescue Israel. That happened three days ago. 22 Some women from our group of his followers were at his tomb early this morning, and they came back with an amazing report. 23 They said his body was missing. They had seen angels who told them Jesus is alive! 24 Some of our men ran to see, and sure enough, Jesus' body was gone, just as the women had said."

25 Jesus said, "You are such foolish people! You find it so hard to believe all that the prophets wrote in Scripture. 26 Wasn't it clearly predicted by the prophets that the Messiah would have to suffer all these things before entering his time of glory?" 27 Then Jesus quoted passages from Moses and all the prophets, explaining what all the Scriptures said about himself.

28 By this time they were nearing Emmaus, the end of their journey. Jesus would have gone on, 29 but they begged him to stay the night with them, since it was late. So he went with them. 30 As they sat to eat, he took a small loaf of bread, asked God's blessing on it, broke it, then gave it

to them. 31 Suddenly, their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. At that moment he disappeared!

32 They said, "Didn't our hearts feel strangely warm as he talked and explained the Scriptures?" 33 Within the hour they were on their way back to Jerusalem where the eleven disciples and other followers of Jesus were gathered. When they arrived, they were greeted with 34 "The Lord has really risen! He appeared to Peter!" (Luke 24:13-34)

The Unexpected Guest

35 Then the two from Emmaus told their story of how Jesus had appeared to them as they were walking along the road and how they had recognized him as he was breaking bread. 36 As they were telling about it, Jesus was suddenly standing among them. He said, "Peace be with you." 37 But the group was terribly frightened, thinking they were seeing a ghost! 38 "Why are you frightened?" he asked. "Why do you doubt who I am? 39 Look at my hands, my feet. You can see it's really me. Touch me, make sure I am not a ghost because ghosts don't have bodies, as you see I do!" 40 As he spoke, he held out his hands for them to see and showed them his feet. 41 Still they stood there doubting, filled with joy and wonder. Then he asked them, "Do you have anything to eat?" 42 They gave him broiled fish, 43 and he ate it as they watched. (Luke 24:35-43)

24 One of the disciples, Thomas, was not with the others when Jesus came. 25 They told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he replied, "I won't believe it unless I see the nail wounds in his hands, put my fingers in them, and place my hand in the wound in his side."

26 Eight days later the disciples were together, and this time Thomas was with them. The doors were locked; but suddenly, as before, Jesus was standing among them. He said, "Peace be with you." 27 Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Put your hand into the wound in my side. Don't be faithless any longer. Believe!" 28 "My Lord and my God!" Thomas exclaimed. 29 Then Jesus told him, "You believe because you have seen me. Blessed are those who haven't seen me and believe anyway." (John 20:24-27)

44 Then he said, "When I was with you before, I told you that everything written about me by Moses, the prophets and in the Psalms must all come true." 45 Then he opened their minds to understand these many Scriptures. 46 And he said, "Yes, it was written long ago that the Messiah must suffer and die and rise again from the dead on the third day.

47 With my authority, take this message of repentance to all nations, beginning in Jerusalem: 'There is forgiveness of sins for all who turn to me.' 48 You are witnesses of all things. 49 "Now I will send the Holy Spirit, as my Father promised. Stay in the city until the Holy Spirit comes and fills you with power from heaven." (Luke 24: 49)

We Have Lift-off

50 Then Jesus led them to Bethany, and lifting his hands to heaven, he blessed them. 51 While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up to heaven. 52 They worshiped him and then returned to Jerusalem filled with great joy. 53 And they spent all of their time in the temple, praising God. (Luke 24:50-53)

30 Jesus' disciples saw him do many other miraculous signs besides the ones in this book. 31 But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing in him you will have life. (John 20:30-31)

Standing At the Cross-Roads

Is Jesus alive, is He really God, the One who loves you enough to be your Proxy on that cross to erase all your sins once for all (Romans 5:6-8; 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:24-25; Matthew 20:28; 1 Timothy 2:6)? Because Christ defeated death, *all* of us will – living forever either with God in heaven, or banned from all light and goodness in a hellish place the Bible calls “the lake of fire.” The choice is ours. A “no decision” equals “no.” Because God is just, somebody *has* to pay for our sins; either you accept Jesus’ payment by faith, or you’ll pick up the tab yourself. Like Pilate and the two crooks, you and I must decide: “Deal or no deal” (Colossians 2:13-14)? Jesus says, “Blessed are those who haven’t seen me and believe in me anyway.”

The Lord’s last words on the cross are what God wants to hear from us: “God, I put my life in Your hands.” If you’d like to do this now, just tell Him: “God, I can never repay Your Son for taking my sins to the cross. I can never express my gratitude for Your forgiving all my sins there forever. But with the faith You’ve

given me to take this step, I put my life in Your hands right now. Thank You for taking me, warts and all. Amen.”

His Deal

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NOTE: Some of Jesus’ experiences on earth are found in all four “gospels.” Others in only one, two or three of them, as follows:

The Crucifixion and Burial of Christ

Soldiers abuse (Matthew 27:27-31; Mark 15:16-20; Luke 23:36,37; John 19:1-3)

Crucifixion (Matthew 27:32-38; Mark 15:21-28; Luke 23:26-34 John 19:17-24)

Mother of Jesus at cross (John 19:25-27)

Mockings (Matthew 27:39-44; Mark 15:29-32; Luke 23:35-39)

Repentant criminal (Luke 23:40-43)

Christ dies (Matthew 27:50; Mark 15:37; Luke 23:46; John 19:28-30)

Phenomena (**Matthew 27:45-53**; Mark 15:33-38; Luke 23:44, 45)

Bystanders (Matthew 27:54-56; Mark 15:39-41; Luke 23:47-49)

Jesus’ side pierced (John 19:31-37)

Burial (Matthew 27:57-61; Mark 15:42-47; Luke 23:50-56; John 19:38-42)

Tomb guard (Matthew 27:62-66; Matthew 28:11-15)

Resurrection

Resurrection (Matthew 28:1-10; Mark 16:1-11; Luke 24:1-12; John 20:1-18)

Post-Resurrection Appearances

Disciples walking to Emmaus (Mark 16:12, 13; Luke 24:13-35)

Doubting Thomas (Mark 16:14-18; Luke 24:36-49; John 20:19-29)

At Sea of Tiberias (John 21:1-23)

On mount of Galilee; (Matthew 28:16-20)

Unrecorded works (John 20:30, 31; John 21:24, 25)

Ascension (Mark 16:19-20; Luke 24:50-53)