

The Redemption of Holy Week

Four scenes highlighting the significant events of Jesus' last days.

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At the Last Supper

Maidservant

I'd brought the water and towels the leader, Jesus, used to wash the feet of this dirty band of a dozen men. It surprised me the man they all seemed to honor would get on his knees to remove their sandals and scrub their filthy feet.

Yet, he did that.

The men, humbled by the foot washing, looked astonished when Jesus frowned and said, "one of you will betray me. Come let us gather around the table."

"What does he mean, one of us will betray him?" The men whispered. "Who would do that?"

I brought in plates of food, and caught snatches of their conversations. I'd attended many Passover dinners, but this one felt different.

A young man sitting beside Jesus asked in a low voice about the betrayer.

Jesus said. "It is he to whom I will give this morsel of bread when I have dipped it."

I watched Jesus hand the bread to a scowling man who clutched a bag to his side.

"What you are going to do, do quickly," Jesus said. The man rose with his bag and rushed out into the night.

Curious, I thought. I wondered what he was up to.

Jesus had a deep voice, dynamic and intense as he led the men through the traditional prayers and activities. But he then added surprising words: "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer."

At the word "suffer," their heads went up.

“For I tell you I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.”

“What does that mean?” blustered one man. “Aren’t you eating with us tonight?”

Jesus smiled and picked up his clay cup. He stilled and looked up to heaven, “Thank you Father,” and looked around the table at the men. “Take this, and divide it among yourselves. For I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.”

The burly man, he looked like a fisherman, protested. “What do you mean, the kingdom of God coming? You said it is in the midst of us.”

My Bible student brother stopped clearing the table and froze at the words, “kingdom of God.” In a shocked voice he whispered, “Does he mean the Messiah?”

Jesus then took up a loaf of my mother’s best challah bread. He thanked God again, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”

A man at the end of the table sat upright. “In remembrance of you? Are you going somewhere?”

The meal continued and we brought in the roasted lamb. The men returned to their food, obviously hungry.

As the meal finished, Jesus looked around the table and held up his wine cup.

“This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.”

My brother gasped again. “Only God can make a new covenant. Who is this man?”

Jesus continued speaking. “The hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you.”

The men muttered among themselves even as Jesus continued speaking. “Remember, I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation, but take heart; I have overcome the world.”

He stood and prayed over the men at the table, and I felt the shalom, the peace, that can only come from God flow over me. Who is this man?

Jesus didn’t answer any questions I might have asked. He nodded toward his friends, “Come, let us go.”

As I watched them go into the cool night, I felt sad to see them go, but also hopeful. Who could overcome such a man, and at Passover no less? Was he another Moses?



In the Garden of Gethsemane

Peter

After our Passover meal, we followed Jesus to our favorite place to pray: The Garden of Gethsemane overlooking the beautiful city of Jerusalem. We went to pray. Judas had left with the money bag, undoubtedly about his typical mysterious business.

As always, we gathered around Jesus and began by praising Yahweh, our God and King. Jesus always called him, “Father.”

He asked us to watch and pray with him. We prayed as hard as we could; our fears were unbearable.

Jesus’ agony in the Garden silenced us as he prayed on his knees, begging God, if possible, for this cup to pass from him, but if not . . .”

We didn’t know what that meant, except he’d been talking about a cup at the Last Supper just an hour ago. It was a cup poured out for us; he had spoken of suffering. Surely, Jesus didn’t mean tonight.

The veins in Jesus’ forehead burst, he prayed so hard that blood poured down his face. The prayers and flowing blood seemed to go on for hours. We knew he was talking to his Father God, he always talked with Him. But what could be so hard? How? Why would he suffer?

When Andrew yawned, a big noisy yawn, Jesus opened his eyes to look at us. “Can you not pray with me for one hour?”

“Of course, we can,” I insisted. But then I yawned and swayed on my knees.

The next thing I knew, Jesus touched my shoulder. We heard a noisy crowd coming our way.

I scrambled onto my feet and unsheathed my sword. But then I saw Judas. Perhaps he had brought them for prayer?

But this crowd was angry and included soldiers carrying torches and weapons.

Judas approached Jesus and kissed him on the cheek.

“Would you betray me with a kiss?” he asked. Judas turned away and motioned to the rabble.

Jesus faced them. “Whom do you seek?”

When they shouted “Jesus of Nazareth,” he nodded. “I am he.”

At that, the crowd swarmed, with shouting and screaming coming from every direction. I recognized the Jewish religious leaders who had dogged us for months, trying to trick Jesus so they could kill him. I recognized the High Priest’s scowling servant grabbing Jesus’ arm.

“You cannot have him!” I shouted. I swung my sword, and cut off the man’s ear.

Jesus glanced at me, leaned down, and picked up the severed ear. To the astonishment of all, he set it back in place on the man’s head and prayed. The ear instantly looked as if nothing had happened.

I slumped, shocked I had been so violent, even more disturbed Jesus had healed the wound of his enemy.

The shrieking gang shoved us backward and tugged Jesus away.

Someone shouted about a trial. The High Priest’s servant ordered the captors to take Jesus to the Jewish authorities.

I felt sick and afraid. The High Priest and his cronies had been trying to kill Jesus for years. We knew this wouldn’t be a fair trial for a man who came only to serve his Father God and, like Moses, to set his people free from sin.

At the Cross

The Roman Centurion

Roman Centurion stands stage left, watching two men carrying away a body on a litter. He steps up to the cross to lean a spear against it, as he removes his helmet to scratch his head. Shaking his head back and forth, he begins,

“Truly, He was the son of God.”

Turning to face the audience, wonder and shock on his face, he continues.

“My Roman leaders assigned me to the Jewish authorities to carry out this man’s death on a cross. My detail picked him up after a terrible scourging—the like of which we seldom see. His clothes were nearly shredded from the beatings. Blood poured from all over him, including his face from a terrible crown made of skull-piercing thorns.

“Even my hardened soldiers couldn’t imagine what this man had done to justify such torture, and then they ordered us to escort him up to this monstrous place, Golgotha—the Place of a Skull.

Waves at the cross behind him.

“As is the custom, the condemned carried his own cross up the steep cobbled streets of Jerusalem.

“He could barely walk, much less carry a 150-pound wooden cross. We had to pull a man out of the crowd to carry it for him. Even a healthy man’s knees nearly buckled trying to haul it. The crowds pressed in, screaming and jeering. What an insane people, these zealots!”

Pauses to remember, glances at the cross.

“When we got here my men erected that cross between two thieves. Even they shouted vile words at this man as my soldiers nailed him to the cross. *Gestures to his two hands and then his feet.*

“Pilate wrote that sign and ordered us to put it on him, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.””

Waves around the audience.

“There were all sorts of people watching and jeering. They all made fun of him, that Jesus nailed to a cross and dying. And he didn’t say much It’s hard to breathe when you’re nailed to a cross.”

“A cluster of people, ‘his disciples’ someone said. Waited. They cried and prayed. One of them was his mother. What a terrible thing, to watch your kid die nailed to one of those.”

“Well, I know it was his mother because when he did somehow muster some words, he gave his mother to one of his friends.”

“At one point, he was praying. Lots of men nailed up there curse us, the Romans, who put them there. This man looked us over and said, “Father, forgive them. They know not what they do.”

“That bothered the detail. This was our job. Did we need forgiveness for following orders?”

“He got thirsty. My men put a sponge filled with sour wine on their spear and lifted it up to him. After he took a sip, he called out, “Father into your hands I commit my soul. It is finished.”

“My men couldn’t believe he was dead. I pierced his side with that spear. Water came out. We were shocked. He really was dead.”

Starts to leave.

“Oh, one more thing. The thief on the left heckled that Jesus, shouting and making fun of him. The other one drew himself up and shouted back, ‘We deserve what we get, but this man doesn’t.’ He asked Jesus to remember him when Jesus got to heaven. Jesus told him he’d be with him in heaven tonight.

“Tonight. I guess they’re both in heaven right now.

“Those are his friends taking away the body just now. I’m supposed to send two of my men over to guard the tomb. What are they afraid of? That he’ll leave?”

Shakes his head, but pauses. “But what about that earthquake when he died?”

“Yeah. That Jesus. Truly, he *was* the Son of God.”



At the Empty Tomb

Michael, the Archangel

It was hard to choose the two angels for this glorious Easter morning.

Points at two angels. I chose those two because they're always joyful.

(Angels react to Michael's words.)



Michael continues. The entire angelic choir had waited for centuries for this great moment, ever since that dreadful day the first man and the first woman decided they wanted to be *like* God, rather than to know and love God.

We all wept when God **sent one of us with a sword** to guard the Garden of Eden.

(Angels look sad, but nod at next words.)

But over the centuries, we curious angels enjoyed watching the Great High God send us to protect, guide, and lead men and women who worshipped our God and followed His directions.

(Angels shade eyes as if watching a scene off stage)

Chuckles. One of our favorite nights was when we rode chariots against the Syrian army and only Elisha saw us at first.

(Angels high five each other)

And the night Jesus was born in Bethlehem, we couldn't contain ourselves. The angel chorus filled the sky and shocked those hard-working shepherds!

(Angels put hands in air, laughing)

Sobers. But then the moment came when our Jesus, the Son of the Great High God, became the Passover Lamb on behalf of mankind. We watched on the Friday called Good, when Jesus gave up His life, shed His blood so that all the men and women, boys and girls, who want freedom from their sins—can be forgiven and free forever.

Indicates the two angels: The best moment was when those two angels tore the veil separating the Holy of Holies—the Most High God Himself—from His people.

Laughs. I'll never forget the shocked look on the pompous High Priest's face when he saw those angels tore it from top to bottom! Good luck fixing that!

(Another high five?)

Men and women can speak to God directly, now. They can know Him. Nothing stands between men and women and our Creator anymore.

Looks stage right and claps hands. Angels roll away stone from before the tomb.

The great moment began when a weeping Mary Magdalene approached the tomb and saw the stone rolled away.

One of the angels asked why she was crying and who she was looking for.

The poor woman could hardly get the words out: "They've taken away my Lord, and I don't know where they have laid his body."

The angels straighten to attention.

When the risen Jesus approached her, Mary didn't recognize Him. She thought He was the gardener who had taken Jesus' body away.

(Angels snicker)

Jesus asked why she was weeping.

She said she wanted to prepare the body for proper burial. What had he done with it?

When Jesus spoke her name, Mary, she suddenly recognized him and shouted, "Teacher Jesus!"

Angels step closer. Jesus puts up a hand to stop her.

But she couldn't hug him yet. He told her to tell the disciples he'd see them soon in Galilee.

Mary runs off stage as two women carrying baskets arrive. They watch her run away before one peers into the tomb.

The older women were frightened, particularly when the angels greet them.

Just like they always have to do, the angels first told the two women to "Fear not."
(That's usually how you can tell it's an angel).

They asked the women why they sought the living among the dead. Jesus wasn't at the tomb, He had risen!

Women throw up their hands in shock. Angels laugh and point after Mary Magdalene.

The angels sent the women to Peter and the disciples to say they would see Jesus soon.

Two women hurry away. Angels shake their heads, laughing, then one points.

We weren't surprised when Peter came to double check

Peter looks into the tomb, comes out and puts his hands into the air with joy!

The disciple who denied Jesus three different times shouted Hallelujah when he saw the empty tomb.

I don't know why. Jesus told them He would rise.

Angels elbow each other, point in the other direction, and run off stage.

Michael shakes his head. The angels then headed to the Emmaus Road We all want to hear how Jesus explains what happened to those two pilgrims heading home.

Michael looks up, pauses, and laughs. And just think. The Holy Spirit s just warming up!

Song: "Up from the Grave He Arose!"

