

THE STORY CHAPTER 26

The Story so far ...

Passover time came. Jesus sent his disciples to make preparations for the meal. Jesus and the 12 celebrated together that night. He surprised and embarrassed the disciples by washing their feet – he was modelling servant leadership. Later in the meal he made it clear that Judas would be the one who would betray him to the authorities.

During the eating of the Passover, Jesus showed them the true meaning of the Passover, and in so doing showed how it foreshadowed the crucifixion – my body to be broken – as he broke the bread; my blood to be shed – as he gave the cup of wine.

Jesus would not be with them for much longer. But, he said, they should not be troubled because he was going ahead to prepare a place for them. He assured them that he was the Way, the Truth, the Life. He told them of another Comforter – the Holy Spirit – who was to come.

Jesus prayed - prayed that he would be glorified. For Jesus the way of being glorified was the way of the cross, as Jesus accomplished the Father's will and work. Jesus also prayed for his disciples – that they would know the Father's love.

After that they sang a hymn, and then went to a familiar place – the Mount of Olives. But tonight was different. Jesus warned that that night they would fall away, because the “shepherd would be struck and the sheep scattered.” Peter declares undying love for Jesus, but is told he would deny Jesus three times. Jesus went to the Garden of Gethsemane, where he prayed, asking the Father to remove the cup from him ... while his three closest disciples slept! An angel of the Lord strengthened Jesus. Then the chief priests arrived with soldiers to arrest Jesus. Peter springs to action, removing the ear of a servant names Malchus. Jesus heals the ear.

Jesus is taken to the home of Caiaphas, where he is falsely accused by false witnesses. Peter sneaks back, where he is recognised as being one of Jesus' disciples. Three times he denies it, as Jesus had said he would. Meanwhile Jesus is lead to Pilate to ask for the sentence of death. Judas, realising what he has done, tries unsuccessfully to return the money he was paid for being a traitor, and then hangs himself.

Pilate is placed in an invidious position: to agree to Jesus' crucifixion would be to go against what he knew was right. Not to agree was to be branded an enemy of Caesar. Pilate does his best to find a solution as he talks to Jesus. He even has Jesus flogged. Nothing would satisfy the Jews short of Jesus' death. So, as was their custom, they released Barabbas in preference to having Jesus released. Pilate washes his hands on the matter, and hands Jesus over to be crucified.

Crucifixion is a cruel and lingering death. Jesus is crucified along with two other thieves. Those passing by mock him, as did the thieves. Then one thief is convicted as to the wrongness of what is happening to Jesus, and repents.

The women in Jesus' life stay near the cross.

As painful as crucifixion is, a deeper pain was Jesus' portion. The pain of bearing the punishment for our sins. The pain of looking up for his Father's presence, and only seeing the Father's back turned towards him. The Father could not look at His Son who had “become sin for us.” Jesus cries out “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me!” And then Jesus surrendered to death.

At that moment the heavy curtain into the Most Holy Place, the place into which the High Priest had access only once a year, that veil is torn in two. Jesus, by his death, had made it possible for all to access the very presence of God the Father..

After Jesus' death, one of the soldiers made the comment: "Surely He was the Son of God."

1. ***What did Jesus predict at the last supper with his disciples?***

Several things:

- He predicted that one of their number would betray him.
- By giving an explanation of the broken bread and wine, he predicted that his body would be broken and his blood shed – which is a reference to the fact that he was going to be killed.
- He "predicted" that the Holy Spirit – another Comforter – would come when he had gone.
- He predicted that they would be scattered when he, the Shepherd, was "struck."
- He predicted that Peter would deny him.

Maybe not all of those are "predictions" as much as telling what would happen. And maybe that is what a prediction is. But Jesus knew those things. Some of them had been foretold in the OT already, but all those things were to happen. I am still of the opinion that NOT knowing the future is one of God's gifts to us. Imagine Jesus, in his humanity, sitting there, knowing what he would still go through? Knowing that Peter would betray him. Knowing that they could not understand the enormity of the significance to the Holy Spirit being given. But still telling them, and knowing that He is inexorably moving towards his crucifixion!

2. ***Why did Jesus have to die?***

Let's start by making one thing clear: Jesus "had to" nothing! Everything that Jesus does is a "chose to." Everything that Jesus does is an expression of grace – doing something that is not deserved by those benefitting from it. We must understand Jesus' sovereignty. Jesus "has to" nothing.

However, Jesus death happened because the Father was determined to put us back in a position where we could enjoy intimacy with the Father. And the Father did that *because the Father wanted intimacy with us!!!* And if we understand that ... how can we understand something as big as that? It is simply too big to grasp that God, the Almighty Creator and Sustainer of the universe, should WANT intimacy with us. So we cannot really fully understand it. We can only accept that it is true. So if we can accept that to be true, then Jesus **had** die. There was no other way that the consequences of our rebellion could be atoned for. In other words, there was no other way that amends could be made for our rebellion and we could be reconciled with God – that is more or less what atonement means. Jesus had to die, to take the punishment for our rebellion and bear the consequences of our rebellion, so that we could be reconciled to God. And because there was no other way, given that this was what the Father had chosen, therefore, Jesus **had to** die.

3. ***How did Jesus' followers respond to these tragic events?***

They started responding even before Jesus was crucified. They denied that it was going to happen; they were sorry for the loss that *they* would experience; they selfishly made sure that Jesus was not referring to them when he spoke about one of them betraying him. During the crucifixion they scattered! They did not want to be next. Peter bravely crept back, but by and large they were absent. The women seemed to have been there most of the time. However, we do not stand in judgement because they were ordinary people like you and me. Chances are that their response mirrors what ours would have been.

4. *What implications does Jesus' death on the cross for the sins of humanity have for your life?*

It can have no implication at all. In chemistry you can put two compounds together, without there being a reaction at all. The one "compound" is Jesus death for the sins of humanity." The other compound is my life. We mix the two together and there is no reaction.

However, if one adds a catalyst to the two compounds (the right one of course) the catalyst will facilitate the reaction. There needs to be a catalyst in our lives as well for the death of Jesus to have any impact. And that catalyst is faith. We need to recognise that we are rebels, we need to believe that Jesus died to atone – as we have explained it – for our rebellion. Then by faith – the catalyst – we receive the benefits of Jesus death. And then the implications for our lives are infinite! We are able to enjoy intimacy with the Father, we are given the "abundant life" – a new quality of life that start now and continues into eternity. We have new relationship with others who love Jesus, our lives become meaningful, we are given a new set of priorities – ad infinitum!!! But for it to have implications we need to believe it, appropriate it.

5. *What can you learn about God's love through these events?*

We learn that God's love is a **verb**, not a noun. God's love can be seen by what he was willing to **do** for us. He was willing to do everything for us. If He hadn't done everything, nothing would have been accomplished. Any involvement from us would have in some way tainted what God was doing and would have thereby negated everything. For God it was all or nothing – and his love was such that he was willing to give and do everything. And the amazing thing about God's love is that he did all even before he had a commitment from us respond. His love for us was a risk – he could have done all that and not have had anyone respond to him. We can talk about God's foreknowledge and try and minimise the risk God took in that way. But the truth is, as Paul tells us, while we were still sinners, while we were still God's enemies, he showed his love by dying for us.

We cannot comprehend how much we are loved by God. What these events teach us is that God's love is amazing.

6. *In what way has Jesus' life and death affected the way you live from day to day?*

We are to live our lives in response to God's love. So whatever we do is a response. I will do this or that, I will sacrifice this or that – whatever – because I am responding to God's amazing love. I don't do things in order to merit his love. I do things because I am already loved by God. The biggest affect God's love ought to have on us is on our motivation for doing things.

Why do we go to church, have a devotion, tithe, visit the sick, attend Bible Study? Why do we do anything? Not in order to provoke God's love – He already loves us as much as he possibly could. We do it because he already loves us as much as he possibly could, and our doing is a response to his prior love.