

# A Solitary Savior

*Pastor Paul Viggiano  
Branch of Hope Church  
2370 W. Carson Street, #100  
Torrance, CA 90501  
(310) 212-6999  
pastorpaul@integrity.com  
[www.branchofhope.org](http://www.branchofhope.org)  
4/20/2003*

# A Solitary Savior

## **The Passover**

Numerous were the events in those last days leading to the cross of Christ. Each of the four gospels gives detailed accounts of what would transpire. It cannot be relegated to fate that the crucifixion of Christ would coincide with the Passover feast. This feast had been instituted by God during the Exodus of Israel from Egypt. Those who covered their doorposts with the blood of the paschal lamb would escape the consequences of the angel of death; that angel would *pass over* their households.

When John the Baptist saw Jesus coming toward him he rejoiced saying, **“Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29)!** John understood what the sacrificial lamb was designed to foreshadow. Paul understood as well writing **“For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us” (1 Corinthians 5:7).**

This Passover would be unlike any before it. It would initiate the turning point in history. BC would become AD. This rabbi/teacher would have an effect upon the human race which would dwarf the combined efforts of all pharaohs, Caesars, emperors, and kings. How would the Lord of Glory orchestrate the events surrounding His death? What would be the framework of this great masterpiece of love, sacrifice, passion, death, and resurrection? What would God, by His Spirit, determine to be the events recorded for our examination?

## **The Memorable Woman**

Three of the gospels (Matthew 26:6-13; Mark 13:3-9; John 12:1-8) record the story of a woman coming to Jesus during this time and pouring very costly perfume on him. The apostles were indignant! They felt the perfume could have been sold and the money used for the poor. Jesus gave what appeared to be a very inhumane response. He indicated that we will always have the poor among us. But this fragrant oil would be for his burial.

Good works are good. And there is certainly not a soul who did greater good than Jesus. But let us be careful that the good works of the church not supplant the message of the church, which is to herald and proclaim the good work of Christ. *What Would Jesus Do?* must give way to *What Did Jesus Do?*

## **The Two Failures**

We also have the record of the two great failures—Judas and Peter (Matthew 26:14-16; 26:34); one a betrayal, the other a denial. Judas was, perhaps, hoping Jesus would be a different kind of Savior. Children often wish their parents were a different kind of parent. They need to be careful not to allow their rebellion to carry them away.

Peter seemed happy enough with Jesus just the way He was. But Peter mistakenly thought he could courageously stand by the side of his Savior all the

way to the cross. Greed, fear, ambition, and pride were the undoing of these apostles. They both felt bad about their failures.

Peter returned to Christ, Judas did not. Paul reveals to us that “**godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death**” (2 Corinthians 7:10). Sorrow has its place. But to nurture a culture of victim-hood that does not produce repentance is a self-centered and evil disposition which produces nothing but death. Let us not forget, of course, that Jesus prayed for Peter (Luke 22:31, 32).

### **The Last Supper**

The most significant event prior to the cross may be the Last Supper. There has been much controversy over the ages regarding this event. That which modern Christendom has belittled, Christians, at one time, died for. What does this event mean? What is its significance?

Whatever it is, it’s worth fighting about. Jesus here took thousands of years of sacrificial ceremonies and hundreds of thousands of gallons of spilled sacrificial blood and reduced it to a loaf and a cup which contained His own spiritual presence. It is no wonder that the greatest scholars in the history of the church have viewed the participation in this sacrament as the mark of a true church. If a church loses this it loses its church-ness. This supper was followed by a hymn; a practice we shall exercise this morning.

### **The Garden**

Then of course we have the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36-44). In the Garden of Eden man would lose all, in the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus would contemplate the price of getting it all back. Let us not think for a moment that the great drops of sweat which fell like blood reflected His fear of nails, thorns, scourging, spit, or insults. It was much deeper than that. It was the prospect of being forsaken of the Father. Calvin wrote,

**When this temptation was presented to Christ, as if, having God opposed to him, he were already devoted to destruction, he was seized with horror, which would have been sufficient to swallow up a hundred times all the men in the world.<sup>1</sup>**

The pain of the cross itself has its place. But it is wrong to emphasize the nails and pierced side rather than the wrath of the Father which fell upon Christ on our behalf. Who can express or fathom what it means to become sin (2 Corinthians 5:21)?

### **The Trial**

The order of the events of Jesus’ trial (if it can be called that) went like this. He was first brought to Annas (the father-in-law of the high priest Caiaphas—

---

<sup>1</sup> Calvin, J. 1998. *Calvin's Commentaries: The Harmony of the Gospels: Calvin's Commentary on Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (electronic ed.). Logos Library System; Calvin's Commentaries. Ages Software: Albany, OR

John 18:13). From Annas He was brought to Caiaphas (John 18:24) then to the Roman governor, Pilate (John 18:28). The Jews were not allowed to put someone to death since they were under the authority of Rome (John 18:31).

For a wonderful example of religion gone bad, in the midst of this mockery of a trial, they didn't go into the governor's headquarters (Praetorium), lest they defile themselves and not be allowed to participate in the Passover. Pilate sent Jesus to Herod who was seeking to enjoy Him for entertainment value and Herod sent Him back to Pilate (Luke 23:6, 7, 11).

The kangaroo court could construct no case against Jesus. Finally they produced two false witnesses (Matthew 26:60). Here we have another example of religion gone bad; two witnesses is what God determines necessary for a conviction (Deuteronomy 17:6).

### **Barabbas**

All four gospels record the story of Barabbas; a man who was guilty of murder (Mark 15:7). Pilate gives the people the option of releasing Jesus or Barabbas. Pilate knew they had delivered Jesus because of envy (Matthew 27:18) and it seems he was giving them one more chance to make things right; they chose to release the murderer. We might take a moment to put ourselves in the place of Barabbas. He was deserving of death and Jesus, who was without sin (Hebrews 4:15), would die in his place.

Is this not the testimony of all humanity? **“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).** And **“the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23).** Thank the Lord that this is not the end of the verse which continues, **“but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”** May the recognition of guilt and appreciation (that upon acquittal Barabbas should have felt) be extended to us all.

### **The Crucifixion**

They stripped Him, mockingly put a scarlet robe on Him, a crown of thorns, a reed scepter, they spat on Him, struck Him, stripped Him again, and led Him away to be crucified. They then crucified the Son of God.

I would not venture to take on the task of expressing the indescribable agonies of the cross between twelve o'clock and three o'clock. Suffice it to say that Christ was made a curse (Galatians 3:13), He was made sin (2 Corinthians 5:21), He was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities (Isaiah 53).

It becomes apparent through this that the church's distaste for the doctrine of hell becomes distaste for the cross of Christ. As the Apostle's Creed informs us, Christ descended into hell. This is a confusing creed to many, for hell is often viewed as some sort of abandoned amusement park rather than the due punishment received from a righteous and holy God. If we deserved hell and didn't get it, who did but Christ?

## The Resurrection

The body of Christ was taken down from the cross and buried in the borrowed tomb of a man named Joseph from Arimathea (Matthew 27:57). Great pains were taken by both the Jews and Romans to make sure His body was not stolen in order to quell the advancement of the Christian faith (Matthew 27:62-66).

On Sunday morning the tomb was empty (Matthew 28:6). The huge stone which guarded the door of the tomb had been moved. For what had happened there was not to be associated with the shallow platitudes we often hear today regarding our dearly departed. It wasn't as if the mere ghost or memory or inspiration of Christ lived on. The physical body of Christ was alive. He had conquered death and grants His victory to all who by grace, through faith, call upon His name.

He brought our worst enemy to humiliation—O death where is thy sting? That greatest and unavoidable foe need no longer be feared. The Son of Man was lifted on the cross and the curse of the fall was lifted from the race. We can dispense with the word games so commonly associated with death. It is not the circle of life, nor part of life, it is not natural, and it is not good. Apart from Christ, it is a horrific nightmare which is to be feared. But to those who trust in Him it is simply walking through a doorway. The faithful eyes that shut on earth open to glory.

## Christ Alone

And if I may make one last point; it is Christ alone who provides this great victory. During His life He was occasionally surrounded by multitudes and often accompanied by His apostles. Such would not be the case as He approached the cross.

**Then Jesus said to them, "All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written: 'I will strike the Shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.'<sup>32</sup> But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee."<sup>33</sup> Peter answered and said to Him, "Even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will never be made to stumble."<sup>34</sup> Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you that this night, before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times."**

**<sup>35</sup> Peter said to Him, "Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!" And so said all the disciples (Matthew 26:31-35).**

It seemed for a brief second that Peter would make good his boast.

**But Jesus said to him, "Friend, why have you come?" Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and took Him.<sup>51</sup> And suddenly, one of those [Peter] *who were* with Jesus stretched out *his* hand and drew his sword, struck the servant of the high priest, and cut off his ear.<sup>52</sup> But Jesus said to him, "Put your sword in its place,**

**for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. <sup>53</sup> Or do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels" (Matthew 26:50-53)?**

But when it became clear that Jesus would face the cross, all human courage melted.

**How then could the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must happen thus?" <sup>55</sup> In that hour Jesus said to the multitudes, "Have you come out, as against a robber, with swords and clubs to take Me? I sat daily with you, teaching in the temple, and you did not seize Me. <sup>56</sup> But all this was done that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled." Then all the disciples forsook Him and fled (Matthew 26:54-56).**

The resolve of silly, weak, foolish man! Even the angel who comforted Jesus in the Garden (Luke 22:43) would not accompany Him to the cross. If the text is clear about anything it is clear regarding this – Jesus would face this cup alone – He was forsaken even by the Father.

In what will you trust? Your own strength, will, power, righteousness, and resolve? Are you willing to stand before your creator naked and alone? Before the foe of death we would crumble like the wafer that we are. Come, let us reason – how long would it take in this judgment before you realize your well is dry? <sup>13</sup>

**Jesus answered and said to her, "Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, <sup>14</sup>but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4:13, 14).**

May God bless the preaching of His word. Amen.