

A Sad Story—with a Happy Ending



When Jesus lived on earth almost 2000 years ago, he went all through the land of Israel teaching and performing miracles. Many people followed him and were amazed not only at his miracles but even at his teaching about God. They so much wanted him to become their king! They saw that Jesus was different from the pious leaders who followed all of the religious rules but didn't love God with their hearts. These leaders hated Jesus! They didn't like what he taught the people because they wanted to control religious things. They didn't want to obey Jesus' teaching about sin and repentance, turning away from sin.

One of Jesus' closest followers, a disciple named Judas Iscariot, secretly agreed to lead these religious leaders to Jesus. They paid him thirty pieces of silver to do this during the Passover festival.

Jesus ate the special Passover meal with his twelve closest disciples. During the meal they ate bread and drank wine. Jesus told them that the bread was like his body, and just like he broke the bread, his body would later be broken. He also taught them that the wine was a symbol of his blood which would be poured out to pay for their sins. After supper they went out to the Mount of Olives to spend time together. Jesus also wanted to pray with his disciples but they fell asleep, leaving him to pray alone. During the evening, Jesus warned them that danger was coming and told them that he knew they would all run away from him. Peter wanted to be brave and said he wouldn't leave Jesus, but Jesus told him that before the rooster crowed the next morning, he would tell people *three times* that he didn't even know who Jesus was. And that is what really happened...but we'll learn about that later in the story.

Later that evening Judas lead a crowd of soldiers and the religious leaders to the Mount of Olives where Jesus was with his disciples. He had told them that he would give Jesus a kiss as a sign to let them know who Jesus was. After Judas kissed Jesus, the soldiers began to take Jesus off to trial. At first the disciples were brave and tried to defend Jesus, even cutting off one of the soldier's ears with a sword. But Jesus healed the man's ear and told the people that if he wanted to, he could call 10,000 angels to come down and help him. He didn't do that however, because he knew the reason he had come to earth was to let his body be broken and his blood be poured out to pay for the sins of the whole world...and that's what was about to happen.

The soldiers and religious leaders took Jesus to Caiaphas, the high priest, then to Pilate, the Roman governor, for a trial. Pilate couldn't find any reason to kill him so he sent Jesus to Herod, another Roman ruler, who also couldn't find any reason to kill Jesus. Herod sent him back to Pilate. The trial lasted all night long! Can you imagine how tired Jesus was? And guess what Peter was doing during that long night. *Three times* he told people that he didn't even know who Jesus was—because he was afraid. But in the morning when he heard the rooster crow, he remembered what Jesus had told him. It made him cry to think he had denied that he knew Jesus was his friend.

The crowd became angrier and angrier as the night went on, yelling out, "Kill him! Hang him on a cross until he dies!" Finally, just to make the crowd and the Jewish leaders happy, Pilate agreed to let them torture and kill

Jesus. He was whipped. He was spit on. They teased him about being a king, pressing a crown of thorns into his head. The soldiers gave him a reed to pretend it was a scepter and took his cloak and gave him a purple robe like a king would wear. The soldiers decided to roll dice to decide who would get his cloak, instead of dividing it into pieces. Hundreds of years earlier, David had said this would happen. (Psalm 22:18) That's pretty amazing, isn't it?

After all of this Jesus was led outside the city where he was nailed to a cross. They hung a sign at the top of the cross that read "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews" because the people had hoped he would be their king. Just as the prophet Isaiah predicted (53:12) Jesus died between two robbers. He hung there on the cross for many hours. When he said he was thirsty, someone dipped a sponge in vinegar and lifted it on a stick up to him. How you would like to drink that? From noon until 3:00 the sky became dark. This was another amazing detail that was foretold many years earlier by Amos (8:9). Finally Jesus cried out, "Father, I commit my spirit to You." And then he died. Later when soldiers came by to see if he was dead, they pierced his side with a spear, just as the Prophet Zechariah had said long before. (12:10)

A rich man named Joseph from Arimathea asked Pilate for permission to bury Jesus in his own tomb. Because Jesus had predicted that he would rise from the dead, the religious leaders made sure a huge stone was put in front of the entrance to the tomb and hired soldiers to guard it.

But guess what? Remember I told you this sad story had a happy ending? Well it really does! Yes, Jesus suffered a lot. That's the very sad part of the story and there was a reason why this had to happen. In the Old Testament, God required the people to sacrifice animals to pay for their sins. John the Baptist called Jesus "The Lamb of God" (John 1:29) because he knew that Jesus would die—as a perfect sacrifice—to pay for our sins. Now we don't have to sacrifice animals anymore if we believe that Jesus' death paid the price God required for our sins.

That's *one* part of the happy ending. Can I tell you the other part? Three days after Jesus died, some of the women who followed Jesus' teachings went to his tomb to put spices on his body, something they did in Bible times. As they walked along, they suddenly remembered the huge stone and wondered how they would push it out of the way. But when they got to the tomb, guess what had happened? Jesus had risen from the dead! The huge stone couldn't stop him. The soldiers guarding the tomb couldn't stop him. Nothing could stop him! That's because Jesus really *was* God and even death couldn't hold him back! And that's why today, you can't find Jesus' grave anywhere. You can go to all over the world to many famous people's graves but not to Jesus' grave because his tomb is empty!

And that's why we celebrate Easter. We celebrate the fact that Jesus rose from the dead and is in heaven waiting for those of us who believe and obey him. I hope you'll be one of those people who trust and obey him so that you can spend eternity with Jesus and me in heaven.

Story based on Matthew 26-28, Mark 16, Luke 23; John 18,19

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