



"God Was In Christ Reconciling the World to Himself"
by Rudolf Schäfer

VIII - IT IS FINISHED!

[Since the Jewish day began at sunset, the Passover meal was technically eaten on Friday. The events after sunset, Nisan 14, until sunset on Friday were all part of Nisan 15.]

As Jesus and the now eleven disciples made their way to the Garden of Gethsemane, He shared with them more disturbing news. Quoting the gist of a prophecy in Zechariah 13:7b, He informed the disciples that they would all fall away on account of Him - that very night (Matt. 26:31). He told them what was going to happen - not to dishearten them any more than they already were, but to forewarn them lest they be totally devastated by these events when they happened. And the fact that this had been prophesied was intended to let them know that this is not catching Jesus off guard. Instead, this too was fitting into God's Plan for the world. Also notice that He immediately seeks to reassure them by offering them some positive news and the encouragement that they will come through this difficult time (Matt. 26:32).

Peter - dear, impetuous Peter - uses this as an opportunity to affirm his unwavering loyalty to his Master. Remember that during the Passover celebration, Jesus had already informed Peter that he would deny his Lord that night (Luke 22:33-34). This surely took Peter by surprise. So much so that no response from Peter is recorded at that time. After having had some time to reflect on these words of Jesus, Peter is very determined to assure his Master of his loyalty when Jesus tells them that they would all fall away from Him yet that night. Peter even makes a comparison between himself and the others, declaring that even if everyone else falls away, he never would (Matt. 26:33). Jesus responds in a tender, but honest way, repeating what He had told Peter earlier (Matt. 26:34). Determined, self-confident Peter replies in an even stronger fashion, with the other disciples echoing his comments (Matt. 26:35). Only too late will Peter remember this dialogue with the Master. [He will remember it once again, however - after Jesus' resurrection - on the shore of the Sea of Tiberias (John 21:15).]

Arriving at Gethsemane, Jesus left eight of the disciples near the entrance to the Garden, taking Peter, James, and John with Him a little farther into the garden (Matt. 26:36-37). He confided to these three the deep stress and inner sorrow which was beginning to flood in on Him. He asked them to keep watch with Him (Matt. 26:38). Even seeing their Master in this intense emotional state, there was no

way they could understand exactly what Jesus was beginning to feel. Knowing that something very abnormal was taking place, they still could not envision what lay ahead for Jesus - and them - in the hours ahead. Notice the way Jesus described the sorrow which He was experiencing: "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow - to the point of death." Many of us have experienced sorrow before - sometimes even deep sorrow - but never to the point that our Lord was experiencing at this moment. For His sorrow was caused by the weight of the world's sins beginning to bear down on Him. The suffering for the sins of the entire human race was beginning. All in accord with God's Plan of love for the world.

Jesus now left these three disciples, with the plea to watch with Him, and went a little farther into the Garden. Matthew tells us that He fell with His face to the ground (26:39a). Lying prostrate on the ground, He pleaded with His Father in heaven (Matt. 26:39b). He knew what unspeakable suffering awaited Him. He didn't shy away from it. But He did ask that if there was some other way to redeem mankind, might He be spared "this cup." There was no other way for mankind to be redeemed, however. He must drink the cup to its bitter dregs. The sins of the world - from Adam to the last person at the end of time - must be paid for. So "God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us" (II Cor. 5:21a). Even as Isaiah had prophesied, "The Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (53:6b). (NOTE: The expression regarding "drinking the cup" is found in different places in Holy Scripture. It was used as an expression of experiencing God's wrath. Psalm 75:8, as well as Isaiah 51:17, use it in this sense. In response to Psalm 75:8b, where it speaks of "all the wicked of the earth drink it down to its very dregs," one might question whether this should apply to the innocent Jesus or not. Just remember, at this time Jesus is bearing the sins of the world, so in God's sight, He is the most wicked of the wicked.)

Luke tells us that an angel from heaven came to Him and strengthened Him (22:43). These blessed heavenly messengers. It was angels who announced His birth (Luke 2:9-14). It was angels who came and ministered to Him after His temptation in the wilderness (Matt.4:11). Now, in Gethsemane, it was an angel who came to Him. And in a little more than 48 hours, it would be an angel who would announce His glorious resurrection (Matt. 28:5-6). But the hours between then and now were such that even Jesus, according to His humanity, needed support and strength. The Father sent an angel for this ministry of mercy. The disciples, whom Jesus had asked to watch with Him, could not be counted on. They had succumbed to slumber, due in part, I'm sure, to the stress of the evening (Matt. 26:40a).

A couple of things are worth noting: 1) Mark writes that in His initial prayer in the Garden, Jesus addressed His Father with both the Aramaic and Greek words for “Father” (Mark 14:36). He who had spoken of the closeness between Himself and His Father in the Upper Room (John 14:11, 20, 31; 15:10; 16:28, 32b; 17:4-5, 11, 21-22), now addresses His Father in the tenderest of terms. Not in an attempt to evoke pity from His Father, but to show the urgency of the prayer He addresses to His Father. Yet each time He approaches His Father, He always humbly submitted to His Father’s will (Matt. 26:39, 42, 44). The only time that Jesus did not address His Father with the tender term of “Father” would happen later this day, Nisan 15, about 3 o’clock in the afternoon. [NOTE: The willing submission to the Father’s will in this Garden stands in stark contrast to the failure to submit to the Father’s will in another Garden (Gen. 3:6). In fact, the obedient suffering taking place in Gethsemane finds its necessity in the disobedience which began in Eden.]

2) It is Luke, the physician, who reports a seldom reported incident of an individual sweating drops of blood (Luke 22:44). This is a physical condition known as “hemathidrosis” (this word comes from a combination of two Greek words which means, literally, “bloody perspiration” or “blood sweating”) where the tiny blood vessels beneath the surface of the skin rupture under extreme stress and/or anguish, causing blood to ooze out through the skin with perspiration. [The expression “sweating blood” does indeed have its root in fact. It is possible, but only under extreme stress, such as our Savior was experiencing in the Garden that night. Luke does point out that even after the angel appeared to Jesus to strengthen Him, the Lord was still “in anguish” (“agony” in Greek, as in the King James Translation), thus precipitating His praying “more earnestly.”] The fact that this condition is seldom reported indicates that not many individuals reach this point of stress and anguish. But our Savior did! Another indication of the tremendous extent of emotional (at this time) suffering being experienced by God’s Son! (And it was also because of me - and you - and the many times we followed the example of our first parents and disobeyed the will of our heavenly Father.)

Returning from His first round of prayers, Jesus found His disciples asleep (Matt. 26:40a). The question He asks them is directed to Peter (Mark 14:37), but I feel confident that the other two also felt the sting of guilt. The question is directed toward Peter probably because he is the one who spoke up so forcefully about his loyalty to the Master. Then in another loving warning, Jesus urges Peter - and the others - to watch and pray (Mark 14:38). Leaving the disciples again, Jesus prayed the same prayer, asking for the removal of this “cup” - but only if it was in keeping

with the Father's will (Matt. 26:42). Returning to the disciples a second time, Jesus found them as before - sound asleep. Mark reports that they didn't know what to say to Him (14:40). Even after the first embarrassment; even after the repeated warnings and encouragements, the disciples could not lend any moral support to their Master. These self-confident disciples, who had affirmed their loyalty to their Master only hours before, could not fight off physical exhaustion and watch with Him. (But before we begin feeling a little self-righteous, let's ask ourselves: would we have done any better? Do we do any better when Jesus urges us - through His Word - to watch and pray today?)

Leaving the disciples a third time, Jesus again spoke to His Father, praying the same thing (Matt.26:44). I'm sure it was no surprise - although nevertheless disappointing - when Jesus found the disciples asleep again when He returned to them a third time. This time things were different. The prayers were completed. The Father's will stands. The "hour is near." So Jesus awakens His disciples with the news that the betrayer is coming (Matt. 26:45-46). Things begin to happen very quickly now. The arrival of Judas, along with the crowd sent by the chief priests and Pharisees, as well as a detachment of soldiers (John 18:3), had awakened the eight disciples who had remained near the entrance of the garden. These disciples either preceded - or followed closely behind - the group to where Jesus and the other three disciples were now standing. John makes a point of stating how Judas knew - or at least suspected - that Jesus was at the Garden (18:2). It was a familiar meeting place for Jesus and His disciples, previously however, under much more pleasant circumstances. (Could the location of His praying have been close to the site where He spoke to His disciples at some length on Tuesday?)

Three of the Evangelists identify the betrayer as "one of the twelve" (Matt. 26:47, Mark 14:43, Luke 22:47). John also names Judas as the betrayer, but does not identify him as being one of the disciples. Matthew (26:48) and Mark (14:44) both refer to the "signal" Judas had arranged with the crowd - a kiss. Luke mentions the kiss (22:47b), but does not comment on it being the prearranged signal. John makes no mention of the kiss at all. A kiss! An act normally associated with love and close relationships, is here used by Judas as an act of betrayal. This hypocrisy did not deceive Jesus. In fact, He challenged Judas with a question: "Are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?" (Luke 22:48). As in the Upper Room, Jesus was letting Judas know that his motives and behavior were no secret to Him. It was something that He knew would happen all along. And once again, Jesus reached out to Judas, calling him "Friend" (Matt. 26:50). But as in previous instances, Jesus' "invitation"

fell on deaf ears.

John now tells us something that neither of the other three Evangelists mention. Jesus spoke to the arriving crowd and asked them whom they wanted (18:4). Even if Jesus were not omniscient, it was pretty obvious that this crowd - armed with torches, lanterns, and weapons - did not come to the Garden to discuss the weather. These were men on a mission. They were looking for someone. In His omniscience, Jesus knew the answer before He asked the question. But He was leading up to something - in fact, two things. The first was to demonstrate His omnipotence. When the leaders of the crowd responded that they were looking for Jesus of Nazareth, Jesus told them that He was the One they wanted (John 18:5a). [Note the way Jesus answered; the words He used: "I AM He." While not a statement in the same sense as the "I AM Statements" we spoke of in a previous chapter, Jesus is again making a statement. He uses the words in Greek that have the same meaning as the Hebrew word "Eh-Yeh" (I am), from which is derived the word "Jah-weh" (He is), which the Jews used when speaking of God. Hence, Jesus is again identifying Himself as the Son of God.]

It was at this point that the omnipotence of Jesus was revealed - also attesting to His divinity. When He informed the crowd as to Whom He was, they all - including Judas - fell backwards to the ground (John 18:5b-6). He knew the crowd would not be impressed with this display of His power. But He did want them to know that they had no power over Him and that His going with them was completely voluntary. This was in accord with previous words of our Lord when He declared that His suffering and death would be at His own initiative and will - and consequently at His own time (John 10:17-18).

After the crowd recovered, He asked them again whom they wanted. Again they responded as before (18:7). Now He reveals His second reason for asking the crowd whom they wanted. Since they were looking for Him - and had indicated that twice - He asked that they let His disciples go (18:8-9). John explains that Jesus spoke these words so that what He had said earlier would be fulfilled (Cp. John 17:12). He was showing His love for His disciples even though He knew that any moment now they would be forsaking Him and fleeing - even as He had told them they would do as they were making their way to the garden a little earlier.

Impetuous Peter now springs into action. Even after the display of Jesus' power, Simon somehow felt he needed to protect his Master. He drew his sword and striking

at the nearest crowd member, cut off the right ear of Malchus, the servant of the High Priest (18:10). The other three Evangelists also include this display of “courage” (Matt. 26:51, Mark 14:47, Luke 22:50). Jesus quickly rebuked Peter, touched the man’s ear and healed it (Luke 22:51). [Another demonstration of His omnipotence. How “blind” the crowd and the disciples were! Another thing, one can’t help but wonder what thoughts went through the mind of Malchus after this!] He tells Peter that if He wanted to, He could call on His Father who would immediately send more than 12 legions of angels (Matt. 26:53). (A Roman legion consisted of 6000 soldiers.) But this would not have fit into the Father’s Plan for the world, so once again Jesus refers to the necessity of what is going to happen (Matt.26:54). This too was part of God’s Plan for the world from the beginning.

Then - under cover of darkness, in the seclusion of Gethsemane, away from the crowds who were sympathetic to Jesus - the soldiers arrested Jesus, binding His hands, as if that could hold the Man who had flung them to the ground by a mere word (John 18:12b). [The soldiers were part of a Roman detachment stationed in Jerusalem. They accompanied the representatives of the chief priests and Pharisees - undoubtedly at the request of the Sanhedrin. Though the arrest was made in an isolated location, the Sanhedrin did not want to take any chances in case the general public found out about this before the “trial” was completed, thus, the sizeable group that came out to take Jesus captive.] Seeing their Master arrested and bound, the disciples took the action Jesus had predicted - they forsook Him and fled (Matt. 26:56b). These perplexed and frightened disciples still did not understand the divine necessity of these events, in spite of all the words of Jesus to this effect.

It is Mark who reports that a young man, wearing nothing but a linen garment, left the linen garment behind when the soldiers tried to seize him, and ran away naked (Mark 14:51-52). No name is given to this young man, which gives rise to speculation that this young man may have been John Mark himself, the writer of this Gospel. He was not one of the twelve, but was a follower of the Lord. It has been further speculated that he was, somehow connected with the Upper Room, with either him or his parents owning the home which included the upper room. If this is the case, it could well be that Judas first brought the group from the chief priests and Pharisees to this location, not knowing that Jesus and the other disciples had already left. The noise and commotion of the crowd could have awakened Mark who then quickly followed the crowd to see what they were going to do to Jesus, his friend. This is one possible explanation as to why Mark was present at the Garden, if he was indeed the nameless young man, and why he would be clad only in a linen garment.

Three of the Evangelists report that the crowd took Jesus to the High Priest (Matt. 26:57, Mark 14:53, Luke 22:54a). This eventually happened. But John tells us that they took Jesus first to Annas (18:13). [Could this have been to give the Sanhedrin time to assemble for their “trial” of Jesus?] Annas was a former high priest - and father-in-law of Caiaphas, the current high priest. Under these circumstances, it is possible that Annas was still considered by some to be the “power behind the throne,” and as such, was the first to interview Jesus. In fact, some of the Jews still considered Annas to be the high priest since he was put out of office by the Roman rulers, an action which some of the Jews considered illegitimate and unlawful according to their laws. Some of the interchange that took place before Annas is recorded by John in chapter 18, verses 19-23. John points out that the “high priest” questioned Jesus about His disciples and His teaching. This was obviously an attempt to get Jesus to say something that they could later use against Him. Getting nowhere, however, Annas then sent Jesus, still bound, to Caiaphas, the official high priest (John 18:24). [Note: The last Biblical mention of Annas is found in Acts 4:6, in connection with the trial of Peter and John after their arrest for preaching about Jesus.]

By this time the Sanhedrin (or at least a quorum) had gathered at the home of Caiaphas (Matt. 26:57, Mark 14:53, 55a). In all likelihood, by now the time was well past midnight. Not finding any legitimate charges to bring against Jesus, the Sanhedrin now stooped to looking for false evidence. They were desperate to find some charge for which they could pronounce the death penalty (Matt. 26:59-60, Mark 14:55-56). John reminds us that it was Caiaphas who had advised the Jews that it would be better that one man die for the people rather than have the whole nation perish (John 18:14. Cp. John 11:49-50). It is likely that John brings this in at this time to show how impossible it was for Jesus to receive a fair trial from this group. Actually, these night trials were not legal either. That is probably why the Sanhedrin met very early in the morning to render an “official verdict” and thus give some legitimacy to their clandestine proceedings (Matt. 27:1, Mark 15:1, Luke 22:66). Thus Jesus was subjected to three trials (religious) before the Jewish governing officials - before Annas, before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin at night, and before the Sanhedrin at day break.

Matthew reveals some of the details of the trial before Caiaphas (26:59-68). In their desperate attempt to find some “evidence” against Jesus, many false witnesses come forward, but their testimonies didn’t agree. Whether these false witnesses were members of the Sanhedrin, or hastily summoned cohorts, we do not know. Mark records some of these proceedings as well (14:55-65). We should remember that

according to Mosaic Law, no one could be convicted of a crime on the basis of only one person's testimony (Num. 35:30; Deut. 17:6, 19:15). Finally, two came forward with their testimony. Who these men were, as above, we do not know. Possibly they were individuals recruited by members of the Sanhedrin. The outcome remains the same however. The two who finally did "agree" on something accused Jesus of saying He could destroy the Temple of God and rebuild it in 3 days. [In ancient times, the destruction or desecration of a place of worship was regarded as a capital offense. But note that Mark reports their testimony did not agree either, 14:57-59.]

What was more important to the Sanhedrin, however, was the implication that Jesus was claiming power to rebuild that magnificent temple in three days - a feat that, they believed, could only be done by God. Thus, they were trying to establish that Jesus was claiming to be God - which was considered blasphemy, punishable by death under Jewish law (which had no bearing on Roman law, and therefore would have been useless before the Roman governor). Actually, all this was a distortion of something Jesus had said early in His public ministry. When the Jews were wanting Jesus to give them a sign to prove His authority, He responded, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days" (John 2:19). But John pointed out (2:21) that Jesus was speaking about the temple of His body. This indeed happened on Easter morning. After they had "destroyed the Temple" of His body on Good Friday, Jesus "raised it again" on the 3rd day - a miracle far greater than merely rebuilding the Temple in three days!

Since they had nothing better, the high priest tried to capitalize on this "testimony." He challenged Jesus to respond to this "charge." Jesus remained silent to this absurd and distorted "accusation." Frustrated, the high priest now resorted to another tactic. He placed Jesus under oath and demanded that Jesus tell them whether He was the Christ, the Son of God (Matt. 26:63). Caiaphas felt that if Jesus denied being the Christ, the Son of God, they could discredit Him and all His "claims." If He admitted to being the Christ, the Son of God, they would find Him guilty of blasphemy. Either way, the high priest felt he couldn't lose. They anxiously awaited Jesus' answer. Being placed under oath, Jesus was now bound to answer or be guilty of (silently) not telling the truth. He admitted that He was the Christ, the Promised Messiah, the Son of God (Matt. 26:64a). [But notice what Jesus says in the last part of verse 64. He is letting this group know that while they are the ones now sitting in judgment, there will come a day when the Son of Man will be sitting on the Judgment Seat and the roles will be reversed. Did Caiaphas and the others catch this? Apparently not, or if they did, they chose to ignore it.]

Feigning shock and dismay, the high priest tore his clothes, asking, “Why do we need any more witnesses?” (Matt. 26:65). The others all joined in accusing Jesus of blasphemy and declared that He should be put to death. According to Mosaic Law, blasphemy (mocking God or reviling God, which the Jews felt Jesus was doing by stating He was the Son of God) was to be punished by stoning - a death sentence (Lev. 24:16). Showing further contempt, some began spitting on Jesus. After blindfolding Him, they struck Him with their fists and mockingly asked Him - since He was “supposed” to be the Christ - to tell them who had hit Him. The emotional stress that Jesus experienced in the Garden was now becoming physical as well.

It was during this time that Peter, sitting outside in the courtyard of the high priest, warming himself by the fire started by the servants of the high priest, found himself in a very awkward situation. After initially running away with the others in Gethsemane, Peter obviously began to feel guilty - especially after His forceful statements about remaining loyal to the Master. Desiring to find out what was going to happen to Jesus, Peter followed the crowd at a distance - right into the courtyard of the high priest (Matt. 26:58, Mark 14:54, Luke 22:54b-55, John 18:15-16. Note: The “other disciple” that John refers to was probably John himself). Three different times someone accused Peter of being a disciple of Jesus. Three different times - with increasing fear and frustration - He denied not only being a disciple, but of even knowing “the Man.” The last denial was accompanied by cursing and swearing (Matt. 26:69-74a, Mark 14:66-71, Luke 22:56-60a, John 18:17, 25-27a).

No sooner had the words of his third denial gotten out of his mouth than a rooster crowed (Matt. 26:74b, Mark 14:72a, Luke 22:60b, John 18:27b). Words cannot begin to describe what Peter felt when he heard that rooster crow. It was as if a knife had pierced his heart. He remembered the words of Jesus - warning Peter of this very thing. Words that he had so cockily contradicted. But now the remembrance of these words went deep into his soul. And just at that instant, the Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. It was not an “I told you so” look. That would never come from the Lord. Rather, it was a look of hurt and disappointment - but also a look of love and forgiveness. Peter’s reaction? He broke down and wept bitterly (Matt. 26:75, Mark 14:72b, Luke 22:61-62). Whether the Lord turned and looked at Peter while He was being transferred to the “official” trial of the Sanhedrin at daybreak or when he was being led to Pilate’s Palace is unknown. It is my feeling that it was while Jesus was being taken to the “official” Sanhedrin trial - at daybreak, the time roosters normally crow (Mark 15:1, Luke 22:66).

After the Sanhedrin had rendered their “official” verdict - the decision to put Jesus to death - they led Jesus away to the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate (Matt. 27:1-2, Mark 15:1, Luke 22:66-23:1, John 18:28a). Even though the Sanhedrin had rendered the death verdict, they were powerless to carry it out. The Romans had removed this authority from them. [NOTE: It appears that even though the Roman government had removed the authority of capital punishment from the Jews, they sometimes looked the other way. Compare Acts 7:54-60, which records the stoning of Stephen. But in such a highly charged situation as this, the Jews would not dare carry out the death sentence on their own.] So the Jews now brought Jesus to Pilate, wanting him to order the execution of Jesus. This meant that Jesus was now to be subjected to a Roman trial as well - or to be more accurate, three Roman trials (an initial trial before Pilate, a trial later before Herod, and a final trial before Pilate again). Three religious trials, three government trials. By this time Jesus had had no sleep for 24 hours. Neither was any forthcoming until He closed His eyes in the sleep of death later this day.

Appearing before Pilate brought a different set of charges. The religious leaders knew that the Roman governor would not be interested in their religious concerns. So they now began charging Jesus with things they thought would catch Pilate’s attention. They accused Jesus of trying to subvert the nation; opposing payment of taxes to Caesar; and claiming to be a King. The first two were totally untrue. The third was true - but in a far different sense than they were trying to make Pilate believe. Pilate questioned Jesus only about the “king” accusation. After talking with Jesus for a while, however, he came back out and told the crowd that he found no basis for such a charge against Him (Luke 23:1-4, John 18:28-38).

In John’s account of this situation, he includes something important. Early in the exchange with Pilate, the governor showed his disinterest in this case by telling the Jewish leaders to judge Jesus by their own (religious) law. They countered by saying they had no right to execute anyone. Then John explains why this is important (18:32). If the Jews would have had authority to execute, Jesus would have died by stoning - the Mosaic punishment for blasphemy. But Jesus had spoken earlier of the manner of His death - a death that involved Him being lifted up from the earth, namely crucifixion (John 3:14; 12:32-33). Here is another example of how God used a civil government to insure that prophecy was fulfilled (Cp. Luke 2:1-7 and Matt. 2:1-6).

Luke is the writer who tells us about the second Roman trial of Jesus. As the Jews

were trying to convince Pilate that Jesus really was a threat to the nation, they said that Jesus was stirring up the people all over Judea - having started in Galilee. When Pilate heard that and realized that Jesus was also under Herod's jurisdiction, he sent Him to Herod - hoping to get rid of this "hot potato." Herod was initially pleased since He had been wanting to see Jesus for some time. He had heard a lot about Jesus and was hoping Jesus would perform some kind of miracle for him. [Would this be a legitimate question for us today, "What do we hope to see in Jesus?" Prayerfully, more than a miracle worker to "entertain" us or come to our aid only in time of trouble.] But even though Herod asked a lot of questions, Jesus spoke not a word. After a little of this, Herod lost interest in this Man. To show contempt for Jesus, Herod and his soldiers made fun of Jesus and mocked Him. In an ultimate attempt to scorn this "King," they put a purple robe on Jesus (to give the "appearance" of royalty) and sent Him back to Pilate. Luke notes that on this day Pilate and Herod became friends (Luke 23:5-12). That was the only thing positive that happened for Pilate that day. Jesus was now his responsibility again.

Now the third portion of Christ's Roman trials begin. It is obvious that Pilate wanted nothing to do with this case. He made several halfhearted attempts to let Jesus go. But each time, the religious leaders would hear nothing of it. Pilate thought that perhaps his custom of releasing a prisoner to the people during the Feast might work. He gave the people a choice between Jesus and Barabbas. Barabbas is described as a notorious prisoner, having been involved in an uprising against the government and had committed murder. The chief priests stirred up the people to request Barabbas. When Pilate asked what he should then do with Jesus, the crowd shouted, "Crucify Him!" Pilate's wife even got involved. She sent word to her husband, urging him to have nothing to do with that innocent Man, since she had suffered greatly in a dream because of Him. Pilate didn't really need that encouragement, but it did make him more intent on releasing Jesus (Matt. 27:15-23, Mark 15:6-14, Luke 23:13-21, John 18:39-40).

For a third time Pilate tried to reason with the crowd. He told the crowd that neither he nor Herod had found any grounds for putting Jesus to death. He offered to punish Jesus (though knowing Him to be innocent) and then release Him - hoping this would quench the crowd's craving for "blood." But the crowd kept shouting louder and louder, demanding Jesus' crucifixion. Pilate even staged a hypocritical show of washing his hands in front of the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood." As if that pathetic act could relieve him of his responsibility. Pilate had the power to release Jesus, but he was too intimidated by the crowd to do what he knew

in his heart should be done. It was then that the crowd called down upon themselves and their children (descendants) an eternal curse, when they shouted, “Let His blood be on us and on our children.” (Matt. 27:24-25, Luke 23:22-23)

Seeing that he was getting nowhere with the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them [An Interesting Note: The name Barabbas means “son of Abba” - “Abba” being Aramaic for “Father.” Compare Mark 14:36. This “son of the father” was released, even though he was deserving of death as a murderer. In his stead, the “Son of the Father” was delivered up for death, even though He was innocent. Another note - or perhaps “question” would be more appropriate. We wonder if Pilate ever had legal reason to regret this action of releasing Barabbas? We wonder if Barabbas - with his infamous history - ever appeared before Pilate again, and for what charge?] In another desperate attempt to free Jesus, Pilate had the soldiers flog Jesus. He was hoping this inhumane treatment would cause the Jews to change their minds. He should have known by now that nothing short of Jesus’ crucifixion would appease this crazed crowd.

Indeed, flogging (KJV - “scourging”) was inhumane. It is described as something so painful and severe that victims occasionally died as a result of such beatings. Different accounts of scourgings describe these floggings in slightly different ways - possibly because different methods were used in different locales and situations. Basically, the victim would be stripped of his outer clothing, bent forward over a low pillar and restrained. In other instances, the victim was stripped to the waist and tied to an upright post. Either way, the back would be bared and exposed to the full brunt of the blows. Instead of rods as were used by the Jewish officials, the Romans used short-handled whips, to which was attached several leather thongs of approximately two to three feet in length. (Most whips were limited to three thongs, but some accounts speak of up to nine such thongs, leading to the description: “cat of nine tails.”) To the end of each thong was fastened either a jagged piece of lead or bone. As the blows were applied to the victim’s back, the pieces of lead or bone caused deep, bloody gashes - sometimes exposing the very ribs of the victim. Some reports state that in some instances, two whips were used simultaneously - one from either side of the victim.

In contrast to the Mosaic Law which limited the number of lashes to 40 (Deut. 25:2-3), there was no such limitation in Roman scourging. The number of lashes was determined by the officer in charge. This method of punishment was so severe that no Roman citizen could be subjected to it (Acts 22:25). It was rather reserved

for slaves and condemned criminals. The innocent Jesus was subjected to this kind of torture without being condemned by the Roman government - but simply because the weak-kneed Pilate would not exercise his authority and stand up to this ranting rabble. But even this was not the depth of the suffering that still awaited Jesus.

Following the scourging, other soldiers got into the act. They made a crown of thorns and pressed it - not too gently, I dare say - on His head. They put the purple robe back on Him, put a stick in His hand (as a mock scepter), then knelt before Him and mocked, "Hail, King of the Jews!" Again and again they struck Him in the face (Matt. 27:27-31a, Mark 15:16-20a, John 19:1-3). John records another attempt by Pilate to release Jesus. Pilate brought Jesus out onto a porch or platform adjacent to his palace. With the crown of thorns clearly visible, wearing the purple robe, Jesus was "presented" to the mob with the words: "Behold the Man." Any sympathy Pilate thought this might generate did not come to pass. Instead, additional shouts of "Crucify Him" filled the air. Pilate told the crowd to take Jesus and crucify Him, since he found no fault in this Man (John 19:4-6). [Ironically, four Gentiles and two Jews declared the innocence of Jesus that day - Pilate (John 19:4b, 6b and Luke 23:14b), Herod (Luke 23:15), Pilate's wife (Matt. 27:19), the Roman centurion at the crucifixion site (Luke 23:47); the repentant thief (Luke 23:40-41) and Judas (Matt. 27:4a).]

The Jews responded to Pilate's plea by forgetting about any previous civil charges they brought against Jesus before the Roman governor and declared their real problem with Jesus. They said He ought to die because He claims to be the Son of God (John 19:7). When already jittery Pilate heard that, any remaining courage left him altogether. He went in and talked to Jesus again. He was even more fearful and wanted more than ever to release Jesus. Pilate appealed to the crowd again, bringing Jesus back outside and telling them, "Here is your King." To which the crowd responded, "Crucify Him," adding, "We have no king but Caesar." Finally, in desperation, Pilate gave in to their demands and surrendered Jesus to be crucified (John 19:8-16). [NOTE: Scripture is silent about Pilate after this. It does appear from secular history that Pilate, in a state of guilt and depression, committed suicide a few years after this event. One tradition has it that he jumped from a mountain precipice near Lucerne, Switzerland, to his death below. For whatever it's worth, that mountain is known to this day as Mt. Pilatus.]

One figure in this whole scenario has been put in the background temporarily. Let's bring him back to the forefront now. What about Judas - the traitor-disciple who,

humanly speaking, started this sad chain of events? Matthew is the only one of the Gospel writers who tells us what became of Judas (27:3-10). When Matthew relates that Judas was filled with remorse when he saw that Jesus was condemned, he was probably referring to the moment when Judas saw that the religious leaders were taking Jesus to Pilate. From that moment on, it was obvious that Jesus had been condemned by the Sanhedrin. Whatever Judas' base motive was in turning Jesus over to the religious leaders, he now had second thoughts. He took the 30 pieces of silver back to the chief priests and elders of the people - and told them that he had betrayed innocent blood. To Judas, Jesus was nothing more than "innocent blood" - an innocent Man caught up in a series of events gone bad.

The chief priests could not have been less interested in Judas' problem - and told him so. The money that had earlier been so important to Judas now was totally repulsive to him. So he took the money and threw it onto the floor of the Temple in front of the priests. But getting rid of the money did in no way remove Judas' feeling of guilt. The fact that Judas did not see in Jesus the Promised Messiah, the Savior of mankind - including himself - is evidenced by his next act. He went out and hanged himself [Luke, in the Book of Acts, records the action of the disciples in filling Judas' vacated position among the Twelve (Acts 1: 15-26).] Since this money was considered to be "blood money" even among the priests, they dared not put it into the Temple treasury. Instead, they bought a potter's field for the burial of strangers. It is interesting to note that both Matthew (27:8) and Luke (Acts 1:19) make reference to the name given that potter's field: "The Field of Blood." [I wonder if Judas himself might have been buried here, in a field that he "bought" with blood money. Cp. Acts 1:18.]

The procession began making its way toward the site of the crucifixion. Initially, Jesus carried His own cross (John 19:17a). [There are differing opinions as to whether the Greek word translated "cross" (stauros) refers to the entire cross (the upright or vertical piece and the horizontal or cross-piece) - or only to the horizontal piece, which was later fastened to the upright or vertical timber which had already been implanted in the earth at the execution site. Two Greek Lexicons that I consulted define the word "stauros" as a stake or cross. One elaborates that this word refers to a stake sunk into the earth in an upright position, explaining that a cross-piece was often attached to its upper part. Respected scholars stand on both sides of the one piece versus the two piece cross.] Either way, in His weakened condition - due to the lack of sleep, loss of blood from the flogging, and the flogging itself - Jesus was unable to continue. So the soldiers forced one Simon of Cyrene (a city in Libya,

North Africa) to carry the cross for Jesus (Matt. 27:32, Mark 15:21, Luke 23:26). Simon was probably of Jewish descent and was in Jerusalem at this time for the Passover celebration. (Acts 6:9 refers to “Jews of Cyrene” - albeit in a negative way. Acts 11:19-20 speak of Jews from Cyrene in a more positive tone.)

Mark makes note of the fact that Simon was the father of Alexander and Rufus. He merely relates this fact, but in a way that it appears these two men may have been known by Mark's readers. A “Rufus” is mentioned by Paul in his letter to the Romans (16:13), but whether this is the same Rufus or not, we do not know. [NOTE: There is strong belief that Mark wrote his Gospel for the Gentile Christians in Rome. Mark was with Paul during his first Roman imprisonment. Compare Colossians 4:10 and Philemon 1:24. Both of these letters were written during Paul's first Roman imprisonment. Toward the end of Paul's life and during his second imprisonment in Rome, he requests Timothy to come to him in Rome - and to bring Mark with him (II Tim. 4:11). So it is quite possible that there is a connection between Mark and Rufus - and could account for the “matter of fact” reference to Rufus being one of the sons of Simon who helped carry the cross of Jesus.]

The procession finally arrives at the place called “Golgotha,” which means “The Place of the Skull” (Matt. 27:33, Mark 15:22, Luke 23:33a, John 19:17). Luke includes the fact that a large number of people followed the procession, including women who mourned and wept for Jesus. He also records the words of Jesus to these women (Luke 23:27-31). It was at this point, when they reached the site of the crucifixion, that the Sanhedrin and members of the crazed crowd got what they wanted. Jesus was crucified!

We write or speak these words rather easily. But none of us can even begin to imagine what this entailed. The description of a crucifixion that I have read and heard most often during my years of ministry is that the cross was laid flat on the ground near the hole into which it would later be deposited and secured. The victim would then be placed (thrown?) not too gently on the cross. (Remember, in the case of Jesus, His back was torn and gashed grotesquely from the scourging. As He was forced to lie on these timbers, His back was extremely sensitive and riddled with pain.) The arms and legs were then stretched out and held securely, while large, iron spikes were driven through the hands and feet.

[Some believe the nails were driven through the wrists rather than the hands to prevent the flesh from separating when the weight of the body began pulling against the nails as the cross was erected. Others believe that the wrists were secured to the

cross by ropes to prevent the nails, having been placed through the palms, from tearing through the flesh between the fingers. None of the Evangelists, in reporting the crucifixion, describe the method of crucifixion - the details probably being well-known by their readers. The Greeks do have two words for "hand." The one is a more restrictive word, referring to the palm area of the hand. The other is a broader term which includes the entire hand, including the wrist. It is this latter word that is used by the Gospel writers when reporting the sudden appearance of Jesus to His disciples on Easter evening and the week following, where reference is made to (the nail prints in) His hands (and feet). See Luke 24:39a, 40; John 20:25,27.]

Having fastened the victim to the cross, the painful process (for the victim) of erecting the cross began. As the cross became more vertical, the weight of the victim's body began bearing down on the nails driven through his hands and feet. The cross was then jostled over to the hole in the ground and dropped into the hole. Who can even begin to imagine the pain this caused the victim as the cross stopped when it reached the bottom of the hole - and the body wanted to keep falling? [The pain would be much the same if the victim's hands were first nailed to a separate cross-piece, which was then lifted up (along with the victim's body) to be attached to the vertical piece - after which the victim's feet would be nailed to the lower part of the upright timber.]

Then began a process that was repeated over and over again during the hours that would seem never to end. As the victim would tire in trying to remain erect, he would want to relax and rest somewhat. But as he slumped down, it became very difficult to breathe. (Try extending your arms to their full length; lift them to a position where your hands are slightly higher than your head; and see how much more labored your breathing is.) Needing more oxygen, the victim would then have to place the weight of his body on the nails through his hands and feet and try to raise himself to a position where he could breathe more easily. Becoming tired of holding himself up - and suffering great pain from the weight of his body on the nails in his hands and feet - he would once again relax and slump to the point where he could hardly breathe. Then the process would begin again. Over and over and over! Yet even now, Jesus was not experiencing the greatest extent of His suffering! (Incidentally, as with scourging, Roman citizens were exempt from this most inhumane method of execution. This was reserved for slaves and the worst of criminals. Truly, crucifixion was one of the most cruel, inhumane, painful, and shameful methods of execution ever devised by sinful human beings.)

Mark tells us that Jesus was crucified at the “third hour,” or 9:00 A.M. (Mark 15:25). Our Savior therefore endured this extreme suffering for over six hours. All four Evangelists make note of the fact that two others, criminals, were crucified along with Jesus (Matt. 27:38, Mark 15:27, Luke 23:32-33, John 19:18). Each also makes the point that these two criminals were placed on either side of Jesus, with Jesus being in the middle. Regarding these two criminals, we will see later that at first both of them joined in with the crowd as they mocked and made fun of Jesus. But then one of them - possibly from watching Jesus’ demeanor and behavior - stopped his ridicule and even chided his fellow criminal for his mockery. Then turning to Jesus, he asked to be remembered by Jesus when He entered His kingdom. While the Scriptures do not identify the position of the repentant criminal, whether on Jesus’ right or left, I would venture that he was on the Lord’s right - even as Jesus describes the “sheep” on His right in the final Judgment (Matt. 25:33).

Matthew and Mark both report that the soldiers offered Jesus some wine mixed with myrrh (or gall), but after tasting it, He refused to drink it (Matt. 27:34, Mark 15:23). This was a mixture intended to help kill some of the pain that victims of crucifixion endured. Jesus refused this mixture, so He would be fully alert and conscious throughout this terrible ordeal. He would not shirk or shy away from paying the complete price of redemption to the fullest; He would be completely aware as He “drank the cup” of God’s wrath to its bitterest dregs. All four Evangelists make note of the distribution of Jesus’ clothing after He was nailed to the cross (Matt. 27:35, Mark 15:24, Luke 23:34b, John 19:23-24). It was customary for the soldiers performing the crucifixion to lay claim to any possessions of the victim. The smaller items were divided evenly and distributed according to lot (similar to throwing dice). One larger garment remained, woven throughout, without seam. Rather than cut this into pieces, they decided on this garment with a separate casting of the lot - thereby fulfilling a prophecy in Psalm 22:18.

The public notice that all four Evangelists mention (Matt. 27:37, Mark 15:26, Luke 23:38, John 19:19-22) was a normal procedure at crucifixions. It explained the charge for which the victim was being put to death - possibly in the hope that this might serve as a deterrent against any others who might be tempted to carry out the same kind of crime. The “charge” was written on a wooden board of some kind and carried ahead of the victim during the procession to the execution site. At the site, it was then fastened to the cross itself. Up to this point, this custom was normal. What made this particular instance different is the “charge” that Pilate ordered to be written. It read: “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.” While ordering this wording was

Pilate's way of "getting back" at the Jews for their insistence on having Jesus crucified because He "claimed to be a King," what he wrote was entirely true. Jesus was - and is - the King, not only of the Jews, but of all mankind. Pilate had this "charge" written in three different languages, so that anyone and everyone passing by could read it. Recognizing this as a mockery of their actions, the chief priests wanted Pilate to change the wording to read that this Man "claimed" to be the King of the Jews. This time, Pilate had the last word. His response: "What I have written, I have written." (John 19:22)

The Evangelists record a total of seven "words" (statements) that Jesus uttered from the cross. None of them record all seven words. The order in which they were spoken, therefore, has been set according to the best of human reasoning. It appears that Luke records the first two words of Jesus from the cross. The first word was spoken just shortly after the soldiers had nailed Him to the cross; had erected the cross and secured it in an upright position. Even though He was suffering indescribable pain, Jesus was thinking of others - as a total of three of His words reveal. Now He was thinking of those who were responsible for carrying out the sentence which had unjustly been imposed on Him - the soldiers. He might have prayed for vengeance - at least justice, but He prays for pardon. "Father, forgive them." (Luke 23:34a) His heart of love will not be silenced even by excruciating pain and suffering. [As He was praying for these soldiers, could He have also had us in mind - we who are also responsible for driving those nails through His hands and feet?]

Three of the Evangelists also tell us about the mockery and ridicule that was being thrown at Jesus from beneath the cross. Evidently some of those who were hurling insults at Jesus were among those present at His "trial" before the Sanhedrin. They mocked Him with some of the "testimony" given at that "trial" (Matt. 27:39-40, Mark 15:29-30). Some of the chief priests, along with the scribes and elders, poked fun at Him by saying He saved others, but couldn't save Himself (Matt. 27:41-42a, Mark 15:31, Luke 23:35). Still others mocked Him, sarcastically saying that if He would come down from the cross now, they would believe in Him (Matt. 27:42b-43, Mark 15:32a). Little did they know how easily Jesus could have come down from that cross. The only thing that held Him there was not the nails in His hands and feet, but His love for mankind - including these scoffers - and His desire to obey His Father's will.

But we notice that this mockery was coming not only from those beneath the cross. The criminals, also experiencing the same pain of crucifixion, added their voices to

those below (Matt. 27:44, Mark 15:32b, Luke 23:39). Maybe this was prompted by their own pain; maybe they were somehow blaming Jesus for their situation; maybe this was indicative of the kind of persons they were. At any rate, Jesus was receiving no sympathy even from those who were enduring the same treatment as He. At least, that was the way it began. For whatever reason, as was written previously, one of the criminals had a change of heart. He began rebuking his fellow criminal and admitted that they were getting what they deserved. But Jesus, he said, had done nothing wrong (Luke 23:40-41). Whether the Holy Spirit was working on something this man had been taught in his youth, or whether the Spirit used the prayer of Jesus in His first word - plus His behavior and demeanor, we don't know. We do know that the Spirit was working in the heart of this man. After rebuking his fellow criminal, he turned to Jesus and asked to be remembered when Jesus comes into His Kingdom. It was at this time that Jesus spoke His second word, assuring this man that yet that very day, he would be with Jesus in paradise (Luke 23:42-43). The second word of concern and love for others. Jesus is always ready and willing to receive another penitent soul into His kingdom.

John is the one who introduces the circumstances that lead up to the third word of Jesus from the cross - again, another word for others. He tells us that Mary, the mother of Jesus, was standing near the cross, along with three other women - Mary's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Mary first appeared on the scene is not recorded. As she stood there, looking up at the pitiful image of her Son, I wonder if she had "flashbacks." Did she think of that day the angel Gabriel appeared to her in Nazareth, informing her that she would become the mother of God's Son? Did her thoughts go back to that unexpected and rather uncomfortable trip from Nazareth to Bethlehem, because of Caesar's decree - and her delivery in a stable, with nothing but a manger in which to place her newborn? Did she think back to that day in the Temple when Simeon took her Child in his arms and uttered prophecy? Did his words come back to haunt her as she felt the "sword" of which he spoke, pierce her soul with a pain that only a mother could feel? Did she remember the hurried flight to Egypt to escape the murdering soldiers of Herod as they sought this "newborn King of the Jews" to slay Him? Did she remember the panic in her motherly heart outside Jerusalem when she and Joseph realized her 12 year old son was missing - and the relief she felt when they found Him in the Temple? Could she even have been somewhat relieved that Joseph did not have to experience what she was now experiencing? Did she think back to the Wedding at Cana and remember how proud she was of her Son as He performed His first miracle?

It may well have been the words of Jesus, directed to her, that brought her back to reality. The present came flooding back into her conscious emotions as she gazed again upon her Son hanging on that accursed tree of the cross. But what was it that Jesus said? Another word of love and concern - His third. Knowing that His time on earth was limited - and therefore knowing it was necessary to break human ties - Jesus addresses His mother as "Dear woman" - a term intended to express His tender feelings towards her, but at the same time indicating a different type of relationship was beginning. Seeing the beloved disciple John, who was standing near His mother, Jesus entrusted her to his care, telling Mary that henceforth she should consider John to be her "son." Similarly, speaking to John, He turned the responsibility of Mary's care over to him. John immediately assumed that responsibility and took her to live in his own home (John 19:25-27). [Whether any of the other disciples were present at the crucifixion - or even nearby - we do not know. There is a possibility that they could be included in a generalized statement in Luke's Gospel (23:49). However, Matthew (27:55) and Mark (15:40-41) imply that those watching from a distance were only women.]

What about Mary's other children? (Cp. Matt. 12:46, 13:55; Mark 3:31; Luke 8:19.) Why were they not expected to take care of their mother? That answer is not given to us in Scripture. Speculation is not sufficient - so we will remain silent on that subject. We do know that Jesus was comfortable in entrusting the care of His mother to John. John was equally comfortable in accepting that responsibility. We have no reason to doubt that he carried out this responsibility adequately and faithfully. For John, I'm sure, it was a privilege to take care of the mother of Him of whom he later wrote: "In the beginning was the Word" (John 1:1), indicating the Divine nature of Jesus. Thirteen verses later, John speaks of the Human nature of Jesus when he wrote, "The Word became flesh" (John 1:14). There was obviously no doubt in John's mind that his friend, Jesus, was both true God and true Man.

[NOTE: There is only one other reference to Mary after this in the Sacred Writings. She is listed as one of those present with the disciples and others, after the Ascension of Jesus, in an upstairs room (the "Upper Room"?). Luke records this in Acts 1:14. How long Mary lived after this and where she died is not revealed to us. There are a number of traditions concerning this, but that is what they are - traditions. But notice that the brothers of Jesus are now referred to in Acts 1:14 as being present. Could it be that His resurrection was the "proof" His brothers needed to begin believing in Him? (Cp. John 7:5). Matthew names the brothers (actually half-brothers) of Jesus - James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas (Jude) - in chapter 13, verse 55 of his

Gospel. There is strong reason to believe that at least two of His brothers became important figures in the early Christian Church. In Galatians 1:19, Paul refers to “James, the Lord’s brother.” In Acts 12:17, 15:13, and Galatians 2:9, James is mentioned as being an obvious leader of the church in Jerusalem. It is the common consensus that the author of the Epistle of James is this same James, the brother of the Lord. The other brother of Jesus who distinguished himself in the early Church was Jude. The author of the Epistle of Jude feels it is necessary to identify himself only as a “servant of Jesus Christ and a brother of James” (Jude 1:1). It appears that the “family tie” was obvious to those who were the recipients of Jude’s letter.]

Three of the Evangelists now relate a most remarkable phenomenon in nature. From the 6th hour until the 9th hour - from noon until 3:00 P.M. - the brightest part of the day, a mysterious darkness befell the land (Matt. 27:45, Mark 15:33, Luke 23:44-45a). Neither of these writers mention anything about it becoming cloudy or any other normal reason for the sky darkening in the middle of the day. (Astronomy tells us that this was not an eclipse - since an eclipse cannot occur when the moon is full or near being full.) Luke simply explains: “The sun stopped shining.” Poetically speaking, so aghast by what was happening to its Creator, the sun temporarily refused to perform the work for which it was created - it refused to shine. No mention is made as to any effect this may have had on anyone experiencing this unusual darkness, but I find it hard to believe that this wouldn’t have caused a lot of fear, trembling, and questions in the hearts and minds of those people around the cross especially.

About 3 o’clock in the afternoon, a loud cry is heard coming from the center cross - in the midst of this eerie darkness. Jesus has just uttered His 4th word from the cross (Matt. 27:46, Mark 15:34). It is a word that has eternal significance for every human being. Unlike His first 3 words - words of concern for others - these are pleading words. Jesus is pleading with His Father in heaven for some explanation as to what is now happening. Jesus is now experiencing the deepest depths of His suffering. He is now drinking the cup of God’s wrath to its bitterest dregs. He is suffering the full torment and agony of hell itself. And His words ask “Why?” He knew this would be necessary when He left His throne above and came to this earth. But now, in the midst of enduring hell itself, He asks “Why?” Notice the way He addresses His Father: “My God, My God!” Not the endearing “Abba” or “Father” - but “God.” (This is the only time He addresses His Father in this manner.) In this moment, as He is suffering hell’s consequences for each and every sin against God’s holy Law, He is forsaken by His own Father. You see, that is what hell is - to be forsaken by God. To save us from being eternally forsaken by God, our Savior - Jesus the Christ,

God's own Son - is being forsaken for us. As God looks upon His Son in that moment, He sees not His Son, whom He loves, but sin personified - and He turns His back on Him. God sees my sin and your sin - sin which has been laid upon Jesus - and He punishes His Son in our stead.

Did the Father take pleasure in this? In punishing His Son for the sins of His rebellious human creatures? In turning His back on His Son when He was enduring the ultimate punishment of hell itself? Yes and no! No - and I'm speaking here in strictly human terms (for who can explain God's feelings) - it gave God no pleasure in heaping this punishment upon His Son. This was His own dear Son - one in substance with Himself - always obedient, always loving, always willing to listen to His Father. Now I'm speaking as a human father - it would have been easier for the Father to endure this Himself rather than punish His Son. But - and this is spiritual thinking again - the Father knew that this was the only way to redeem fallen mankind. So yes, the Father did take pleasure in this act - but only with the end result in mind. That is what the writer to the Hebrews says about Jesus as well. He speaks of Jesus as enduring the cross - despite its shame and anguish - for the joy that was set before Him - the joy of saving mankind (Hebr. 12:2).

[NOTE: Jesus calls out "My God" as a Person totally subject to the Law. This is one of the reasons why our Savior had to be both true God and true Man. In order for sinful humans to be redeemed from sin and death, the Law, which mankind had not kept, must be perfectly fulfilled. Its every provision must be obeyed. As God, our Savior was above the requirements of the Law. He lived in perfect harmony with the Law - not because He was required to, but because He was the Creator of the Law. The demands of the Law were not binding upon Jesus as God. But the demands of the Law had to be obeyed in order to satisfy God's justice. You see, God is not only a God of love, but also a God of justice. He would not have been true to His justice if He had "overlooked" the sins of the world. But His love sought and found a way that sinful mankind did not have to pay the righteous and well-deserved price for sin. His Plan was to substitute His Son for sinful mankind. His Son would keep the Law for us. But as God, as we mentioned above, the requirements of the Law were not binding upon Jesus. Therefore, our Savior had to be true Man - someone who would be "under the Law" (Gal. 4:4), bound to keeping the demands of the Law because He was subject to the Law. However, as Man alone, albeit sinless and perfect, He could keep the Law for only one other person. So our Savior had to be both God and Man. Man to be subject to the Law and keep it perfectly; God, so that His keeping of the Law would be sufficient for every human being. (There are

two other reasons why our Savior had to be both God and Man. These will be explained in due time.)]

Things happen rather quickly now. Knowing that He had successfully completed His work of redeeming the world, John tells us that Jesus uttered His 5th word from the cross. Nothing more was needed; nothing more could be added - except death itself. His tremendous suffering was over. Now He would think of Himself. So He said, "I'm thirsty." (John 19:28) In so doing, He fulfilled a prophecy in Psalm 22:15, which describes the condition of dehydration which Jesus was experiencing; a condition that accompanied crucifixion - due in no small part to the fever that resulted from His wounds. The soldiers fulfilled another prophecy (Ps. 69:21b) when they offered Him a drink of sour wine (vinegar). John describes that action in 19:29. Matthew (27:48) and Mark (15:36a) speak of this action as well.

We look to John again for the next spoken word - His 6th. This is a word spoken to His Father. A word that means "mission accomplished." It is only one word in Greek, but is best translated with three in English, "It is finished." (John 19:30a) The purpose for which Jesus came to this earth is now completed. The Law has been fulfilled perfectly. Every sin of every human being has been atoned for. God and mankind have been reconciled. The separation between God and man that began in the Garden of Eden has now been spanned. These words that rang out from the cross have eternal significance for us human creatures. For now the promise of forgiveness is made real. Not that the promise of forgiveness was empty before. A promise of God is always a sure promise. But up to this point, it was a promise based on the coming redemptive work of Jesus. Now that work was complete. It was finished. Everything necessary for man's forgiveness was done. We now have a sure hope of forgiveness through this atoning sacrifice of our Savior. "It is finished!"

The 7th and final word of Jesus from the cross follows quickly. As with the first word from the cross, this word is also addressed to the Father. Once again, Jesus addresses Him as "Father." The tender, loving relationship between Father and Son that existed from Eternity is now restored. So Jesus commits His spirit (soul) into the loving hands of His Father (Luke 23:46). But notice how Luke describes the way Jesus uttered this word: "with a loud voice." Matthew (27:50) and Mark (15:37) also record the fact of the loud voice. In other words, Jesus now leaves this earth - not as a defeated, helpless victim, but as a Conqueror, One in charge of His destiny right up to the very end. Most victims of crucifixion die in silence - or barely able to speak - a result of untold agony over an extended period of time, totally exhausted. But

Jesus calls out in a loud voice, determining and setting the moment of His death. Truly a death possible only by the Son of God. He bows His head. He stops breathing. His heart stops beating. His body relaxes. The soul of Jesus is now reposing in the loving hands of His heavenly Father.

[NOTE: This is the second reason why our Savior had to be both God and Man. The payment for sin is death. The One who was to save us had to be able to die. As God alone, Jesus could not die - for He is immortal, eternal; the very Author and Giver of life. So our Savior had to be true Man to be able to die. But as Man alone, He could have died for only one sin - not even the sins of one human being. Paul tells us in Romans that the wages - what is earned, deserved - of sin (singular) is death (6:23a). Thus each sin ever committed has a penalty of death. Our Savior had to be true Man to be able to die - but had to be true God, so that His dying would be of sufficient worth to pay the debt of every sin ever committed. The third and final reason why our Savior had to be both God and Man will be explained in the next chapter.]

As soon as Jesus breathed His last and bowed His head in death, several remarkable occurrences took place. 1) The veil in the Temple was rent in two from top to bottom (Matt. 27:51a, Mark 15:38, Luke 23:45b). This is the veil that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies (or Most Holy Place). Both the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place were “off limits” to the average Jew. Only officiating priests could enter the Holy Place. And only the High Priest could enter the Most Holy Place - and that, only once a year, on the Day of Atonement, “Yom Kippur.” The Most Holy Place was obviously the most sacred part of the Temple. The Day of Atonement was a very high and holy day for the Jewish people. It was the day when the high priest offered sacrifices for the sins of the nation. The procedure for this ritual is given in Leviticus 16. (We spoke of some of this earlier in our account of Palm Sunday.)

The veil between the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place indicated the separation between God and man, brought about by sin. Only the High Priest dared go beyond that curtain - and then only once a year - as he offered sacrifices for the sins of the people. When Jesus, as our Great High Priest, had offered the only sacrifice which can atone for sins - Himself, the veil of separation tore in half, indicating that sinful mankind no longer needs any human intermediators, but can go directly to God themselves through our Great High Priest, Jesus Christ (Hebr. 9:1-14, 10:10-22a).

2) The second remarkable occurrence is reported by Matthew alone (27:51b). It was as if nature rebelled again when its Creator died. An earthquake shook the area.

Rocks were split as if they were made of egg shells. 3) The third unnatural occurrence is also reported only by Matthew (27:52-53). During the earthquake, tombs (which were often carved out in rock) broke open and the bodies of the faithful came back to life. They came out of their tombs, but for whatever reason, did not go into Jerusalem until after Jesus' resurrection on Easter morn. The obvious significance of this was to demonstrate Jesus' victory over death by His own resurrection. (What happened to these resurrected individuals or how long they might have lived after this is not revealed to us.)

Witnessing all that had happened, the Roman centurion in charge of the crucifixion detail made a pronouncement - not only implying Jesus' innocence, but also attesting to His divinity (Matt. 27:54, Mark 15:39, Luke 23:47).

It was now sometime after 3 o'clock in the afternoon. Sundown would usher in the Sabbath. And this was a special Sabbath since it fell during the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread celebration. There would be many people passing the crucifixion site as they went to the Temple. After all their clamor to have Jesus crucified, the Jewish leaders now surprisingly didn't want the bodies to remain on the crosses on the Sabbath. (Could the sign which Pilate had fastened to the center cross have been one of the reasons they wanted the bodies, especially Jesus', removed?) If the bodies remained on the crosses until sundown, they would have to wait until after the Sabbath to remove them. (No work was allowed on the Sabbath.) So the Jews approached Pilate and requested that the legs of the victims be broken (John 19:31). With broken legs, the victims could not put weight on their feet, pushing themselves into a more upright position to be able to breathe easier. Suffering from increased pain from broken legs, more intense shock, and a greater inability to breathe, the victims would then die more quickly.

Pilate granted their request and gave such an order. The soldiers broke the legs of the two criminals, but when they came to Jesus, they realized He was already dead and thus did not break His legs. Unwittingly, they fulfilled prophecy in that act of omission. Exodus 12:46 speaks of the Passover lamb and warns the people not to break any of its bones. Those Passover lambs foreshadowed Jesus, Who is the great Passover Lamb, the Lamb of God, as identified by John the Baptist (John 1:29). The Psalmist David also utters prophecy to this effect in Psalm 34:20. Instead of breaking the legs of Jesus -but to make certain that He was indeed dead - one of the soldiers plunged a spear into Jesus' side, thus fulfilling another prophecy (Zech. 12: 10b), and foreshadowing an event that will take place on Judgment Day (Rev. 1:7). In his

description of these events, John notes that blood and water flowed from Jesus' side and makes reference to the fulfilled prophecies (John 19:32-37). Once again, agents of the government are used by God to carry out His will and fulfill His Word.

As the start of the Sabbath drew closer, a man who will be forever associated with the burial of Jesus, Joseph of Arimathea (a Judean town about 20 miles northwest of Jerusalem), went to Pilate and requested approval to remove the body of Jesus and bury it. Joseph is described as a prominent member of the Sanhedrin, but one who did not agree with the actions of the Sanhedrin (Luke 23:50-51). He is further described as a believer in Jesus, but did not proclaim his faith openly because he was afraid of repercussions from the Jews (Matt. 27:58, Mark 15:43, Luke 23:51b, John 19:38). But now that the Master was dead, there was nothing that was going to prevent Joseph from burying the body of Jesus. (Joseph's actions were certainly motivated by love and devotion - but could there have been some guilt mixed in with his feelings; guilt over not speaking up in Jesus' behalf before the Sanhedrin when they were plotting to kill Him?) So he goes boldly to Pilate with his request. Mark tells us that Pilate was surprised at this request because he didn't think that Jesus was dead already (15:44a). Sending for the centurion in charge of the crucifixion detail, Pilate was told that Jesus was in fact dead. So Pilate gave permission for Joseph to take the body (Mark 15:44-45).

Another secret disciple, Nicodemus, accompanied Joseph on this errand of love (John 19:39a). Nicodemus, you remember, was the Pharisee member of the Sanhedrin who had visited with Jesus one night to inquire about the Kingdom of God (John 3:1ff). Nicodemus and Joseph lovingly removed Jesus from the cross and laid Him in a new tomb, which was located nearby. The reason for the selection of this tomb was twofold. 1) The Sabbath was rapidly approaching, so the burial had to be done quickly. 2) Matthew tells us that this tomb belonged to Joseph himself (27:60a), which made it very convenient. Scripture also makes a point of telling us that this was a new tomb, a tomb wherein no one had yet been placed (Matt. 27:60a, Luke 23:53b, John 19:41). As Jesus rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday on the back of a donkey, on which no one had ever ridden, so now on Good Friday, He is laid to rest in a tomb wherein no one had ever been laid. Thus maintaining the practice, although probably not in the conscious thoughts of Joseph and Nicodemus at the time, of using only the best - things never used before for secular or normal purposes - when used by or for God.

Before placing Jesus into the tomb, however, Joseph and Nicodemus hastily followed

Jewish burial customs and prepared the body of Jesus for His burial. Nicodemus had brought about 75 pounds of myrrh and aloes, in mixture, which they placed in the strips of linen that they wrapped around the body of Jesus (John 19:39b-40). Matthew (27:59), Mark (15:46), and Luke (23:53a) speak of the body of Jesus being wrapped in a “linen cloth.” John (19:40) speaks of His body being wrapped in “strips of linen” (Cp. Luke 24:12 and John 20:6). There is no problem with these differing accounts. Traditional Jewish practice seems to have been to wrap a corpse in long pieces (strips) of linen cloth, winding it around the body. While wrapping, spices were included as a sort of “embalming” process. That was all held in place by a larger sheet or shroud - as referred to by Matthew, Mark, and Luke, noted earlier in this paragraph. There was also a separate, smaller cloth in which they wrapped Jesus’ head (John 20:7). As Jesus was wrapped in “swaddling clothes” (strips of cloth) at His birth, so now at His death, He is once again wrapped in strips of cloth! (Another comparison: At the beginning of Jesus’ life on earth, He was carried in the womb of His mother, Mary. At the end of His life on earth, He was placed in the womb of “mother” earth.)

After placing Jesus in his own new tomb, Joseph (probably assisted by Nicodemus) rolled a large stone in front of the entrance and left (Matt. 27:60b, Mark 15:46b). Matthew (27:61), Mark (15:47), and Luke (23:55) all report the presence of women at the burial. Seeing the large stone that was rolled in front of the tomb gave rise to a troubling question for the women early Sunday morning (Mark 16:3). A question, as they found out, that needed no answer. Luke tells us that after they left the tomb late that Friday afternoon, the women returned home and prepared spices and perfumes in order to complete the burial process for Jesus on Sunday morning (Luke 23:56). Evidently feeling that their supply was insufficient, some of the women went and bought additional spices after the Sabbath was over, namely, after sundown on Saturday (Mark 16:1). Nothing more is recorded about Jesus or any of His followers until early Sunday morning - a Sunday that has gone down in the annals of Christian history as the day that changed everything; a Sunday now known as Easter!

Matthew does record the activities of some of the chief priests and Pharisees, however. Ignoring some of the Sabbath restrictions, they went to Pilate with another request. It seems odd that these individuals, who were so certain that Jesus was not the Son of God and Promised Messiah, would now be worried about what might happen to His body. They tried to excuse their request by saying they feared the disciples of Jesus might come and steal His body and then tell people He rose from the dead, as He had said He would. Could it be that this delegation might have had another “fear” - that He really would rise from the dead? At any rate, they asked Pilate to

make the tomb secure until the third day. Pilate agreed and even gave them a group of Roman soldiers to guard the tomb (Matt. 27:62-66). A seal was placed on the stone that closed the entrance and a guard was posted. While it is not specifically stated, you can be sure that the Jewish leaders, if not the Roman soldiers themselves, or both, made certain that the body of Jesus was still in the tomb before sealing it and setting the guard. Even with all this, could the chief priests and Pharisees rest well as they waited for the “third day” to arrive? As for the guards, they could keep someone from *entering* the tomb - but what about Someone *leaving* the tomb?

COMMENTS:

The crucifixion of Jesus! An historical event limited to the distant past? A sad and sentimental story about the cruel end to the life of an innocent, loving, selfless individual? A story intended to evoke sympathy and compassion for this Man who was caught up in the spiritual politics of His day? If this is all the crucifixion of Jesus means, then the Son of God suffered and died in vain. There is so much more to the crucifixion of Jesus. In the crucifixion you can see how important mankind is to God - how important *you* are to God. You see, God worked out the Plan for our salvation - for your salvation - in Eternity (Eph. 1:3-6, 11). Jesus carried out that Plan in time. For reasons explained earlier, this was all necessary for the redemption of mankind.

Before creating the world; before creating the crown of His creation - man and woman, God knew His human creatures would rebel against Him and “sell their souls” to Satan. In order to redeem them, to “buy them back,” God devised a magnificent Plan which depended on His Son coming to earth in time and fulfilling every requirement of that Plan. Good Friday saw the fruition of that Plan. Easter is the proof of the successful completion of that Plan. Why did God come up with a Plan to save His wayward children? Because of love. Look at the cross and you see God’s love. A love that cannot be adequately explained in human terms. Jesus describes it best in John 3:16, “God so loved...that He gave.” Paul speaks of that love in Romans 5:1-2,6-8. (Read verse 8 very carefully.) If that won’t capture your attention, think of this - God would have done all this if you were the only sinner on earth. God loves the masses. But He loves the individual as well. Look at the cross and see how much God loves you; how important you are to God. Don’t ever feel that you are unimportant; that you don’t count for much. The cross shows otherwise.

The eternal Son of God, having taken on human flesh and blood, carried our sins (my sins, your sins) to the cross and paid for each and every one of them with His innocent suffering and death. He did this so that you and I would not have to spend

eternity in hell, a just reward for our sins, but by His grace, can live with our God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - in heaven throughout eternity. I ask you: will eternity be sufficient time to praise and thank Him for this act of love for us?

ADDITIONAL NOTES:

*** Good Friday will always be remembered - in the Christian world at least - as the day when our Savior, Jesus Christ, was crucified for the sins of the world. We have described some of the horrors of crucifixion in this chapter. Words, however, will never be able to describe the pain and suffering that our Lord endured for us. What is most remarkable, Jesus knew exactly what was awaiting Him. He knew it from eternity, before time began. Yet He chose to follow this Plan, to obey His Father's desire for Him to redeem the world. He lived the perfect life for us; He died the sufficient death for us. He paid the price that no one else - that nothing else - could have rendered. Years after the crucifixion, St. Peter wrote about the price paid, in his First Epistle (I Peter 1:18-19). Notice that in verse 19, he makes reference to Jesus as the Lamb "without blemish or defect" (Cp. Ex. 12:5). Peter also verifies that Jesus knew this from eternity (I Peter 1:20).

*** It is interesting to note that no one really questioned the death of Jesus on the cross at the time - or even during the lifetime of the eye witnesses. It was not questioned until the beginning of the 19th century - to advance what is called the "swoon" theory. (This will be discussed in the next chapter.) But there can be no logical question about Jesus dying on the cross. When the soldiers came to break the legs of the victims, to hasten their deaths, they saw that Jesus was already dead, so they did not break His legs (John 19:33). They did pierce His side with a spear, however, which resulted in a flow of blood and water pouring from His side (John 19:34). This blood and "water" mixture was the result of the spear puncturing the pericardium (a two layer bag or sac that completely surrounds the heart and contains clear fluid which lubricates the movements of the heart) and the heart itself. Any question as to whether Jesus was really dead before this, was now erased totally. Jesus was indeed physically dead. But there is more proof. When Joseph of Arimathea requested the body of Jesus for burial, the surprised Pilate sent for the centurion, who verified the death of Jesus (Mark 15:42-45). Permission was needed from the governor to remove a body from the cross to prevent family or friends from retrieving a body prematurely and trying to revive the victim. So in addition to physical proof, there is also legal proof that Jesus was indeed dead. (This information will be touched on again in the next chapter.)

*** One of the doctrines (teachings) of the Christian Church is the doctrine of divine inspiration of the Holy Scriptures. This is the belief - and a strong, sure belief it is - that the writers of Holy Scripture wrote under the direct influence of the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 2:13, II Tim. 3:16a, II Peter 1:16, 19-21; note especially the words of Peter in v. 16). It is true that the various writers had a writing style of their own - cp. II Peter 3:15-16. It was not as if the Holy Spirit had them sit down and then dictated the exact words which they wrote. Each one wrote from his own background, learning, experiences, etc. I'm sure they interviewed eye witnesses to various events and personal experiences, of which they had no firsthand knowledge. But we believe that the Holy Spirit was working in and through each of these things so that when the holy writers had finished their work, they had not written anything that the Holy Spirit did not want them to write.

This gives us comfort and confidence, for we know that the words we read in the Bible are the very words of God - inerrant, infallible, absolute truth (John 10:35b, 17:17; I Thess. 2:13). How else can you explain the many prophecies and their fulfillment which are recorded in Holy Writ? Obviously, when writing prophetic statements, the writers were guided only by the Holy Spirit. We have included some of these prophecies in this and previous chapters. There are many more throughout the Old and the New Testaments. Quite a few of these prophecies had to do with our Savior's suffering and death. Two chapters in particular are full of prophecies that were fulfilled on Good Friday.

Psalm 22 is one of these chapters. In fact, no other Psalm speaks more about the circumstances surrounding the crucifixion than does Psalm 22. It begins already in verse 1. Although David wrote these words as he himself was being attacked by vicious enemies over a prolonged period of time, the Savior spoke these same words to describe His feelings on the cross, indicating the prophetic nature of these words. These were the words He uttered as His 4th Word from the cross, to describe His anguish in being forsaken by His Father because He was bearing the sins of the world for mankind.

Further, read verses 6-8 and compare that with the treatment and scorn and verbal abuse Jesus endured on the cross. Verse 15 describes the thirst He experienced on the cross. Verse 16b speaks of the piercing of His hands and feet, which happened when He was nailed to the cross. Verse 17 tells about His emaciated condition during the crucifixion, while verse 18 foretells the distribution of His clothing by the soldiers. And mind you, all of this was written approximately 1000 years before

Good Friday - and centuries before crucifixion was even used as a method of execution. An argument for divine inspiration? What other answer could there be?

The other chapter I had reference to is Isaiah 53. Actually, the end of chapter 52 begins the description of the "Suffering Servant." Verse 14 speaks of the grotesqueness of His physical appearance on the cross. Chapter 53, verse 3, foretells the opposition and suffering He would endure. Verse 4 tells us that it was for our sakes that He endured this, but we (a generic "we") thought that God was punishing Him for His own actions. Verse 5 quickly points out that this was happening to the Suffering Servant (Jesus) because of our sins. Verse 6b spells it out very frankly. Verse 7 foretells the silence with which Jesus would meet His tormentors (cp. Matt. 26:62-63a, Mark 14:60-61a; Matt. 27: 12-14, Mark 15:3-5, Luke 23:9; Acts 8:32 is a reference to Isa. 53:7b). Verse 9 explains that as far as those present were concerned, He deserved to be buried with the wicked - while, in fact, He was buried in the tomb of the rich (Joseph of Arimathea). The last part of verse 12 speaks of the fact that He was crucified along with "transgressors" (the two criminals - cp. Mark 15:27) as He paid for our sins - even interceding for the "transgressors" (those who were crucifying Him - His first Word from the cross, Luke 23:34). Another thing - while Isaiah wrote these words approximately 700 years before Good Friday, notice that he wrote this in the PAST tense, as if it had already happened! (We call this the "prophetic future.") Isaiah was so certain that his inspired words would be fulfilled that he wrote in the past tense, totally confident it would happen exactly as he wrote it. Another argument for the divine inspiration of Holy Scripture? Again, what other answer could there be?

As we read God's Word today, therefore, we can have the same certainty and conviction that the inspired writers had; the same certainty and conviction that millions of believers have had since then - that we are reading nothing less than God's own Word; yes, God's own Word to us (I Thess. 2:13). We can therefore believe it, trust it, and cling to it as if our very lives depended on it. And in truth, our spiritual lives do!

*** This is a good place to bring in the promised explanation of the Gospel being a Means of Grace (Chapter VI). As we approach this subject, we need to remember what a Means of Grace is. It is the means, the avenue, the channel, through which God comes to us and imparts to us His blessings of love, forgiveness, and salvation. God's "grace" in Scripture always refers to His "undeserved" love, which in turn provides us with forgiveness and salvation (Rom 5:6-9). We remember that there are

only three such Means of Grace that God has chosen to use - Baptism (Chapter VI), The Lord's Supper (Chapter VII), and the Gospel. The Gospel is the essential element in all three Means of Grace. In fact, the Sacraments (Baptism and Holy Communion) are Means of Grace only because of the Gospel connected with the outward (earthly) elements in those Sacraments (water, bread & wine).

Without the Gospel, the water in Baptism would be nothing more than common, ordinary water. But connected with the Gospel (the words of Jesus in Matthew 28:19), the water becomes a wonderful washing of regeneration; a water which gives a new birth (spiritual birth); a new life (spiritual life). Cp. Titus 3:5, as well as John 3:5, which is a reference to Baptism. Similarly, without the Gospel, the bread and wine in the Lord's Supper would be nothing more than bread and wine. But connected with the Gospel (the words of Jesus, "Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins"), the bread and wine are united with the Body and Blood of Jesus (I Cor. 10:16) and become a Means through which God gives us that forgiveness of which Jesus spoke when He instituted this Sacrament on Maundy Thursday night (Matt. 26:26-28).

That brings us to the Gospel. What is the Gospel exactly? The word "Gospel" means "Good News." (Can you think of any better "good news" than what Jesus describes in John 3:16, the "Gospel in a nutshell"?) Paul tells us that the Gospel is "the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes" (Rom 1:16). It is that Word of God which offers, conveys, and bestows God's forgiveness, eternal life, and salvation (Acts 10:43, Rom 10:17, John 3:16, I Peter 1:23, John 20:31, II Tim 3:15, Col. 1:6). That is what a Means of Grace does. It is the means through which God reaches down, touches lives individually, and imparts His divine and eternal blessings. [Note: Whereas Baptism is a Means through which a person can be brought into the Kingdom of God, and Holy Communion is a Means through which a child of God can be strengthened in his/her faith, the Gospel is a Means which can do both (Rom 1:16, I Peter 1:23; Col. 1:22-23a; consider also the words of Jesus Himself in John 8:31-32 - "teachings" is more accurately translated "Word," "logos" in the Greek, as translated in the KJV).]

One word of caution, however. We must never confuse the Law of God's Word with the Gospel of God's Word. Both are found in His Word. But it is only the Gospel that holds the power of God for salvation. The Law can only condemn and show our sins. It is certainly necessary. For without the Law, we would have no way of becoming conscious of our sins and our need of a Savior. Paul calls attention to this important aspect of the Law in Romans 3:20. So the Law is important. But it cannot save. It

can only condemn. That's where the Gospel comes in. After becoming conscious of our sins through the Law - the fact that we have broken God's commands time and time again - the Gospel comes to our rescue, showing us our Savior and the forgiveness He earned for us on the cross. A good way to remember the distinction between the Law and the Gospel is to use the International Distress Code: SOS. The Law: Shows Our Sin; the Gospel: Shows Our Savior. Through the faith which the Holy Spirit works in our hearts through the Means of Grace, we repent of our many sins and throw ourselves on the mercy of a loving God, confident that He will forgive our sins for Jesus' sake.