



## ***The Hour of Darkness***

A narrative about when it seemed like all hope was lost.

## ***THE BIBLE***

Matthew 26-27, Mark 14-15,  
Luke 22-23, John 16-19

*Prepare for the Story*

## **ICEBREAKER**

- *Watch the short film: "Follow" and discuss your initial reactions as a group.*



*Rewind the Story*

Can someone highlight what has happened in the story so far ...

- Miracles - Jesus' ability to perform wonders
- Kingdom Ways – The nature of the Kingdom of God
- No Ordinary Man – Supernatural experiences with Jesus
- One Week to Live – The final week in the life of Jesus

*Hear the Story*

### **Scene One: When Darkness Reigns**

After the Passover meal, when it was dark, Jesus and His disciples went to an olive grove to pray. He said to His disciples, *"Sit here while I go over there to pray."* He took Peter, James, and John along with Him, and He began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, *"My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch."* Filled with pain and sorrow, He fell face down on the ground.

*"Abba, Father," Jesus cried ('abba' means daddy), "... everything is possible for You. If there is another way besides My death, please let that happen ... but I will do whatever You ask." Then, He returned to His disciples and found them sleeping. "Couldn't you keep watch with me for one hour?" He asked Peter. "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." So Jesus withdrew a second time and again asked God if there was any other way than His death.*

When He came back again, He found the disciples asleep. *"Are you still sleeping? Look, the hour has come, and the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners. Rise! Here comes my betrayer!"* While He was speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived; with him was a large crowd armed with swords and clubs.

Judas greeted Jesus with a kiss, a sign to show the guards which one they should arrest. Jesus said to them, *"Who are you looking for?" "Jesus of Nazareth,"* they replied. *"I am He. If you are looking for Me, then let these other men go."*

Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it and stuck one of the men in the mob, cutting off his right ear. Jesus commanded Peter, *"Put away your sword! Do you think for a minute that I would not drink this cup that my Father has prepared for me?"* Then Jesus touched the man's ear and healed him. After doing so, He said to the armed crowd, *"Am I a dangerous criminal that you need weapons to capture me? Why didn't you arrest Me in the Temple where I've been teaching every day? But this is your hour – when darkness reigns."*

### **Scene Two: The Courtyard**

Those who were there arrested Jesus and dragged Him away. They took Him to Caiaphas, the High Priest, where the teachers of the law and the elders had assembled. The disciples ran away and hid, but Peter followed from a distance, right up to the courtyard. He entered and sat down with the guards to see what would happen.

The Chief Priest and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for false evidence against Jesus so they could put Him to death. But they did not find anything. Finally, two witnesses came forward and declared, *"This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and rebuild it in three days.'"*

Then the High Priest stood up and said to Jesus, “*Are you not going to answer? Is what these men say true? Did you make these claims?*” But Jesus did not answer. He remained silent. The High Priest said to Him, “*I charge you under oath of the living God. Are you the Messiah, the Son of God?*”

Jesus answered, “*I am, and you will see me seated next to God in power, coming back on the clouds of heaven.*” When Jesus said this, the High Priest tore his clothing in horror and said, “*Any man who claims to be God must be put to death.*” Then, they slapped Jesus in the face and spit on Him. Others slapped Him and mocked Him, saying, “*Prophecy to us, ‘Messiah.’ Who hit you?*”

After this happened, some people built a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together; Peter was with them. A servant girl saw him seated there in the firelight. She looked closely at him and said, “*This man was with Jesus.*” But he denied it, saying, “*Woman, I don’t even know the man.*” A little later, someone else saw him and said, “*You are definitely one of His disciples.*” “*I am not!*” Peter replied. About an hour later, another person asserted, “*Certainly, this fellow was with Jesus; he is a Galilean.*” Peter replied, “*I have no idea what you’re talking about!*”

Just as Peter was speaking, a rooster crowed. When this happened, Peter looked to Jesus, who was looking straight at him, and he remembered what Jesus had said at the Passover meal, ‘*Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times.*’ At this, Peter went outside the courtyard and wept bitterly.

### **Scene Three: Torn in Two**

Early in the morning, all the chief priests and elders of the people came to the decision to put Jesus to death. They bound Him, led Him away, and handed Him over to Pilate, the Roman governor, since Jews could not execute anyone without official approval. After questioning Jesus and determining that He was innocent, Pilate went out to the Jews gathered outside the palace and said, “*I find no basis for a charge against this man. But it is your custom for me to release to you one prisoner at the time of the Passover. Do you want me to release this Jesus, ‘the King of the Jews’?*”

The Jewish leaders had been stirring up the crowds to pressure Pilate into condemning Jesus. The crowd shouted back, “*No, not him! Give us Barabbas instead.*” This man, Barabbas, was a notorious prisoner who had taken part in an uprising. After hearing this, Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged.

Then, the soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on His head. They clothed Him in a purple robe and went up to Him again and again, saying, *"Hail, King of the Jews!"* as they slapped Him in the face.

Once more, Pilate came out and said to the Jews, *"Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no basis for a charge against Him."* When Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe, Pilate said to them, *"Here is the man!"* As soon as the chief priests saw Him, they stirred the crowd, and everyone was yelling, *"Crucify Him! Crucify Him!"* But Pilate answered, "You take Him and crucify Him. As for me, I find no basis for a charge against Him."

The Jews insisted, *"We have a law, and according to that law, He must die because He claimed to be the Son of God."* When Pilate heard this, he was even more afraid, and he went back inside his palace. Addressing Jesus, he said, *"Don't you realize I have the power to either free you or have you crucified."* Jesus answered, *"You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above."* From then on, Pilate tried to set Jesus free, but the Jews kept shouting, *"If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar."*

Pilate feared a riot would break out, so he handed Jesus over to the Roman soldiers to be crucified. Jesus was brutally beaten and whipped by the soldiers. All night, they beat Him and mocked Him. When morning came, they led Jesus to a place called Skull Hill.

As he was led out, those who passed by hurled insults at Him, shaking their heads, saying, *"So you are the one who is able to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days? Why don't you just come down from the cross and save yourself!"* Even the chief priest and teachers of the law mocked him, saying, *"Let this Messiah, this King of Israel, come down from the cross, that we may see and really believe."*

Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with Him to be executed. Jesus was nailed to a heavy wooden cross in between these men. Hanging there, He cried out, *"Father, please forgive them – they don't know what they're doing."*

The people stood watching, and the rulers sneered at him. The soldiers mocked Him, offering vinegar to quench His thirst, saying, *"If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself."* There was even a written notice above Him mocking Him, which read, *"THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS."*

As He hung there, even one of the criminals hurled insults at Him, “*Aren’t you the Messiah? Save yourself and while you’re at it save us as well!*” But the other criminal rebuked him saying, “*Don’t you fear God, we are being punished for our crimes, but this man has done nothing wrong.*” Then he said, “*Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.*” Jesus replied, “*Truly I tell you, today you will be with Me in paradise.*”

Near the cross stood Jesus’ mother, Mary. When He saw her there, and His disciple John standing nearby, He said to her, “*Woman, here is your son*”, and to John, “*Here is your mother*”. From that time on John took her into his home.

At noon, darkness filled the skies, blocking out the sun for three hours. Suddenly, the thick curtain hanging in the Temple tore down the middle! At that moment, Jesus shouted, “*Father! I give you my life … it is finished.*” Then Jesus breathed His last breath and died. The earth shook, the rocks split and even tombs broke open.

Late in the afternoon, Jesus’ body was taken down from the cross, wrapped in long strips of cloth, and buried in a rich man’s tomb. A large stone was rolled over the entrance to the tomb and Roman guards were posted to make sure nothing happened to His body.

### Retell the Story

- Where do Jesus and the disciples go after their Passover supper?
- What do the disciples do in the garden? What does Jesus do?
- Who shows up to arrest Jesus?
- Who questions Jesus first? What do they ask Him?
- What happens to Peter at the campfire?
- Where do the Jews take Jesus?
- What happens while Jesus is in Pilate’s custody?
- What happens on the way to Skull Hill?
- What happens while Jesus is on the cross?

### Discuss the Story

- What is your first reaction to this story? How did this story make you feel?

- What stood out to you from this story? What did you notice for the first time?
- What from this story made you wonder?
- Why do you think the disciples fell asleep? What could be significant about this?
- In the garden, why do you think Peter cuts the man's ear off? Why does Jesus heal him?
- Why do you think Jesus endured so much physical and verbal abuse?
- How does Jesus fulfill the prophet's predictions about the coming Messiah?
- Why do you think the Temple curtain was torn in half?
- Did you hear anything that reminded you of *other* stories?
- From this story, what did you notice about humans?
- From this story, what do you notice about God's character or His qualities?

## 1) DENIED THREE TIMES

Peter, one of Jesus' closest friends, vigorously denied three times that he even knew Jesus – even as Jesus watched on (Luke 22:54-62). How do you think Jesus felt as this happened? How did Peter feel? What are some ways that we deny Jesus and act like we don't know Him? Share some specific examples from your experiences.

## 2) THE HEART OF JESUS

What do you learn about the heart of Jesus as He hung on the cross, interacting with (1) those who crucified Him, (2) the criminal who reached out to Him, (3) His own mother? What about this do you find interesting or challenging? How can we live out these things that Jesus demonstrated on the cross?

## 3) THE CURTAIN

Discuss the meaning or the purpose of the curtain in the tabernacle and temple. Why do you think it tears when Jesus died? Then read Hebrews 10:19-22. In your own words, what is the author of Hebrews trying to say? What are some things that we allow to become 'curtains' in our lives, separating us from God?

Pray

God,

*When we think of all You endured for us, our hearts can't help but feel heavy. You were crushed because of our sins. You were beaten and mocked because of our failures. You were bruised and beaten because of our brokenness. We are grateful for all You have done for us. We do not take it for granted. Help us remember the price that You paid so that we could live. Allow that truth to be at the front of our minds each and every day. Amen.*