

Peter:

Have you ever been interrupted while in the middle of a deep sleep? Perhaps you acted irrationally before you could fully wake up. That is what happened to me. But let me start at the beginning. The beginning of the end, that is.

During the last week of the life of Jesus, we settled into a simple, but uneasy, daily pattern. We spent the night on the Mount of Olives, just outside the walls of Jerusalem. The next morning, we crossed the Kidron Valley, climbed up the Temple Mount and entered the Temple grounds. Jesus taught the people, jostled with the Jewish leaders, and instructed his apostles and disciples. As the day ended, we returned to the Mount of Olives.

We knew the Jewish leaders were dangerous, but we did not know Satan had entered Judas Iscariot, one of us. He slipped away and went to the chief priests and temple guards to talk to them about betraying Jesus to them when the crowds were not present. They paid Judas thirty pieces of silver in advance for his treachery.<sup>1</sup> Why thirty pieces of silver, which wasn't a lot of money? Possibly to fulfill a prophetic passage in the book of Zechariah.<sup>2</sup> Possibly because that is all Judas demanded. He bargained away the most precious life ever lived for a pittance.

The day of Unleavened Bread came. This was the day during the Passover festival when the Passover lamb was to be sacrificed. I guess I was expecting Judas to make preparations since he was our treasurer<sup>3</sup> but Jesus turned to John and me, and told us to go make preparations. He gave us detailed instructions instead of his typical vague inferences. His instructions started with, "As you enter the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you." I was immediately taken aback. I had been with Jesus for a week and knew he had not had an opportunity to make complex plans. The odds of seeing a man carrying a jar of water were small. Men did not typically do this type of work.

John and I found things exactly as Jesus said. We met the man, followed him to a house, and asked the owner of the house where the Teacher could eat the Passover feast with his disciples. The owner showed us a furnished room upstairs, and we prepared for the Passover. Many of your scholars believe that the owner of the house was the mother of John Mark since Christians would soon meet in her house on a regular basis.

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 26:15, 27:3

<sup>2</sup> Zechariah 11:4-14

<sup>3</sup> John 13:29

When the appropriate hour came, we apostles and Jesus reclined around the table for Passover, like we had done every year of our lives. The meal did not go as we expected. The words Jesus used portrayed him as the Passover sacrifice. He even said, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me." We should have been stunned and immediately started to question him about his words.

Instead, we started arguing among ourselves about who was going to be greatest. This was not the first time we had had this argument, and I'm sure Jesus was devastated that we were still so prideful. Jesus took the argument and turned it into a lesson showing that the most humble among us would be the greatest. He backed up his words by showing how he had come to serve, not to be served. I should have let well enough alone, but I continued with a haughty attitude.

Jesus turned to me and said, "Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers." I did not catch his conclusion that I would fail while being sifted. I boasted, "Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death." He looked at me with sad eyes and said, "Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times."

Jesus continued to talk to us for a long time, just as John recorded in his gospel account. While continuing to teach us, Jesus led us across the Kidron Valley and up the side of the Mount of Olives to a place known as Gethsemane. After a while, Jesus separated himself from us to pray to God. He had often done this, so we didn't think much of it until he asked James, John and me to keep watch with him. He felt so sorry for us because we could not even stay awake during this time of extreme danger.

I was dead asleep. A crowd of men with torches appeared out of nowhere and came toward Jesus. Judas was with the crowd and walked toward Jesus as if to kiss him in greeting. Jesus said, "Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?" I grabbed a sword and hacked toward the nearest person to me, and cut off a man's right ear.<sup>4</sup> I had just woken up, wasn't thinking clearly, just reacted. Now, I was completely in a panic. I saw that the crowd consisted of soldiers and the temple guard, probably sent by the chief priests, elders, and other Jewish officials. They seized Jesus and started walking down the hill. We apostles scattered in every direction.

From my vantage point, I could see that the torches were headed to the southeast, toward the house of the high priest. I stumbled down the path in the dark, able to stay a short distance from the crowd.

As they went into the house, I came from the backside and sat near the fire in the courtyard, trying hard to keep my face hidden. This girl came up to me. "This man was also with him!" It

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<sup>4</sup> It was the servant of the high priest. John 18:10. Jesus healed him.

was a servant girl accusing me of being a follower of Jesus. I, of course, denied it but my accent and clothes gave me away. I denied my Lord at the mere words of a girl. Twice more I was accused of being a follower of Jesus, and twice more I denied it.

At the exact moment of my third denial, a rooster crowed, and Jesus turned and looked straight at me. I remembered what he had said to me, and I went away and wept bitterly. In the distance, I could hear them insulting Jesus, beating him.

Pilate:

I should have just stayed in Caesarea that wretched day. Why didn't I just stay in Caesarea that day? I had been the prefect of the Roman province of Judaea, an area that was also known as Palestine or Israel. As the representative of Emperor Tiberius, I was Rome. The eternal city. I had total power and control over the province. Even the power of life or death.

I took a large group of soldiers and made the seventy-mile, up-hill, dusty trip to Jerusalem, and prepared to stay there for a few weeks. I had most of the soldiers stay in the Antonia Fortress, our military garrison on the northwest corner of the Temple Mount.

Imagine me in a deep sleep after having a little too much to drink the night before. My attendant taps at my door. I answer, he motions for me to step away so as not to wake up my wife, and tells me that a group of Jewish leaders are waiting frantically to talk to me. He says things that seem odd, but he wants to make sure we don't unintentionally set off a riot by ignoring them.

The leader of the assembled religious brass points to a bloody man and says, "We have found this man subverting our nation. He opposes the payment of taxes to Caesar, and claims to be Messiah, a king."

At that point, I didn't care a bit about what they had to say. The man they were pointing to was badly beaten and clearly posed no threat to me or the Empire. The charges were not even worthy of my time. So, I sarcastically asked the poor man, "Are you the king of the Jews?" I knew Herod was the king of the Jews.

"You have said so," the man replied. Not a bad answer if I don't say so myself, I just laughed. I announced to the crowd, "I find no basis for a charge against this man." I turned to leave, and the group leader frantically tried another charge.

"He stirs up the people all over Judea by his teaching. He started in Galilee and has come all the way here!" Now, the leader thought he could get my attention by insinuating that this poor wretch might be causing an insurrection, but he got my attention in another way instead. He mentioned that the man was from Galilee, which meant that he was under the authority of Herod. Conveniently, Herod was only a few hundred yards away.

Herod would have to deal with a problem that had no good solution. He was either going to break Roman laws or disappoint the Jewish leaders and possibly cause a riot. Either way, I wanted to make Herod's life miserable. He was a pathetic, sad little man, and we were bitter enemies. It was an easy choice for me. I sent the crowd with their wretched prisoner to Herod, and headed back to sleep.

Now imagine my surprise a few hours later when the crowd reappeared and demanded to see me again. What had happened? I asked my assistant, and he gave me the short version. Herod was actually happy to see the man because he had heard of him, and wanted to see him do some great miracle. When the man just stood there, Herod eventually tired of his silence and had his soldiers ridicule him, beat him to a pulp, and dress him in a purple robe that signified his supposed royalty. Then, in a sign of deference to me, Herod sent him back for my judgment.

As that poor man stood there, weaving from fatigue and pain, I could easily see this was not a legal case, but some kind of religious dispute. I was in a no-win situation, and I frantically searched for a way out.

My first gambit; to tell the crowd that Herod and I both found no guilt in the man, and that I would punish him before releasing him. Rather than appeasing the crowd, this just made them more furious. The religious leaders were whipping the crowd into a frenzy, a riot was sure to break out soon.

My second tactical gambit: a brilliant maneuver, give the crowd a choice of releasing this man, or releasing a murderer, a revolutionary named Barabas. It was my custom to release someone at Passover, and I was sure of whom the crowd would not choose. Much to my surprise, they demanded the release of Barabas, and would not listen to my reasoning. "Crucify him! Crucify him!" they shouted.

They had me in a corner and they knew it, both the religious leaders and the crowd. I appealed again to them, but on the verge of a riot, and they kept shouting, "Crucify him! Crucify him! Crucify him!" Their shouts prevailed. I released Barabas, and gave the prisoner to the crowd, which was tacit approval for him to be crucified.

Hours later, my centurion brought his report. The innocent man's name was Jesus. He was so fatigued that he could not carry his cross all the way to the hill of death, so my centurion seized someone from the crowd and had him carry it for him. My centurion was surprised at the large number of people who supported Jesus and followed them, but they were mostly women or men who posed no obvious problem.

With typical Roman efficiency, my soldiers took along two other men who were scheduled to be executed, and all three of them were crucified on Golgotha, with Jesus being placed in the middle.

As was often done, the soldiers gambled against one another to claim the clothing that would never be needed again by the prisoners. I had a notice placed above Jesus that said, "This is the king of the Jews." The soldiers and crowd delighted in mocking Jesus about his inability to save himself even though he was a king. The only one in the crowd who treated him with respect? One of the other crucified prisoners.

It was about noon, when a deep darkness came over the entire land lasting about three hours. The Jews, ever superstitious, were reminded of the plague of darkness when they were slaves in Egypt. They started to regret their actions. The enormous Temple curtain was torn in two from top to bottom and the Jews went ballistic.

Jesus called out, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." He died. It had taken only a few hours for him to die, when it often took several days. My centurion was amazed. And deeply moved. He said that he praised the Jew's God, and said, "Surely this was a righteous man."

No sooner had the centurion finished his report than my assistant came with another urgent request. A wealthy Jew named Joseph had come to ask for the body of Jesus so he could bury it. He was in a hurry, he said he wanted to wrap the body in linen and place it in a new tomb before the Sabbath started.

Quite honestly I was thrilled to have this unexpected request. Usually we Romans would leave crucified bodies in place for a long time. It's a powerful reminder. However, since this Jesus had so many followers, I did not want the body there as motivation for them to unite and rebel, or make a sacred martyr of him. Having the body disappear was a good solution to a potential problem. I granted Joseph permission, and that was the end of the matter. At least it was the end as far as I expected.

Peter:

As it turned out, the end was only the beginning.