

The Passion Narrative of St. Luke

NARRATOR: It was a time of celebration in the city of Jerusalem. Thousands of pilgrims from across the world were gathering for the annual Feast of the Passover. This great feast remembered how God saved the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt. It was a time to remember how God's promise to be with his people always was alive and well.

As the people of Israel gathered publicly to celebrate God's love, another group of men met privately; far removed from the public eye. They met secretly for fear that what they had to say might stir the public into open revolt. The men who gathered so cautiously were the leaders of the Jews. Rabbis, Priests, and Teachers of the Law. Their reason for coming together was obvious: Jesus of Nazareth was in town stirring up trouble for them again. Something needed to be done to put an end to his influence over the people of God.

PRIEST #1: Brothers! Hear me! We must agree on how we shall deal with this heretic: Jesus of Nazareth!

ALL: *(Spoken all at once at random)* Yes! I agree! Amen! By all means! He must be stopped!

PRIEST #1: We must find a way to stop him from spreading his dangerous lies to the people!

ALL: *(All at once)* Agreed! Amen! He must be stopped! He is a heretic! Yes!

PRIEST #1: We must put him to death!

ALL: *(All at once)* Let it be so! Praise God! It must be done! Amen!

PRIEST #2: Brothers! Brothers! Listen to me. I agree with you. This Jesus must be dealt with once and for all! But we must be careful. He is no fool. He has the crowds on his side. He tells them what they want to hear. He speaks of love and peace. He welcomes all into the Kingdom of God.

PRIEST #3: How does that concern us?

PRIEST #2: We must proceed with caution. We must win the crowds to our way of thinking if we are to succeed. We must show them that Jesus is a fraud.

PRIEST #3: And how shall we do this?

PRIEST #2: Simply my brother. Simply. We have all heard his ridiculous claims. He says that he will live after he dies. He says that Jerusalem will be destroyed and God's House shall be no more. He says true worship of God has nothing to do with our Sacred Laws. We shall arrest him secretly and put him on trial for his blasphemies. We shall have him sentenced to death. And when he dies; when he stays dead, and all his claims are proven false, then this whole matter of Jesus of Nazareth will be dead as well. That, my brother, will be the end of the heretic from Galilee.

PRIEST #3: And the people will turn to us again? And the true worship of God will prevail?

PRIEST #2: Yes, my brother! Yes! The people will listen to us as God almighty ordains it to be.

PRIEST #1: The plan is sound. The way is clear. Jesus will be arrested in secret and put on trial for his mockery of the One true faith. And the people will see him for the fraud that he is.

ALL: (*All at once*) Let it be so! Amen! Death to the heretic! Death to Jesus of Nazareth! To God's glory!

NARRATOR: In this way, the religious leaders plotted to have Jesus killed. They let the word get out that anyone who would help them with information against Jesus would receive a reward. When Judas, one of the beloved disciples of Jesus heard about this, Satan entered into him. He decided he would go to the Chief Priests and help them find a way to arrest Jesus away from the crowds. Under the cover of darkness, Judas went to the meeting place of the High Priests and quietly knocked upon their door.

PRIEST #1: Listen! What was that? Was that a knock on our outer door?

PRIEST #2: Who could it be at this hour?

PRIEST #3: Another Roman soldier here to harass us I'd bet. Don't open it!

NARRATOR: Judas kept rapping against the door. Finally he called out loudly.

JUDAS: Open the door! I am a friend! I have something you desire.

NARRATOR: The wary priest opened the door just a bit and Judas forced his way inside.

JUDAS: My name is Judas Iscariot. I have some information that you are looking for.

PRIEST #1: Oh? And what would that be?

JUDAS: I am one of Jesus' disciples. I have been with him and followed after him for some time. I know his habits and the places he goes alone. I am trusted and given great respect in our group. I can give him to you so that he will bother you no more.

PRIEST #2: And why would you do this for us? It is no small matter to betray the King of the Jews, your Lord Jesus.

PRIEST #3: Yes! Don't you believe that he is the Messiah as the rest of Jerusalem seems to think?

JUDAS: I believed in him once. I saw great things in him when I first learned to know him. But now, what I see is not what I had hoped for. He speaks of suffering and death. He talks of forgiving our enemies and living at peace with them even when we are persecuted. He is a fool! I cannot follow the man any longer. He is not the Messiah that I had dreamed he would be. If he cannot restore the Kingdom of Israel, it is better that he dies.

NARRATOR: The priests were surprised and pleased at their good fortune. With Judas' willingness to help their cause, the end of Jesus would come soon. They offered to pay Judas for his efforts and Judas accepted. From that time on, Judas looked for chances to turn Jesus over to the priests in a way that would not draw attention from the crowds.

NARRATOR: Soon after Judas' visit to the priests, the whole city of Jerusalem began its celebration of The Feast of the Passover. It was customary to kill a sacrificial lamb in remembrance of the last great plague in Egypt. It was to remember how God instructed the people to kill a lamb and smear its blood over their doors so that the Angel of Death would not kill their firstborn. It was a time to remember how God saved his chosen people from slavery and death. Jesus and his disciples prepared for this event as well as Jesus gave instruction to his friends.

JESUS: Peter. John. Go and prepare the Passover Meal for us.

PETER: Lord? Where shall we go? We have no home, no place to call our own? How shall we get things ready under these conditions?

JESUS: Fear not Peter. All will proceed according to the will of God. You will go into the city ahead of us. There you will find a man carrying a jar of water. Follow the man back to the house he serves and say to the owner of that house: 'The Teacher says to you, where is the room where my disciples and I will eat the Passover Meal?' He will show you a large furnished room upstairs where you will make everything ready.

NARRATOR: Peter and John did as they were instructed. And they were amazed when all that Jesus said came true. They prepared the Feast of the Passover according to all tradition. When evening was at hand, Jesus and the other disciples arrived and took their places around the eating area. It was Jesus who spoke first when all were settled into place.

JESUS: Friends, I have wanted to share this meal with you for so long. I have wanted to be together one last time before I must suffer and die. For I tell you now, I will never eat this meal again until God's Kingdom comes into the world with all its glory and power.

NARRATOR: The disciples were a bit shocked by Jesus' words. They murmured anxiously amongst themselves and looked through fearfilled eyes to Jesus. They still did not understand what he was saying. And as they became quiet again, Jesus lifted up a cup filled with wine and said:

JESUS: Take this and drink. Share it amongst yourselves. I tell you openly, I will not drink this wine again until God's Kingdom comes into the world.

NARRATOR: Jesus then took a piece of bread, gave thanks to God, broke it and gave it to his disciples saying:

JESUS: This is my body, which is given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me.

NARRATOR: In the same way, he gave them the cup of wine after supper saying:

JESUS: This cup is God's New Covenant, sealed with my blood, which is poured out for you. But look! The one who betrays me is here at the table. The Son of Man will die as God has decided, but how terrible it will be for the man who betrays him!

NARRATOR: When the disciples heard this, they began to question each other and arguments broke out between them. Each wondered who the traitor was and how such a terrible thing could happen. As they argued, they even began to think more highly of themselves than the others.

DISCIPLE #1: I would never do such a thing! After all, I was the very first one to follow Jesus.

DISCIPLE #2: So what?! You never have been able to understand his teachings as I have!

DISCIPLE #3: You are both fools! He has always chosen me for the important jobs that the two of you could never handle in the first place!

NARRATOR: The arguing and bickering continued until Jesus spoke:

JESUS: Friends...Beloved friends. The kings of this world and the rulers of godless lands have power over other people and claim to have titles such as 'Friend of the People'. But this is not the way that it will be with you. For the greatest among you must be like the youngest. And the one who wishes to lead must first be the servant of all. In this world the servant is not as great as the one he serves. But I have come to be servant of all. You have stayed with me throughout all my ministry. And just as God has given me the right to rule, I will give you that same right when all things come under God's plan of salvation.

JESUS: You will one day eat and drink at my table in God's Kingdom and you will sit on thrones to rule over the twelve tribes of Israel.

NARRATOR: The words of Jesus were still confusing. The disciples discussed what the words meant and how they should respond. Simon Peter was filled with a sense of bravery. He seemed to feel heavenly power and God's glory there in the room. He spoke openly to the others.

PETER: I am not afraid! God's will be done!

NARRATOR: Jesus listened to Peter's proclamation. He felt great love for him in his heart. But he warned him of the danger ahead just the same.

JESUS: Simon! Simon. Listen! Satan has received permission to test you all. He will separate the good from the bad as a farmer separates the wheat from the chaff. But I have prayed for you, that your faith will not fail. And when you turn back to me, you must strengthen others with your faith as well.

PETER: Lord! I will not desert you! I am ready to go to prison with you and die with you!

JESUS: Peter, I know you mean well, but before the rooster crows to bring in the morning, you will deny me three times.

NARRATOR: Peter and the other disciples were still confused by the words Jesus shared with them. Peter spoke out under his breath and avowed that he would remain faithful after all.

PETER: I will never deny our Lord!

NARRATOR: Jesus used this opportunity to teach and instruct his beloved friends.

JESUS: Do you all remember the time when I sent you out to minister to others? I sent you on your way without money, extra clothing or shoes or any added luxury. And when you went on your way in my name, did you lack anything at all?

PETER: Not a thing Lord! We had all we needed to survive!

JESUS: Now then, if you have money or a bag of goods you must take it. And if you do not have a sword you must sell your coat and buy one. For as the Scripture has predicted of The Son of Man: 'He will share the fate of criminals'.

PETER: Look! Here are two swords Lord!

JESUS: It is enough.

NARRATOR: Jesus and his disciples left the room and went out of the city to the Mount of Olives. Jesus had come here often in the past to pray in quiet, far away from the rush of the crowds. When they arrived he spoke to his disciples:

JESUS: Pray that you will not fall into temptation!

NARRATOR: Then Jesus went a way off to pray...about as far as a person might throw a stone. There, he knelt and prayed to God.

JESUS: Father! If you will; take this cup of suffering away from me. Yet, not my will, but your will be done!

NARRATOR: An angel from heaven appeared to Jesus and gave him strength. In great anguish Jesus prayed even harder. His sweat was like great drops of blood falling to the ground. When he completed his prayer, he arose and went back to his disciples. He found them asleep. They were worn out by their fear and grief over all that Jesus had said.

JESUS: Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray that you will not fall into temptation!

DISCIPLE #1: Jesus! Look! There's a group of people with torches headed this way!

DISCIPLE #2: And see! There's the traitor! Judas is with them!

NARRATOR: Judas and the group with him came toward the disciples and Jesus. Judas broke away from the crowd and came near to Jesus as if he was about to give him a kiss.

JESUS: Judas? Is it with a kiss that you would betray the Son of Man?

DISCIPLE #3: Should we use our swords Lord!?

DISCIPLE #1: Stand back! All of you! Keep away!

NARRATOR: At this moment, one of Jesus' disciples struck one of the priest's slaves with his sword. The ear of the slave was completely torn away.

JESUS: Enough! Enough of this!

NARRATOR: Jesus walked to the man who was cringing in pain. He placed his hand over the wounded ear and the slave was healed instantly. Jesus then turned to the angry crowd that had come to him and said:

JESUS: Did you have to come here with swords and clubs as though I were a common outlaw? I was with you in the Temple every day, and you did not arrest me then. Why not? But this is your hour to act. It is the time that the power of darkness rules.

NARRATOR: Several of the men in the group grabbed Jesus and began to lead him away to the house of the High Priest. Peter followed the group from a distance. When the mob had taken Jesus inside the residence of the High Priest, Peter decided to warm himself by a fire in the courtyard. One of the servant girls recognized him right away.

GIRL: Hey! This man here was one of those with Jesus!

PETER: Woman! You are wrong! I don't even know him!

MAN: No! She is right! You are one of them!

PETER: Man, I am not!

NARRATOR: About an hour passed by when another man looked at the face of Peter and insisted strongly:

MAN: There is no doubt that this man was with Jesus. I can tell! He is also a Galilean!

PETER: Man! I do not know what you are talking about!

NARRATOR: Peter had barely taken another breath when in the distance a rooster crowed. Jesus, on his way to the inner courtyard of the High Priest, turned and looked directly at Peter. Peter saw his Lord and remembered the warning he had spoken just a few short hours before:

JESUS: Before the rooster crows to bring in the morning, you will deny me three times.

NARRATOR: A wave of emotion swept over Peter. He ran away from the courtyard and wept bitterly for what he done....

The men who were guarding Jesus began to treat him cruelly as they led him to the High Priest. They made fun of him and had him blindfolded. They beat him and taunted him:

SOLDIER #1: Someone just hit you in the face Jesus! If you are so great, tell us who it was!

SOLDIER #2: Yes! If you are the great Messiah of the Jews surely you would know!

SOLDIER #3: Show us your power great king. Show us your power!

NARRATOR: The soldiers led Jesus to the Council room of the religious leaders of the Jews. When daylight came, the Elders, Chief Priests and Teachers of the Law gathered and began to question Jesus.

PRIEST #1: Tell us straight out. Are you the Messiah? The Promised One of Israel?

JESUS: If I tell you, what good would it do? You will not believe me. And if I ask you a question you will not answer. But from now on, the Son of Man will be seated at the right side of Almighty God.

PRIEST #2: Are you then the Son of God?

JESUS: You say that I am.

PRIEST #3: Enough! We have heard enough! We do not need witnesses to testify against him. We have heard for ourselves this blasphemy he has spoken!

NARRATOR: The whole group arose and took Jesus from the High Priest's house to the residence of the Roman Governor, Pontius Pilate. They immediately accused Jesus as being an enemy of God and the Roman Empire.

PRIEST #1: We caught this man misleading our people!

PRIEST #2: Yes! He told them not to pay taxes to the Emperor.

Priest #3: He claims to be the Messiah! ... A king!

Narrator: Pilate listened to their complaints and looked at Jesus.

Pilate: Is it true? Are you the King of the Jews?

Jesus: So you say.

Pilate: I find no reason to condemn this man. What is all the fuss?

PRIEST #1: He started riots in Judea with the words that he spoke.

PRIEST #2: All the way from Galilee he has made it clear he is an enemy of Rome.

Pilate: Is this man a Galilean?

Priest #3: Yes governor. He is!

Narrator: Pilate was looking for a way to get rid of these pesky religious fanatics and now he had one. If Jesus was a Galilean, he would send him to the governor of Galilee, Herod Antipas.

Pilate: This man is a Galilean. It is Herod's task to administer justice, not mine. Send this man to Herod!

Narrator: Once again the great crowd was on the move as they took Jesus to the place of Herod. Herod was also in Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover. Herod was pleased when he saw Jesus because he had heard so much about him. He had wanted to meet him for a long time. He was even hoping that Jesus would perform a miracle for him. He questioned Jesus and had his soldiers mock and beat him. But Jesus made no reply. They dressed Jesus in a fine robe fit for a king. But when Jesus refused to speak, Herod sent him back to Pilate. And it was on that day that Herod and Pilate became friends. Before

that time, they were bitter enemies. Once again the group moved through the city and back to the palace of Pontius Pilate. Pilate, frustrated with these ornery Jewish fanatics spoke out!

Pilate: Look here! You brought this man to me and said that he was misleading your people. So, I examined him to see if this was true. I find him to be innocent of your charges. Herod also found him NOT GUILTY. That is why he sent him back here to me. There is nothing this man has done to deserve death! I will have him whipped and then I will let him go!

All: (*All at once*) No! Never! God forbid! Give us Barabbus! We want Barabbus.

Priest #1: Yes excellency. Give us Barabbus instead.

Narrator: Barabbus was a convicted murderer who had taken part in many riots in Jerusalem in the past. Still, it was the custom of Rome to release one prisoner of the people's choice on their Feast of the Passover. Pilate tried to persuade them that it should be Jesus.

Pilate: I will give you Jesus. He has done no wrong. I will set him free.

All: (*All at once*) No! Barabbus! Give us Barabbus! We want Barabbus!

Pilate: But this Jesus has done no wrong!

All: (*All at once*) Crucify him! Kill him! Death to Jesus! Jesus must die!

Pilate: But what crime has he committed. I cannot find anything that he has done that deserves the sentence of death. I will whip him and set him free!

ALL: (*All at once*) Give us Barabbus! Crucify Jesus! Kill him! Crucify! No! He must die! We want Barabbus!

NARRATOR: The crowd continued to shout and scream for the death of Jesus until Pilate became weary of them. He didn't understand their frenzied hatred for this gentle man but he gave in to their request and passed sentence.

Pilate: Very well, you have made the choice not I! I will free for you the criminal Barabbus. Jesus of Nazareth will be sentenced to death!

NARRATOR: The crowd roared their approval as Jesus was led away by the soldiers. They forced Jesus to carry the main beam of the cross that he would hang upon and die. Along the way it became obvious that Jesus may not be able to bear the load of the cross. A soldier noticed Jesus' condition and looked to the crowd and shouted:

SOLDIER #1: You there! Come here! You will carry this man's cross!

SOLDIER #2: In service to your Emperor you will obey! Come!

NARRATOR: The man that was chosen by the soldiers was named Simon who came from the land called Syrene. He shouldered the cross that would be the instrument of death for Jesus. He carried it through the city streets as Jesus walked behind. As the procession made its way through the city, some women followed along and cried out loudly for Jesus. Jesus looked at them and replied:

JESUS: Women of Jerusalem! Don't cry for me, cry for yourselves and for your children. For the day is coming when you will say: 'How lucky are the women who never

had children, who never bore babies, who never nursed them! That will be the time when people say to the mountains: "Fall on us!" and to the hills: "Hide us!" For if these things can happen when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?

NARRATOR: Two other men were also being led to their deaths with Jesus. Both of them deserved their fates for they were criminals. When they came to the place called "the Skull", an outcropping of useless rock, they crucified Jesus and the two criminals as well. They place one criminal to Jesus' left and one to his right. And as they raised the cross on which Jesus had been nailed he said:

JESUS: Father! Forgive them! They do not know what they are doing.

NARRATOR: The soldiers paid no attention to Jesus once the cross was in place. Crucifixion was a slow and painful death that sometimes took days. To bide their time, they began to divide his clothes amongst themselves and threw dice to see who would get the choicest strip of cloth. People who had followed from the angry crowd began to taunt Jesus and mock him.

PRIEST #1: Hah! Some Messiah! He saved others. Let him save himself!

PRIEST #2: Yes! If you are the great Messiah save yourself. Didn't you say that you would conquer death? Ha! Death will prove you wrong!

PRIEST #3: Hurry Chosen One! Time is running out! Come down from that cross before it's too late!

NARRATOR: Having finished their gambling, the soldiers also made fun of Jesus.

SOLDIER #1: Save yourself great King of the Jews! It's the least you can do!

SOLDIER #2: Yes! Let us see the kingdom that is greater even than Caesar's.

NARRATOR: Another soldier dipped a sponge in some cheap wine and raised it on a long pole to Jesus' lips.

SOLDIER #3: Here you are great King! Drink from your cup of glory! Hail to the King of the Jews!

NARRATOR: He said this for they had placed a sign above Jesus' head that read: 'This is the king of the Jews'. One of the criminals also chided Jesus.

CRIMINAL #1: Hey you! Messiah! What are you doing on that cross? Come on! Save yourself! And save us too!

NARRATOR: The other criminal silenced the man by saying:

CRIMINAL #2: Aren't you afraid of God? Have you no awe of his power? You and I have been sentenced rightly for our deeds. We deserve our punishment. But this man is innocent. This man is truly good. He has done nothing wrong ...Jesus...Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom!

JESUS: I promise you...Today you will be with me in Paradise.

NARRATOR: It was now about twelve o'clock noon. Suddenly, the sun stopped shining and deep darkness covered the whole earth. It remained this way for nearly three

hours. At the end of the three hours the great curtain hanging in the Temple was torn from top to bottom. It was the curtain that signified that no person could come into the presence of Almighty God and live. In his last breath, Jesus cried out:

JESUS: Father! Into your hands I commend my spirit!

NARRATOR: After speaking these words, Jesus died. An army Officer who had seen all that had happened praised God saying:

SOLDIER: Truly, this man was the Son of God!

NARRATOR: When the people who had gathered to watch these men die saw what happened, they all went back home. Their hearts were filled with sorrow. So much so, that they beat their breasts in show of their terrible grief. All those who knew Jesus personally, including some women who had followed him since Galilee, stood at a distance to watch. There was a man named Joseph of Arimathea there as well. He was a good and honorable man who was waiting patiently for the Kingdom of God to come. Although he was a part of the great Council that had sentenced Jesus to die, he had not agreed with their decision and had spoken against their judgment. Because of his position in the Council, he asked Pilate for Jesus' body in order that he might have him buried in a tomb that was to be his own. Pilate agreed. So it was that Joseph took down Jesus' body from the cross, wrapped it in a linen sheet, and placed it in his tomb that had been dug out of solid rock. It had never been used. Because it was nearly dusk, and the Jewish Sabbath was about to begin, Joseph sealed the tomb.

NARRATOR: The women who had followed Jesus would have to wait to anoint his body according to tradition. For no one was allowed to be out and about once the Sabbath had begun. They went back home and prepared spices and perfumes to anoint the body. And on that Sabbath Day, they rested as The Law commanded. But it was the rest of ones who were burdened with heavy hearts.