

Synopsis & Context – Session #26: The Hour of Darkness

We're in the final six sessions of *The Story*. Each of the Gospels tell the Good News in slightly different ways, but in these weeks, we are exploring what a composite picture of Christ can be, working from all the Gospels. This week we look more intently on what makes Good Friday and Holy Saturday.

Every Maundy Thursday (and working from John as well as Luke), we remember the events as they unfold. Knowing that his time had come, Jesus spent his last few hours with his disciples. The Passover was approaching so they prepared a customary feast. But this was no ordinary Passover meal; Jesus was about to change history. At this “last supper,” Jesus taught the disciples a significant lesson by washing their feet. He even washed Judas’ feet, although he knew Judas would betray him. Then Jesus took the unleavened bread and cup of wine from the Passover meal and instituted the New Covenant, the Covenant that Jeremiah and Ezekiel had promised centuries ago. He promised them that an advocate, the Counselor, the Spirit, would come and help after his own departure. After a lengthy prayer to the Father for glorification, Jesus led this rag-tag group through the night to the Garden of Gethsemane.

What Peter lacked in judgment, he made up for in zeal. Peter pledged to even die with his Lord rather than abandon him. But Jesus knew that he would go through his ordeal alone. He told Peter that he would disown him three times before dawn. Jesus’ anguish for what was to come drove him to agonizing prayer. Peter and his companions quickly devolved absolute fidelity for sleep while Jesus prayed. He acknowledged that he would do God’s will and not his own. Then Jesus’ betrayer and conspirators arrived to arrest him. They led him to Caiaphas’ “court.” No one could find legitimate charges against Jesus until he affirmed his identity—the Son of God. The Sanhedrin charged Him with blasphemy and sentenced him to death. The religious henchmen beat and belittled Jesus. Watching from a safe distance, Peter denied knowing Jesus three times before the rooster crowed. Stunned and ashamed, he left in bitter humiliation. Judas, in a sudden moment of remorse, returned the blood money and killed himself.

Meanwhile, Pilate, the Roman governor was stuck with what to make of Jesus, let alone what to do. The Jews wanted Jesus crucified, and he wanted to stay on the good graces of Caesar. What’s a governor of a no-name, backwater region of the Empire to do? Interrogating Jesus himself, he found no legitimate charge to pin on this man. Yet the pressure was escalating from the crowd as they threatened to turn him in to Caesar as a rebel sympathizer. Pilate’s thug soldiers clothed, beat, and crowned Jesus with contempt before they marched him to Golgotha the place where he would be crucified on a cross.

Crucifixion was an exceptionally cruel way to die. The public execution drew hordes of scornful onlookers. Their jeers challenged Jesus to save himself. They failed to grasp that Jesus was there to save them. One of the two criminals crucified with Jesus, however, got the picture. Even the creation itself testified to the enormity of this event. Here the editors begin to really pour-in their commentary (comments not in the text) when they say something to effect, “As sin overcame Jesus, darkness eclipsed the whole land. For the first time in eternity, Jesus was forsaken by His Father.” Good Friday and the texts we use in worship would make clear the context of the words. Still, there is a fundamental introspection needed to always answer the question, “What makes this day good?”

“It is finished,” He proclaimed. At that very moment, the temple curtain was torn, an earthquake split rocks and tombs were opened. It was finished: the work that the Father sent Him to do. God’s love compels God to pursue his people, but his holiness requires “justice.” The mob of mockers witnessed a Lower Story *drama*, disciples witnessed a Lower Story *injustice*. But God witnessed the Upper Story culmination of God’s plan. It was no surprise. It was justice. And it was finished.



Chapter #26: *The Hour of Darkness* is 'woven' from selections from all four Gospels: Matthew 26—27, Mark 14—15, Luke 22—23, John 13—14, 16—19

Plot Points for Chapter #26: The Hour of Darkness

In his last hours with his disciples, Jesus took time to teach them what true servanthood looks like and express his love for them, knowing they would abandon him. Even as he was arrested, Jesus was in control of the situation; he was not a victim but a champion on his way to battle. The religious and political leaders who crucified Jesus were motivated more by a desire for self-preservation than for justice. Jesus, fully man and fully God, felt the full weight of God's wrath against sin as he was beaten for our transgressions and lifted up on the cross for our healing.

When Jesus first began his public ministry, John the Baptist pointed at him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God." During three years of ministry together, the disciples had come to believe Jesus was the promised Messiah. Although they believed he was the prophesied descendant of David destined to restore Israel, they were not prepared for the real-world application of his kingly crown. They were anticipating a golden circlet, not a mass of thorns.

Perhaps they began to comprehend that things would be different as he sat with them that night in the upper room? For several weeks Jesus had been quite clear about his mission: "I have come here to die, to give my life as a ransom for many" (see Mark 10:45). As Jesus broke the bread and poured out the cup, calling the elements of the meal his body and blood, did they begin to understand what was about to happen?

Cf. Barr, Adam Exploring the Story: A Reference Companion (Story, The). Zondervan.

God's Story – YOUR story!

- **What in Maundy Thursday do you find so significant?**
- **What makes Good Friday "good" for you?**
- **Is there a parallel for you between the Lord's Supper and the Passover meal of the Exodus?**
- **In John, what's the significance of washing the disciples' feet? What about for us here & now?**
- **Thinking back to the Old Testament scriptures, how would you contrast the kingship described there and that of Christ?**