

# The Life of Christ

## Book VII - His Death And Glorious Resurrection

by George Ford

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## 1. The Arrest Of Christ In Gethsemane

**"Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, 'Sit here while I go over there and pray.' He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee 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 with me.' "** (Matthew 26:36-38)

An advancing object with a light shining behind it casts its shadow forward. Thus, the approaching Cross, with the light of salvation behind it, threw a sombre shadow indeed; Judas Iscariot had just left the Upper Room, and it was night -- indeed the darkest of nights. After Judas' departure, Christ instituted "The Lord's Supper" and discussed its relevance. Then, he delivered a comprehensive sermon to the disciples, followed by his High Priestly Prayer. No doubt, it was near midnight when his prayer ended, and the hostile plans for his death in the city were well underway. But Jesus, at this dreadful hour, could not do without a special time with the Father, in preparation for what lay ahead of him.

Christ left the Upper Room in the company of his twelve disciples. They made their way quietly through the narrow alleys under the cover of darkness, crossing the Kidron Valley by moonlight, heading eastward to a garden at the foot of the Mount of Olives. This garden belonged to one of the friends of Christ in an area called Gethsemane, meaning "oil press". Tradition has it that the trees in this garden were olive trees, and Christ may very well have chosen the dense foliage of these trees as a suitable retreat for prayer.

Upon entering the garden, Christ had eight of his disciples sit down. He exhorted them to pray lest they enter into the temptation which was soon to come. He went further into the garden with his three closest disciples -- Peter, James, and John. These three had accompanied him on the Mount of Transfiguration where his true, divine sonship was gloriously exhibited. While there, he was in a state of joy and majesty. Now, however, they watched him as he agonised, being overcome with deep sorrow. But this new scene near the Mount of Olives was necessary, in order for them to understand his true humanity. Christ, when transfigured, displayed the brilliance of his greatness, like the sun on the earthly horizon. But while at Gethsemane, he manifested the beginnings of his sufferings and humiliation. The sun of his radiance became darkened, as it were, by an eclipse; but this dimming was no less wonderful than the previous splendour, for these two events were inextricably linked.

Christ chose total solitude for his final battle with Satan, his great encounter with his Father,

and his total surrender to His will. We stand amazed that Christ, who an hour earlier was full of joy as he delivered a sermon and offered a prayer, was now saying, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death." The reason for this statement was that the hour had arrived for which he had come from heaven. He asked his three companions to remain and keep watch with him. He went a stone's throw further, prostrated himself on the ground, and began to pray. How humble, beautiful, and honest was his request, "Stay here and keep watch with me."

### 1.1. Christ Prays in Gethsemane

**"Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, 'My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.' Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. 'Could you men not 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 body is weak.' He went away a second time and prayed, 'My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done.' When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. So he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing. Then he returned to the disciples and said to them, 'Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour is near, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us go! Here comes my betrayer!' " (Matthew 26:39-46)**

Here we see Christ,, the champion of heaven, the only Son of God and His co-equal, shrinking from what he saw of the hour when the face of his Father would be hidden from him. His uneasiness is understandable when we realise that his redemptive death would entail his bearing the sin of all mankind; he could not endure that prospect calmly. This, then, is the reason for his present sorrow and pleading prayers to have this hour pass from him if possible. if only the Father would have another means of saving the world without his having to endure such unspeakable suffering! Three times he asked the Father to spare him from that hour; he was in a struggle, praying agonisingly, until his sweat fell to the ground like drops of blood. But he refused to bear the displeasure of his Father for even one moment.

Christ knew that Satan was not attacking him only, but his disciples as well. These wicked onslaughts were aimed at persuading him to abandon the work of Redemption on the Cross. Therefore, Christ warned his disciples to beware of Satan, and he asked them to watch and pray for him and for themselves. One would think that languishing would have been impossible for them at such an hour. But they immediately succumbed to sleep, as they had also done on the Mount of Transfiguration.

While the disciples were sleeping, Christ knelt in prayer and communed with his Father. He did not only ask for his coming ordeal to pass from him, but added, "...Yet, not as I will, but as you will." When he finished his first prayer, he returned to his disciples. After waking them, he gently rebuked them, beginning with Peter. He was grieved at their sloth, pointing

out the weakness of their flesh.

Again he prayed, this time more earnestly. After a while, he found the three still very sleepy and incapable of responding when he tried to wake them; and so, for the third time he went out and prayed, using the same words he had prayed earlier. From the Father's not answering all that Christ requested, we discover the necessity of his enduring this ordeal. God, in His infinite love, would not normally have left his Son to suffer such agonies, unless it were absolutely indispensable. The Father, who loved fallen mankind, did not spare his only Son, but delivered him for us all (Romans 8:32).

When Christ awakened the three for the third time, he told them that the opportunity for watching and praying had gone. It now made no difference whether they were awake or asleep because his hour had come. Although the ones he loved had slept, the traitor Judas Iscariot was awake; he needed no one to urge him to remain alert. Even though Jesus had often endeavoured to train him in righteousness and salvation, he again showed concern for this man who would betray himself and his master for thirty pieces of silver.

Christ surrendered himself to his Father in the garden before he yielded his body to the enemies at its gate. In that act of relinquishment, salvation was accomplished fundamentally. The crucifixion and his physical sufferings were only the outworking of his basic, completed work at Gethsemane.

**"While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived. With him was a large crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests and the elders of the people. Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: 'The one I kiss is the man; arrest him.' Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, 'Greetings, Rabbi!' and kissed him. Jesus replied, 'Friend, do what you came for.' Then the men stepped forward, seized Jesus and arrested him. With that, one of Jesus' companions reached for his sword, drew it out and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear. 'Put your sword back in its place', Jesus said to him, 'for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?' "** (Matthew 26:47-54)

While others were sleeping after the Passover meal, Judas was settling the final details of his base plans with the Jewish leaders. This is the testimony of history: "...For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light" (Luke 16:8). Should not the activity of the powers of evil in the world call for redoubled vigilance by the forces of good?

Christ and his disciples were in the garden. Iscariot had left Christ and the other disciples in the Upper Room. He knew that the only weapons they had were two swords, and they would get no protection at this hour when most of the people were asleep. He assured his partners that Christ would not use his miraculous power to escape from them, for he had repeatedly said that he had to suffer many things from the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and to be

killed by them.

Judas foresaw no complications in an arrest of Christ, while he was in the Upper Room. He could then deliver Christ to the Roman authorities early in the morning, before the crowds awoke. Jesus, however, was not in the Upper Room, and so Iscariot thought he and his company would most likely find him in the Garden of Gethsemane. He took some more men and they prepared themselves for their evil deed outside the city.

We know that the group which arrived at the garden comprised Judas, the Roman Temple-guards who were available to the Jewish leaders, the servants of the high priest, the scribes and the Pharisees, and the elders of the Jews. They were a large company and they no doubt had torches, lamps, and other weapons in addition to their swords and clubs. To prevent the soldiers from seizing the wrong person in the dark, it was agreed that Judas would give them an unmistakable sign: "The one I kiss is the man; arrest him."

Judas went ahead to greet Christ and said, "Greetings Rabbi", and kissed him, as if they were the best of friends. Jesus, still hoping that he could save him from the corruption of his heart, asked him, "Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?" (Luke 22:48). Because Christ said this, it shows us that there is hope for even the worst of sinners, because the Saviour will not give up seeking to save him, despite his many evils. There is also encouragement here for soul-winners to persist to the end in their efforts to save lost souls, no matter how deeply in sin they have become entrenched.

It appears that Judas and some of the Jewish leaders entered the garden, while the rest of their group remained outside, awaiting further instruction. After Judas greeted him, Jesus saw the armed crowd. His first concern was to protect his disciples from harm. He asked the men whom they wanted, and then he identified himself. Those in the crowd retreated and fell to the ground; such was the force of the personality of Christ (John 18:6). It was clear to them that they could not lay hands on him without his consent. When they got up, he repeated the same question. They received the same answer and still could not come forward. He told them that if they were after him, they should allow his disciples to go (John 18:7,8). By so doing, he was the one giving the orders, and they obeyed.

This was not the first time that Jesus frightened a hostile crowd, foiling their plans against him; but this incident was the greatest and strangest of them all. Christ had gained increased power and steadfastness from his watching, praying, and total submission to the Father. When his enemies were confronted with his awesomeness, their cowardice was exposed, as a result of their consciences witnessing against them.

The disciples did not flee after Christ had commanded his adversaries to let them go. They remembered their promise to go with him, if necessary, to prison and death. Earlier that evening, Christ had told them that if they had no sword, they should sell their coat and buy

one. When they responded that they had two swords, he told them that that was enough (Luke 22:36-38). This made them think that they were to defend him by force. So, when they saw that those who seized him tied his hands behind his back, as was customary with major offenders, they became anxious and asked him presumptuously, "Lord, should we strike with our swords?" (Luke 22:49).

Peter noticed that the fiercest attacker against his master was a servant of the high priest. Not waiting for a reply from Christ, he drew his sword and struck this servant whose name was Malchus. This was a death blow, aimed for the head. Peter missed, however, and severed his right ear instead. Jesus immediately acted to rectify the mistake of Peter for their benefit. But at the same time, he would clearly establish his own standing before his foes. They would not be able to overpower him except by his own consent. He showed his disapproval of Peter's action and ordered him to return his sword to its sheath, reminding him of an old saying, "Put your sword back in its place for all who draw the sword will die by the sword" (Matthew 26:52). He taught Peter that he did not need human assistance to save him; he did not expect his disciples to rescue him by force. Had he wanted that, he could have asked his Father for more than twelve legions of angels! Could Peter not understand that his master had to be arrested in order for prophecy to be fulfilled?

Christ requested that Malchus be brought to him, which indicates that his enemies must have had to loosen his bound hands somewhat. When they did so, he stretched out his hand and healed the servant's ear, in accordance with his commandment: "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you"... (Luke 6:27). This was his last miracle before his crucifixion.

When the disciples realised that Christ did not need their help, and that their remaining there in danger served no purpose, they all left him. Thus, his prophecy to them in the Upper Room was fulfilled: "This very night you will all fall away on account of me, for it is written: 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.'" (Matthew 26:31).

## 2. The Trial Of Christ By The Jewish Elders

Only the Roman governor could confirm a death sentence, and the government was normally quick to enforce the judgements of the Jewish religious leaders, in order to prevent problems.

The Jews had two high priests. The first, Annas, was the legal chief, even though the Roman governor had deposed him twenty years earlier in favour of Caiaphas, his son-in-law. Annas was influential with the people, and he was the framer of the main conspiracies against Christ.

After Christ had been seized and his disciples had fled, the soldiers took him to the residence of Annas. John the Beloved, however, returned and joined the hostile group as they marched towards the house of the high priest. Because he was known there, he was able to enter with



the others. Peter also returned, though he followed at a distance. When he arrived after the others, a maid at the door stopped him, and he asked her to call for John, his friend and companion. After John came out and spoke with the maid, Peter was allowed to enter the house, but not the chamber of the high priest (John 18:15-16).

It appears that Caiaphas immediately summoned those he wanted from among the scribes and elders, in order to conduct a trial. Then, he issued a verdict that could be speedily executed, which would enable them to hand Christ over to the Roman procurator early in the morning. Caiaphas could thus pronounce the death sentence before the Passover sacrifice took place, because the Law of Moses forbade such an action on the day of this Feast and the remaining feast days.

## 2.1. Christ Before the High Priest

**"Meanwhile, the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching. 'I have spoken openly to the world', Jesus replied. 'I always taught in synagogues or at the temple, where all the Jews come together. I said nothing in secret. Why question me? Ask those who heard me. Surely they know what I said.' When Jesus said this, one of the officials nearby struck him in the face. 'Is this the way you answer the high priest?' he demanded. 'If I said something wrong', Jesus replied, 'testify as to what is wrong. But if I spoke the truth, why did you strike me?' Then Annas sent him, still bound, to Caiaphas the high priest." (John 18:19-24)**

We are presented here with a strange situation indeed: the true, legitimate High Priest, appointed by God, stood bound and guarded, waiting to be judged before one who had usurped the function of high priest, with the approval of a wicked, heathen governor.

Due to his large and popular following, Christ was accused of being the leader of a group of conspirators who wanted to overthrow the government. Caiaphas therefore asked Jesus questions about his disciples and teachings. Christ replied that this information was known to the public, and it could be got through those who had heard his words. Had Christ complied with Caiaphas' wishes, expounding his own teachings, his reply would not have had any effect in this trial, nor would he have convinced his questioner.

The words of Christ angered one of the servants standing guard; he slapped Jesus and rebuked him for answering the high priest in this way. No doubt, we can recall the teaching of Christ in the Sermon on the Mount about turning the other cheek. But since Christ did not mean this literally, nor apply it to all situations, he calmly censured the servant who struck him, instead of consenting to this abuse. As for the other blows which befell him a little later, he did not protest or resist them at all.

## 2.2. The False Witnesses

**"The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for false evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death. But they did not find any, though many false witnesses came forward. Finally two 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? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?' But Jesus remained silent. The high priest said to him, 'I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God.' 'Yes, it is as you say', Jesus replied. 'But I say to all of you: In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.' Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, 'He has spoken blasphemy! Why do we need any more witnesses? Look, now you have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?' 'He is worthy of death', they answered. Then they spit in his face and struck him with their fists. Others slapped him and said, 'Prophecy to us, Christ. Who hit you?' " (Matthew 26:59-68)**

The leaders of the Jews were most eager to find false witnesses, but the testimonies did not agree. They thought they would finally succeed when they found two who could testify that Christ said he would destroy the Temple and rebuild it in three days. This was a distortion of what he had said in the Temple three years earlier, when he cleansed it the first time; he had meant the temple of his body. The high priest was angry. He stood in the centre and asked Jesus to respond to the accusation, but Christ refused. Thus, the prophecy of Isaiah came true: "He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth" (Isaiah 53:7).

At this point, the high priest asked him directly if he truly was the Christ, the Son of God. To this, Jesus could not remain silent, lest it be interpreted as a denial of his earlier declarations to this truth or a sign of fear of his persecutors. Therefore, he immediately replied in the affirmative, adding that they would see him seated at the right hand of God and also returning from heaven. It was as though he were telling his accusers of a day to come, when the tables would be turned; he would then be the judge, sitting in judgement over them and their nation.

What strange yet grand words from one on trial -- words addressed to his accusers, while his life was in their hands! Could a mere man say such things? The high priest was outraged by these words which to him appeared to be offensive to God Most High. He tore his garments, saying: "...Look, now you have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?" (Matthew 26:65,66).

No high priest had the right to express his opinion over a matter prior to a final verdict from the Council, because their ruling would have an important effect on the outcome of consequent voting. At council, an equitable Jewish ruler would normally demand that the votes of the minor members be taken before the major ones. Caiaphas, however, overstepped his authority as judge the moment he declared Jesus to be a blasphemer. This charge, which carried the death sentence, subsequently obtained the full agreement of all his colleagues to

this verdict.

When the attending servants and military guards saw that the Jewish leaders had unanimously charged Christ with the greatest religious crime possible, being thoroughly outraged with him, they gave full rein to their depraved inclinations, knowing that by doing so they would please their leaders. Even though the official trial had not yet begun, they started to spit in the face of Christ, beat him, and do all sorts of insulting and humiliating things against him. Thus, another prophecy from Isaiah was fulfilled: "I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting" (Isaiah 50:6).

The trial of Christ took place in a room which opened onto the outer courtyard where the servants and slaves were gathered. Because it is normally quite cold in April before dawn, those who were gathered kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard; Peter was among them. It appears that he did not object to the insults directed at his master; thus, he escaped their criticism. However, the maid at the door gazed at him and recognised him as one of the followers of Christ. But he denied this.

### 2.3. Peter Denies Christ

**"While Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest came by. When she saw Peter warming himself, she looked closely at him. 'You also were with that Nazarene, Jesus', she said. But he denied it. 'I don't know or understand what you're talking about', he said, and went out into the entryway. When the servant girl saw him there, she said again to those standing around, 'This fellow is one of them.' Again he denied it. After a little while, those standing near said to Peter, 'Surely you are one of them, for you are a Galilean.' He began to call down curses on himself, and he swore to them, 'I don't know this man you're talking about.' Immediately the rooster crowed the second time. Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken to him: 'Before the rooster crows twice you will disown me three times.' And he broke down and wept." (Mark 14:66-72)**

Peter's first denial of Christ burned in his heart, and he went out into a passageway. While there, he heard the crowing of a rooster. Another servant met him and she too acknowledged that he was one of the followers of Christ. Again, Peter denied this, swearing this time, so that they would be less apt to uncover his lies. After a while, the charges increased against him from those who insisted that he was a disciple of Christ -- especially since his Galilean accent reinforced their suspicions. Finally, a relative of Malchus, whose ear had been slashed, appeared on the scene. He explained how he had seen Peter with Christ earlier (John 18:26). When Peter perceived the great danger he was in, and realised that another simple denial would serve no purpose, he started swearing and cursing, insisting that he did not know Christ.

Peter had not finished his shameful expressions of denial when, for the second time, the crowing of a rooster was heard. Christ was awaiting this in order to rescue his disciple from

the pit he had dug himself into. He turned his attention from his own sufferings, in order to inquire about the soul of his fallen disciple. He turned his face from the high priest and leaders of the Jews, and gazed at Peter in the courtyard. Their eyes met at the very moment the rooster was crowing. This glance melted the heart of Peter. It was one of love mingled with sadness. Tears started to well up like a river, and his nobler emotions overcame him. Pure, heartfelt penitence took the place of disavowal and denial. He knew that his sin had been forgiven and that the prayer of Christ for him -- that his faith would not utterly fail -- had been answered. Peter no longer considered what people would say of him or what danger he would be in. He wanted only the approval of his master, the lover of his soul. We are told that he went out and wept bitterly. This was because he had obtained full forgiveness for his sin.

Christ, who restored Peter with a glance, will always rescue those who look to him in faith. He will save them from their evil deeds and the consequences which follow. With the rich promises in the Bible, can we give way to doubt?: "Come now, let us reason together", says the LORD. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool" (Isaiah 1:18); "I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more" (Isaiah 43:25); "Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered" (Psalm 32:1).

## 2.4. The Morning Trial Before the Sanhedrin

**"At daybreak the council of the elders of the people, both the chief priests and teachers of the law, met together, and Jesus was led before them. 'If you are the Christ', they said, 'tell us.' Jesus answered, 'If I tell you, you will not believe me, and if I asked you, you would not answer. But from now on, the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the mighty God.' They all asked, 'Are you then the Son of God?' He replied, 'You are right in saying I am.' Then they said, 'Why do we need any more testimony? We have heard it from his own lips.' Then the whole assembly rose and led him off to Pilate." (Luke 22:66-71; 23:1)**

When morning dawned on Friday, the elders of the Jews decided to render their verdict which they had arrived at during the trial of the previous night even though night-time trials were considered illegal. During their session, the elders asked Christ if he was the Messiah. Jesus said that no purpose would be served by his replying, and he repeated his earlier words about his sitting at the right hand of God. They asked him if he was the Son of God, and when he replied in the affirmative, they responded: "Why do we need any more testimony? We have heard it from his own lips." And so this highly-respected religious court sentenced Christ to death for the crime of blasphemy. What would the Council do now after this verdict?

The Roman governor, Pilate, had to ratify a verdict, in order for it to be effective, and since the following day would be the beginning of the Feast which would last for a week, the

Jewish elders had to hurry to obtain the approval of Pilate. If this sentence were not carried out immediately, it would be necessary to delay it for a whole week, and who could tell what could happen during another seven days. Perhaps the people would try to rescue Christ from his unjust sentence. Therefore, everyone arose quickly and took Jesus to the palace of Pilate, the governor.

What a depressing scene! Here were the leaders of the nation, the teachers -of the divine Law, advancing at the head of a crowd through the Holy City, delivering their Messiah -- their only hope and the sole aspiration of the world -- to a cruel, unjust, heathen governor for crucifixion.

## **2.5. Judas Takes his Own Life**

At this point, Judas Iscariot knew that he had wronged Christ. Maybe he hoped that Jesus would escape from his oppressors by virtue of his power and supernatural abilities. However, when he saw that the trial was well under way, and that Christ was facing death, he hastened to the elders of the Jews to tell them that he had done wrong by betraying innocent blood. He wanted to return the thirty silver pieces he had obtained by handing Christ over to them. But the Jewish elders were not interested in a fair trial, so they ignored his suggestion, telling him that this matter was his own problem. Judas flung the silver at their feet and left. The Law, however, prohibited them from returning the money to the treasury, so they used the silver coins to purchase a field for the purpose of burying strangers. And so an important prophecy from the Prophet Zechariah was fulfilled: "If you think it best, give me my pay; but if not, keep it.' So they paid me thirty pieces of silver. And the LORD said to me, 'Throw it to the potter'-- the handsome price at which they priced me! So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the LORD to the potter" (Zechariah 11:12,13).

When Judas saw that Christ was not going to escape his death sentence, he was bitterly conscience-stricken. However, his sorrow was different from that of Peter, for he sought only to put the matter straight with man. He had met with the failure that always attends those who first admit their sins to man. He imagined he could rectify what he had done, but that was impossible. He should have gone to God first for forgiveness, asking Him to put right the wrong he had committed.

How sad is the account of Judas Iscariot; a hopeful beginning, yet a tragic end! He died by hanging himself, being disembowelled in the process. This dreadful outcome was matched by his dastardly treason. This incident offers a glimpse of the tortures of hell. It flashed upon our world as a lesson and example. Who will not take it to heart?

## **3. The Trial Of Christ By The Roman Govenor**

Early on Friday, Pilate, the governor, received word of the arrival of the high priest and his council, who were bringing with them the famous Nazarene prophet and miracle worker in chains, claiming that he had committed a serious offence. The Jewish leaders were regarded highly, even by the Roman rulers. The governors respected these leaders and acknowledged their wide authority and great influence. As a rule, they implemented their ecclesiastical decisions without question.

The Jewish leaders expected Pilate to deal with them in the customary manner, without analysing the case, since time was working against them. Moreover, they feared that any re-examining of the case might involve revoking their unjust sentence. Their Law held that they would become unclean if they entered a heathen law court, and there was insufficient time for purification before the Great Feast. So, the Roman procurator was lenient, going out to meet them instead. He brought Christ and the soldiers guarding him into his house. When he asked the Jewish leaders why Christ was brought to him, they said that if he had not been guilty, they would not have brought him. They hoped, by this reply, to avoid any re-examination of the case by Pilate. But the governor adhered to his legal duties. Therefore, they were obliged to put their charge in legal form -- in such a way that Christ would have to be sentenced to death.

### 3.1. The Accusation of the Jews

"Then the Jews led Jesus from Caiaphas to the palace of the Roman governor. By now it was early morning, and to avoid ceremonial uncleanness the Jews did not enter the palace; they wanted to be able to eat the Passover. So Pilate came out to them and asked, 'What charges are you bringing against this man?' 'If he were not a criminal', they replied, 'we would not have handed him over to you.' Pilate said, 'Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law.' 'But we have no right to execute anyone', the Jews objected. This happened so that the words Jesus had spoken indicating the kind of death he was going to die would be fulfilled" (John 18:28-32).

The first crime which the Jewish leaders ascribed to Christ was that he was corrupting the nation; that is, he was inciting a revolt against the government (Luke 23:2). But if this were really the case, Pilate would have known of it through his spies. He would not have needed the intervention of the leaders, who would not have minded a revolt against the Roman authorities anyway.

The second accusation against Christ was that he was forbidding the payment of taxes to Caesar (Luke 23:2). This is what they tried to make Jesus sanction earlier, but he had refused, saying instead, "Then give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's" (Luke 20:25).

As to the third charge, it was that he claimed to be the Messiah (Luke 23:2). But this

accusation did not carry any weight with the Roman procurator either. Pilate knew that they as Jews prided themselves in all that was opposed to Roman rule. It would be impossible for them to deliver any Jew to death on this charge, even if the accusation were true.

The governor replied with hostility, disdain, and cynicism. He suggested that they take Christ and deal with him according to their own Law, even though there was no connection between it and the charges made against him. It was as though the governor were telling them, "You cannot do what you want without me, and I will not submit to your wishes without an examination." The leaders were forced to humble themselves to get what they really wanted, so they said, "we have no right to execute anyone."

### 3.2. Pilate Questions Christ

"Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, 'Are you the king of the Jews?' 'Is that your own idea', Jesus asked, 'or did others talk to you about me?' 'Am I a Jew?' Pilate replied. 'It was your people and your chief priests who handed you over to me. What is it you have done?' Jesus said, 'My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place.' 'You are a king, then!' said Pilate. Jesus answered, 'You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.' 'What is truth?' Pilate asked. With this he went out again to the Jews and said, 'I find no basis for a charge against him' " (John 18:33-38).

The charges against Christ were made in the open, in front of the palace of the governor who questioned him. His first inquiry was reasonable and appropriate because the Jews had accused Christ of being the Messiah, the king within his province. The governor asked Christ if he indeed was the king of the Jews. Jesus did not give an affirmative or negative answer because that would have been interpreted politically. He knew that the Jews had spoken with him, so he wanted to know if Pilate was asking this of himself or if he was merely using their words. It was as if Jesus were asking him, "Do you want to know the truth or do you merely want to determine the honesty of those who delivered me to you?" The answer from Pilate indicated that he was not interested in the truth.

Speaking further with Pilate, Jesus presented a magnificent account of the nature of his spiritual kingdom. He brought to Pilate's attention the fact that his followers would have used weapons to defend him, had his cause been a political one. This, however, was an ambiguous message for the governor who wanted a direct answer. Sensing the desire of Pilate for straightforwardness, Jesus proclaimed his kingship and added some clear explanation as to his origin, mission, and commitment to the truth. To this, Pilate replied with scorn, "What is truth?" He wanted to know which among the contradictory religious views was the true one. Was it that of the Greek philosophers who worshipped beauty, the Romans who venerated power, or the Jews who claimed to revere the One God, the invisible Spirit? Was it Christ --

the one rejected of the Jews for claiming to have come from heaven to witness to the truth?

Pilate asked what truth was, but he did not wait for an answer. How many people in every age and place are like him! They ask the same question as Pilate, but do not wait for an answer from the Truth himself, and thus they never find him. Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:31,32).

After questioning Jesus, Pilate turned toward the Jews and said that he found no fault in him. Some have speculated that the wife of Pilate may have swayed him in favour of Christ, because his deep respect for the accused is clearly evident. But despite the clear confession of Pilate, the Jews renewed their attack, fiercely accusing Christ of inciting the people to sedition. They said, "He stirs up the people all over Judea by his teaching. He started in Galilee and has come all the way here" (Luke 23:5).

The leaders of the Jews mentioned the connection of Christ with Galilee, in order to turn the governor against him and to convince him to put him to death. But the Jewish leaders regretted saying this because it led to a delay in their schemes; that is, the case of Christ was handed over to the Jewish governor of Galilee, Herod.

Pilate sent Jesus to the palace of Herod in Jerusalem, along with those who accused him. He supposed that this transfer would free him from his responsibility towards the Jews as well as from his own nagging conscience. He also hoped that this transfer would be seen as a conciliatory gesture by Herod, helping to mend the rift that had been deepening between them.

The plans of Pilate appeared to have succeeded; he and Herod became friends that day. However, he could not placate the Jews nor silence his own conscience.

### **3.3. Christ Before Herod**

"On hearing this, Pilate asked if the man was a Galilean. When he learned that Jesus was under Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who was also in Jerusalem at that time. When Herod saw Jesus, he was greatly pleased, because for a long time he had been wanting to see him. From what he had heard about him, he hoped to see him perform some miracle. He plied him with many questions, but Jesus gave him no answer. The chief priests and the teachers of the law were standing there, vehemently accusing him. Then Herod and his soldiers ridiculed and mocked him. Dressing him in an elegant robe, they sent him back to Pilate. That day Herod and Pilate became friends-- before this they had been enemies." (Luke 23:6-12)

Herod was pleased, not only that Pilate had referred Christ to him, but also that he himself



would have the opportunity to see and meet Christ, the most renowned of his Galilean subjects. He also hoped that Christ would perform some of the miracles about which he had heard so much.

Herod examined Jesus, but Jesus answered him nothing. The wicked Herod had silenced the voice of God through John the Baptist, and now the Son of God would say nothing either. We can imagine that the sight of Christ bound in ropes brought back painful memories to Herod after he had had the Baptist beheaded. When he had previously heard of Christ, he thought that John the Baptist had risen from the grave. What was he thinking now?

Because he received no answer from Jesus, Herod despised him and made a mockery of him, along with his soldiers. Then, putting a sumptuous robe on his back, Herod sent him back to Pilate without a verdict.

### **3.4. Pilate Attempts to Save Christ**

"Pilate called together the chief priests, the rulers and the people, and said to them, 'You brought me this man as one who was inciting the people to rebellion. I have examined him in your presence and have found no basis for your charges against him. Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us; as you can see, he has done nothing to deserve death. Therefore, I will punish him and then release him.' With one voice they cried out, 'Away with this man! Release Barabbas to us!' (Barabbas had been thrown into prison for an insurrection in the city, and for murder.) Wanting to release Jesus, Pilate appealed to them again. But they kept shouting, 'Crucify him! Crucify him!' For the third time he spoke to them: 'Why? What crime has this man committed? I have found in him no grounds for the death penalty. Therefore I will have him punished and then release him.' But with loud shouts they insistently demanded that he be crucified, and their shouts prevailed. So Pilate decided to grant their demand. He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, the one they asked for, and surrendered Jesus to their will." (Luke 23:13-25)

When the people returned to Pilate with Christ, they said that Herod could find no fault in him deserving death. Pilate, therefore, hoped that the crowd would assist him against the scheming Jewish elders. Since no charge against Christ could be established, Pilate suggested that he merely be scourged and then released. He thought that he could save Christ from death and pacify the Jews at the same time. Pilate wanted to punish Jesus after just declaring him innocent; how inconsistent! This was the start of his error which led him into far worse transgression.

Because all these events were happening during the Great Feast, the thoughts of the people turned to the subject of a customary favour which was granted them in honour of the festivity -- a prisoner of their choice could be acquitted. Pilate saw this as an opportunity to release Christ, so he went inside, sat on his judgement seat, and gave the people time to make their

choice. Not for one moment did he think they would prefer a common criminal, guilty of sedition and murder, to the noble and virtuous rabbi who had healed many of their sick.

### 3.5. Advice from the Wife of Pilate

"While Pilate was sitting on the judge's seat, his wife sent him this message: 'Don't have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him.' But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus executed. 'Which of the two do you want me to release to you?' asked the governor. 'Barabbas', they answered. 'What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called Christ?' Pilate asked. They all answered, 'Crucify him!' 'Why? What crime has he committed?' asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder, 'Crucify him!' When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. 'I am innocent of this man's blood', he said. 'It is your responsibility!' All the people answered, 'Let his blood be on us and on our children!' Then he released Barabbas to them. But he had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified." (Matthew 27:19-26)

After having an unpleasant dream concerning Christ, the wife of Pilate warned her husband not to have anything to do with "that innocent man". No doubt, this message affected her husband, for he was superstitious like other heathen people, and he grew fearful at the prospect of assuming responsibility for the execution of Christ. As the evidence in favour of Christ increased in the hall of the governor, however, the very opposite was happening outside; the Jewish leaders were trying their utmost to sway the crowd against Christ, arguing that his blasphemy in claiming divinity made his crime greater than that of Barabbas. When Pilate asked the people for their decision, they all shouted in favour of Barabbas. But Pilate still attempted to rescue Jesus because he asked the people to reconsider their decision, in case it was rushed or based on a misunderstanding. Although he hoped that the crowd would change its intent, the people insisted that he release Barabbas to them. Pilate again was not content with the answer from the crowd, so he asked once more what the people wished him to do with Christ; and again they shouted, "Crucify him!"

In Luke 23:22, we read the following words: "For the third time he spoke to them: 'Why? What crime has this man committed? I have found in him no grounds for the death penalty. Therefore I will have him punished and then release him.'" Pilate tried to save Christ three times by arguing in favour of his innocence. He ended his plea by offering to chastise Christ for them and then let him go. But his offer to discipline Jesus, after he had just acknowledged and proclaimed his innocence, shows us that he was submitted to the passion of the crowd, at least in part. Perhaps he hoped that the Jews would somehow be content after Christ had been scourged, foregoing their demand for his crucifixion. But this was not to be the case.

As the voices of the people grew increasingly louder, Pilate became a mere instrument in

their hands, capitulating to the frenzy of the mob that demanded the crucifixion of an innocent man. But he did not surrender without reservation; he tried to extricate himself from the responsibility of this treachery by transferring it into the hands of the Jewish leaders. To symbolise this act, he washed his hands in front of the crowd, saying: "I am innocent of this man's blood. It is your responsibility!" To this, the people replied, "Let his blood be on us and on our children!" It is strange indeed that these people who were now openly and boldly claiming responsibility for the crucifixion of Christ would later try to dodge it. In the book of Acts, these same people condemn the preaching of the apostles, after Jesus had risen from the dead, with the following words: "We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name. Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood." (Acts 5:28).

### **3.6. Christ is Scourged**

"Then he released Barabbas to them. But he had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified. Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers around him. They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand and knelt in front of him and mocked him. 'Hail, king of the Jews!' they said. They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again. After they had mocked him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him." (Matthew 27:26-31)

In Jewish law, the one sentenced to be crucified would be scourged first, with thirty-nine strokes. Roman justice was far more merciless; sentenced criminals were scourged with utmost cruelty, being thrashed with whips whose thongs were laced with sharp pieces of iron, lead or bone. As a result, the victim often became unconscious in the process, and in some cases even died.

The Roman soldiers took Christ and began to trifle with him. Having heard that he had been called "King of the Jews", they proceeded to poke fun at him. Taking him inside the government building and gathering the whole contingent together, they stripped him and put on him a purple robe. Then, they wove together a crown of thorns and placed it on his head. To complete their insults, they handed him a reed for his imperial sceptre, mocking his claim to royalty. They prostrated themselves before him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" They continued their farce by repeatedly snatching away the reed from his hand, striking him, and spitting upon him.

### **3.7. A Final Attempt to Save Christ**

"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 and their officials saw him, they shouted, 'Crucify! Crucify!' 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 the palace. 'Where do you come from?' he asked Jesus, but Jesus gave him no answer. 'Do you refuse to speak to me?' Pilate said. 'Don't you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?' Jesus answered, 'You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin.' 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.' When Pilate heard this, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judge's seat at a place known as the Stone Pavement (which in Aramaic is Gabbatha). It was the day of Preparation of Passover Week, about the sixth hour. 'Here is your king', Pilate said to the Jews. But they shouted, 'Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him!' 'Shall I crucify your king?' Pilate asked. 'We have no king but Caesar', the chief priests answered. Finally Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified. So the soldiers took charge of Jesus." (John 19:4-16)

Pilate led Christ away from the soldiers, presented him to the waiting crowd, and repeated that he considered him innocent. This only served to make the Jews bolder, for they began to chant in unison again, demanding his crucifixion. Pilate again proclaimed the innocence of Christ, daring the crowd to seize him and crucify him. But they, holding to their Law, insisted that anyone claiming divinity had to die.

Pilate was convinced of the superiority of Christ in wisdom and virtue. When he learned that Jesus had referred to himself as "the Son of God", he questioned him concerning his origin. But when Jesus refused to answer, Pilate rebuked him, reminding him that he held the key to his life or death. Pilate wondered why Jesus was withholding information which would help to secure his release. He thought that Christ would surely regard the efforts he was making on his behalf. But who was Pilate to claim such authority? Did he possess the moral strength to resist fear and obey the promptings of his conscience? Did he have control over the Jews under his rule? Did he have the power to sway Christ from his purpose? It would have been better for Pilate not to say anything about authority, especially since he had already compromised his own conviction of the innocence of Christ in order to please his subjects.

In response to the claim Pilate, regarding his authority, Christ asserted his own power with the following words: "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin." The one who had delivered him to Pilate was the high priest. It is apparent why Jesus magnified the sin of the high priest over that of Pilate: Pilate was misled by the high priest, but the high priest was

self-deceived by his own evil heart.

The response from Jesus shook Pilate to the core. Again, he wanted to release him when he realised his complete authority over the forces of evil. Now, however, the Jewish leaders resorted to threats. Had Pilate been an upright man, these would only have served to confirm his resolve to uphold justice; for nothing makes a truly great man hold to his determination like threats! But Pilate unfortunately was not on the best of terms with Caesar in Rome. Some genuine complaints about him had been already delivered to Caesar who was now prepared to depose him on the slightest provocation. Therefore, the Jewish leaders threatened Pilate with treason if he dared to let Christ go free. This would make Pilate appear to be the enemy of Caesar. The governor well knew what a report to Rome about his loyalty would mean. And so, the threats of the Jews forced Pilate into submission before them. He said to them, "Here is your King!" But they insisted that he should do the evil deed. To his further objection, "Shall I crucify your King?", they masterfully replied, "We have no king but Caesar!" With these words, the Jews confirmed the prophecy about how the royal authority would pass from the line of David as soon as the Messiah came: "The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his" (Genesis 49:10).

Pilate was left with no alternative, and so he handed Christ to them for crucifixion. Seizing Jesus, his captors exposed him to further scoffing. Then, they replaced the purple robe with his own clothing, and led him out to be crucified.

In the annals of history, Pilate is described as being very stubborn, and this trait surfaced in his repeated efforts to sway the Jewish leaders. From his clashes with them over the fate of Christ, he made obvious the innocence of Jesus and the injustice of his oppressors. His delivering him into their hands for crucifixion confirmed Jesus' own words about how he would be lifted up to die for the life of the world (John 3:14-16).

#### **4. The Crucifixion Of Christ**

"Finally Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified." (John 19:16). These words are the introduction to a new chapter in the life of Christ on earth, when he would bear in his own body the penalty for the sins of all mankind. Through this atoning work, he had to endure suffering, the intensity of which far exceeded all earlier trials and afflictions. The Jewish leaders finally had their wish, and now the crowds looked on as the miracle-worker walked before them, exhausted and bleeding. Here was the "Lamb of God which takes away the sin of the world" on his way to be sacrificed for the wickedness of mankind. He proceeded through the alleys of the city, carrying his own cross, just as his great ancestor Isaac himself had carried the wood upon which he was to be sacrificed as a burnt offering (Genesis 22:6).

#### 4.1. Christ Staggered Beneath His Load

"After they had mocked him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him. As they were going out, they met a man from Cyrene, named Simon, and they forced him to carry the cross." (Matthew 27:31-32)

The causes of Christ's bodily exhaustion on that day are obvious. They were such that he reeled beneath the weight of the Cross. His spiritual and physical sufferings drained his strength, and those in charge had to enlist another man to carry the Cross. Christ had not slept at all since his arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane. From there he was led handcuffed to the palace of the high priest, then to the hall of judgement, and finally to the house of Pilate. During the trials, he had stood upright for long periods of time, was subjected to repeated beating and scourging, and had most likely lost much blood in the process.

How enormous were the spiritual sufferings which crushed the tender, sensitive, and loving soul of Christ! We can recall his disappointment over the treason of Judas, the fall of Peter, the disciples' jostling for prominence and later desertion, and the anguish in the garden. Now the continued violence directed towards him as well as the hunger, fatigue, and cold only added to his agony. All these factors made him sink under the weight of the Cross. In these multiplied afflictions, as in his wilderness temptation, his humanity was put through an awesome test.

There were four guards leading Jesus to the place for crucifixion. When they saw him stagger under his load, they enlisted a certain Simon from Cyrene to carry the Cross for him. No one in the crowd would volunteer for such a service, for it was considered a great disgrace to be associated with a crucifixion. However, what was then deemed as shame has turned out to be an honour, and thus Simon of Cyrene served at the head of a mighty army of saints, helping to carry the Cross of Christ!

The crowd continued its procession accompanied by eight guards as well as two criminals. Each of the two convicts carried a sign over his head, indicating his name, hometown, and the crime for which he was being punished. As for the sign with the name of Christ on it, the inscription was in three languages: Hebrew, the language of religion, because he was the Son of David and the Son of God; Greek, the language of learning, because he was the light of the world and the eternal truth; and Latin, the language of political might, because he was the King of kings and Lord of lords. Thus, his notice read: "THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS" (Matthew 27:37). His crime was that he was claiming to be the king of the Jews, a revolutionary against Caesar.

#### 4.2. The Women of Jerusalem Weep for Christ

"A large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wailed for him. Jesus turned and said to them, 'Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. For the time will come when you will say, "Blessed are the barren women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!" "Then they will say to the mountains, 'Fall on us!' and to the hills, 'Cover us!' For if men do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?' Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed." (Luke 23:27-32)

Pilate maintained all along that Christ was innocent. However, when he delivered him to be crucified, he was obliged to let everyone see that his crime fit the punishment, and this he was not permitted to falsify. But Pilate retaliated against the Jews for pressing him to commit an injustice, so he inscribed the following words upon the placard above the head of Christ: "King of the Jews". Thus, the disgrace fell upon the Jews who were crucifying their own king. The chief priests objected to this inscription, saying, "Do not write 'The King of the Jews,' but that this man claimed to be king of the Jews" (John 19:21). Despite their criticism, Pilate upheld his decision, saying, "What I have written, I have written" (John 19:22). He who once asked what truth is, now served and upheld the truth, even though he did not realise it.

Such a spectacle drew a large multitude into the alleys of Jerusalem, and many of the women gathered were overcome with grief at the sad sight. They began to weep and lament loudly. Obviously, they did not care what the Jewish elders thought of them, nor did they fear being reprimanded for their open display of emotion. But Christ objected to this outburst from the women, even though this was the only open sign of affection displayed that entire morning. They should not have wept for him but rather for themselves. He could see what they could not -- the unspeakable horrors which the inhabitants of Jerusalem would soon experience. They would one day wish that the high mountains would fall upon them, so that they could be spared the great sufferings which would make death seem like a mercy and not a curse. He asked what would happen to them, symbolising dry branches void of any goodness, if they allowed the Romans to crucify him, the tender, green branch in whom the life of righteousness flowed. He could envision the innumerable crucifixions that would take place at the time of the impending destruction of Jerusalem; and some nailed upon the crosses would be his own crucifiers and their relatives. All the weeping taking place was unnecessary for Christ had accomplished his purpose. Although the onlookers saw him in a position of defeat, he alone knew that he had fulfilled his goal and had obtained the victory. With all his insight, it is no wonder that he objected to the women weeping on his behalf.

### **4.3. Christ Was Not a Martyr**

The death of Christ cannot be considered to be that of a martyr, because martyrs are killed in spite of themselves. Even though their noble motive is to choose death instead of opposing

the will of God for them, they remain powerless to save themselves from their enemies. The position of Christ, however, is clearly different. His authority would have enabled him to save himself from his oppressors, had he chosen to do so. But since the salvation of the human race depended upon his willing acceptance of crucifixion, mankind would have been lost eternally, had he chosen to save himself.

It is not enough to view the death of Christ merely as a touching episode in history, but also as a crucial incident upon which our present spiritual life as well as eternal happiness depends. The Apostle Paul understood this vital truth and emphasised it in the New Testament. The following verses illustrate this important message: "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20); "... For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin" (Romans 6:6); "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

#### **4.4. Christ Refuses an Anaesthetic**

"They came to a place called Golgotha (which means The Place of the Skull). There they offered Jesus wine to drink, mixed with gall; but after tasting it, he refused to drink it." (Matthew 27:33-34)

Jewish women made it their task to help reduce the pain of their countrymen undergoing the grotesque punishment of crucifixion, and as the procession reached the Place of the Skull, Christ was offered a painkiller. The women had followed the advice of Solomon in Proverbs 31:6: "Give strong drink to him who is perishing." Some herbs were also mixed in with the wine to help increase the tranquillising effect. But it was the intent of Christ to drink the bitter cup of pain down to its dregs, so he refused the anaesthetic. He planned to speak some vital words from the Cross to those gathered, as well as direct some important prayers to his Father in heaven, so he refused even the slightest lessening of mental clarity, which the wine would certainly have induced. It was necessary for him to keep his mental and spiritual powers intact, so when he tasted the drink which they offered him and recognised it, he refused more.

#### **4.5. Crucified Between Two Thieves**

"When they had crucified him, they divided up his clothes by casting lots. And sitting down, they kept watch over him there. Above his head they placed the written charge against him: THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS. Two robbers were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, 'You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save



yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!' In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him. 'He saved others', they said, 'but he can't save himself! He's the King of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, "I am the Son of God.'" In the same way the robbers who were crucified with him also heaped insults on him." (Matthew 27:35-44).

There were two thieves crucified with Christ, and the soldiers placed his Cross between them. It is said that these men were accomplices in robbery and murder with Barabbas the insurrectionist, and that the middle cross was originally intended for this villain. Christ, therefore, took his place. From ancient manuscripts, we find that the first name of Barabbas was "Joshua" or "Saviour"; and Barabbas itself means "Son of the Father." Thus, his name made him fancy himself as the Messiah who would save his people from the yoke of Rome. This was the basis of the crimes which caused him to be sentenced, with his accomplices, to death by crucifixion. At the same time, this was the reason why the crowd sought his release instead of that of Christ.

When carrying out a crucifixion, the guards used to tie a prisoner to his cross while it was flat on the ground. Then, they drove large nails through the wrists and feet, after which they raised the cross and planted it upright in the ground. They would sit down, keeping watch over him until he died. This prevented any friends or relatives from taking him down. Before dying, those who were crucified usually lingered on for two days or at least one full day, and since the death of the victim was inevitable, the guards would often administer torture as entertainment. To quicken the death of a prisoner, the guards would often break his legs with an iron rod. The Romans would leave the corpse of a prisoner on the cross for the vultures and other wild beasts, but the Jews would ask for the body to be taken down before sunset. As for the clothing of the victim, it went by law to the guards.

#### **4.6. Christ Asks Forgiveness for His Crucifiers**

"Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.' And they divided up his clothes by casting lots." (Luke 23:34)

When the soldiers began their crucifixion of Christ, three hours of the day had already elapsed. During this time, Jesus was tried before the Jewish Sanhedrin, the Roman governor, King Herod, and was then led to the site of crucifixion. The soldiers were accustomed to shouts of anger, blasphemous language, and cursing which their prisoners would call down upon them. Most likely, the two thieves were like other prisoners in this respect. But, with his first words from the Cross, Christ was heard praying lovingly for his tormentors. He did not ask for them to be excused on the grounds that they were ignorant of what they were doing, but he did ask for them to be forgiven, because they did not fully know or understand who it

was that they were crucifying. The Apostle Paul said, "...None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory" (1 Corinthians 2:8).

In the prayer of Christ, "Father forgive them", there is a new note which we have not heard him sound before. He used to grant forgiveness as one who had the right to do so. But now he speaks as one who forgives because of his rights against others and as one who is concerned that divine wrath be spared them for their deeds.

#### **4.7. The Prophecies Are Fulfilled**

The Roman soldiers did not know what they were doing, because they were in the darkness of heathenism; neither did the Jewish leaders, because they had deliberately shut their eyes to the light, becoming as blind as anyone who keeps his eyes closed for a long time. They fulfilled the prophecies concerning their Messiah without knowing it, and in so doing they proved Christ to be their Messiah, even though they denied it with their lips. By helping to nail him to the Cross, they fulfilled the prophecy in Psalm 22:16 which says: "Dogs have surrounded me; a band of evil men has encircled me, they have pierced my hands and my feet" ...; and by placing him on the Cross between two thieves, they fulfilled the prophecy in Isaiah 53:9,12 which says: "He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth... Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors." The Roman soldiers proved unwittingly that Christ was the true Messiah of the Jews, about whom the prophets had spoken, for when they divided his clothing among them, they fulfilled the prophecy which says, "They divide my garments among them..." (Psalm 22:18); and when they got his robe, woven without a seam, they drew lots for it, fulfilling the remainder of the prophecy in that verse: "...and cast lots for my clothing." By stripping him of his garment, they fulfilled another prophecy which says: "I can count all my bones; people stare and gloat over me" (Psalm 22:17).

This Crucified One was fitted with a crown of thorns, and over his head were written these words: "King of the Jews." Those with perception can see other glorious diadems gracing the beauty of his countenance, symbolising wisdom, beneficent power, and celestial holiness. These royal attributes combined to form an even greater crown -- that of his redemptive love, displayed through his words and deeds.

How numerous were the reproaches that Christ heard on the Cross! The spectators amused themselves by twisting the words he had spoken throughout his ministry -- even those uttered in his trial before Pilate. They attacked his references to himself as one able to tear down the

Temple and rebuild it in three days, as the Son of God and Saviour of the world, as the Messiah, and as a king. As they viewed him on the Cross, his present situation seemed to be a contradiction of these claims. They challenged him to come down from the Cross, so that they could believe in him. But had he done this -- and he very well could have -- he would have landed all of mankind in the despair of eternal separation from God. These insults he endured, from the crowd gathered below him, were only further confirmation of prophecy fulfilled, for in Psalm 22:7,8, it says: "All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads: He trusts in the LORD; let the LORD rescue him. Let him deliver him, since he delights in him."

The Roman soldiers joined ranks with the scoffers, offering him vinegar to drink instead of wine, saying, "If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself." (Luke 23:37). The thieves also hurled down curses upon Christ, but one can excuse their ridicule more than that of the others, because their torment excited the misery in their hearts. Most likely, their motive was to prompt Christ to save himself and themselves as well, if possible. All the jeering directed at Christ was in accordance with another prophecy in Psalm 69:9, which says, "... the insults of those who insult you fall on me."

#### **4.8. One Thief Repents**

"One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: 'Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!' But the other criminal rebuked him. 'Don't you fear God', he said, 'since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.' Then he said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.' Jesus answered him, 'I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.'" (Luke 23:39-43)

Jesus once said, "But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself" (John 12:32). Those whom Christ draws through his Cross are like stars in the dark firmament of his sufferings. Immediately the first star appeared; one repentant thief, whom many Bible commentators believe was at the right hand of Christ, was drawn to him. He had witnessed Christ's conduct, silence, patience, and prayers for his tormentors. This man had especially noticed the composure of Christ in the midst of unspeakable reproach, and he compared it to that of his colleague being crucified at Christ's left hand. He put his faith in the crucified Saviour, repented of his deeds, and began to serve him in any way he could, rebuking his collaborator in full view of the crowd and the Jewish elders. He alone defended Jesus with amazing courage. In this way, he did what the disciples of Christ had failed to do in the Garden of Gethsemane.

The repentant thief, in effect, was telling his accomplice: "If this crowd, which is not under sentence, is reproaching our crucified companion, dare we follow suit -- we who are under

the same sentence as he, only justly? Unlike us, this man is innocent." How strange did these words sound in the ears of those gathered below -- one thief asking another if he feared God, and acknowledging that they both deserved crucifixion for their sins. He called upon Christ who was hanging next to him, saying, "Lord". The tears of his repentance were like the lens of a telescope which brings into view what is distant and obscure to the gaze of others. By faith, this man could see a spiritual kingdom with this Crucified One as its king, and he asked him, "Jesus, remember me when You come into Your kingdom." How many thousands have been encouraged by the example of this man, receiving pardon and salvation from Christ as a result!

This incident encourages those, who have wasted their lives in sin, to repent at death. Many a sinner who has spent his life far from God has shown a true, acceptable repentance by reason that Christ pardoned the thief on the Cross. But this story is an isolated event, and sinners should not presume, on this basis, to delay repentance until the hour of death.

Christ was quick to respond to the thief, promising him happiness immediately after death. He himself would then be the companion of this man. Once again, by making such a promise, he manifested his divine authority, and at that moment another prophecy was fulfilled: "After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities" (Isaiah 53:11).

Christ was crucified during the time of the Great Feast, and as he hung upon the Cross, the priests in the Temple were offering the firstfruits of the barley harvest, according to the Law of Moses. As the priests were presenting the barley sheaves, Christ our High Priest presented to the Father in heaven the firstfruits of the harvest of those whom he drew to faith and salvation by his death. The joy in heaven over one sinner repenting made him forget his sufferings. He regarded the gain of this one soul as a reward for all that he endured on earth, after having left the glories of heaven. Thus, his second utterance from the Cross, like the first, was not for himself, but in love of others -- not those who were near to him in spirit, thought, or attributes, but those who were afar off.

These two thieves typify the entire human race. On the left of the crucified Saviour are those who are perishing, because they are dying in their sins. On the right are those who are eternally saved, because they repent and trust wholly in the only Saviour.

#### **4.9. The Concern of Christ for His Mother**

"Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, 'Dear woman, here is your son', and to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' From that time on, this disciple took her into his home." (John 19:25-27)

Christ directed his first utterance from the Cross to his Father in heaven, his second to the repentant thief, and his third to Mary, his mother, through whose soul a sword pierced at that moment. The aged Simeon had predicted the anguish of Mary roughly thirty-three years earlier when he took the Baby Jesus in his arms (Luke 2:35). The sight of the sorrowing mother of Christ, bathed in her own warm tears, was most touching. Truly, only the all-knowing God could plumb the depth of her agony at this momentous hour; and Christ, even though thoroughly holding onto his lofty spiritual objective throughout his entire distress upon the Cross, did not allow his own pain to prevent him from showing loving concern for the physical needs of his mother. He looked at her with tenderness as his disciple, John, stood beside her, and he said, "Dear woman, here is your son!" Then he said to John, "Here is your mother!" He knew that this loving, faithful disciple of his would do for her all that a dutiful son could render -- even more than that which his very own brothers and sisters would do. Thus, he presented John with a very special honour, and from that hour, John took in the mother of Christ as his own. Through this act, Jesus demonstrated that even full-time religious service does not exempt one from caring for the needs of his family. From the lack of reference to her, after Christ had spoken his third utterance, we can deduce that John took her away immediately from that grim place, in order to spare her the sight of the final moments of his death and its aftermath.

#### **4.10. Christ is Forsaken of God**

"At the sixth hour darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, 'Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?'-- which means, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' When some of those standing near heard this, they said, 'Listen, he's calling Elijah.' One man ran, filled a sponge with wine vinegar, put it on a stick, and offered it to Jesus to drink. 'Now leave him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to take him down', he said. With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last. The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, heard his cry and saw how he died, he said, 'Surely this man was the Son of God!' Some women were watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. In Galilee these women had followed him and cared for his needs. Many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem were also there." (Mark 15:33-41)

When Christ entered the world, a star announced his birth, illuminating the plains of Bethlehem with its dazzling light; and as he was departing, the sun was veiled, heralding the approach of his death with an ineffable gloom that eclipsed the entire world in its sombre shroud. From noon until three, it was as if nature shared in the anguish of Christ, and she put on a garment for mourning. But the strangeness of the sun's obscuration was rivalled only by the deeper mystery surrounding the wrath of God on Christ, the perfect man who was also the beloved and only begotten of the Father.

The fourth utterance of Christ from the Cross helps us to understand the reason for this darkness: "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" But we will never be able to fully comprehend the mystery of what actually transpired during those grim hours as he hung on the Cross, when as the Son of God he was forsaken of his Father. In this utterance, his words were completely different from those he had spoken previously. This time, he did not say, "Father", but "My God, my God!" Apparently, he keenly felt the barrier between himself and the Father, for his right to address him in this way was shelved for the moment. Being forsaken of the Father, he fulfilled the prophecy in Psalm 22:1 which says: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning?" and as he hung there, bleeding for the sins of the world, he was also fulfilling another prophecy from the Prophet Isaiah:

**"Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand. After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities. Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors." (Isaiah 53:4-7,10-12)**

#### 4.11. Christ Thirsts

"Later, knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, 'I am thirsty.' A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips." (John 19:28,29)

Here we see the Giver of the Water of Life asking for something to drink -- he who had once spoken the following words to a Samaritan woman by a well: "...but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (John 4:14). We know that the thirst he experienced was physical, and the water which he gives is spiritual. After requesting some refreshment, a guard lifted to him a sponge soaked in vinegar. Some hardhearted people tried to prevent this, saying, "Let Him alone; let us see if Elijah will come to save Him" (Matthew 26:49). They said this because when Christ had earlier called out in Aramaic, "Eloi, Eloi" they thought that he was calling Elijah the prophet, owing to the similarity of these words in that language. Christ drank some of the vinegar, because he intended to surrender his spirit very

soon, and in so doing, his fifth utterance from the Cross came in fulfilment of another prophecy: "They put gall in my food and gave me vinegar for my thirst" (Psalm 69:21).

#### **4.12. Christ Completes His Work**

"When he had received the drink, Jesus said, 'It is finished.' With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. (John 19:30)

After Christ had taken some of the vinegar, he spoke forth his sixth utterance: "It is finished." By these words, he announced the completion of the most important event in all human history; namely, reconciliation between a holy God and sinful mankind. In Colossians 1:19-22, the Apostle Paul elucidates this amazing transaction: "For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation."

#### **4.13. Christ Commits His Spirit to the Father**

"Jesus called out with a loud voice, 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.' When he had said this, he breathed his last." (Luke 23:46)

When Christ asked, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?", the awesome temporary separation between himself and the Father was expressed. Thereafter, he announced to the multitude that this previous barrier had ended, and he viewed his dying on the Cross with complete satisfaction, evidenced from his last words of prayer and committal. In his seventh and last utterance from the Cross, another prophecy was realised: "Into your hands I commit my spirit; redeem me, O LORD, the God of truth" (Psalm 31:5). Thus, the restoration of his relationship with the Father in heaven was evidenced by his use of "Father", and with these words, which myriads of his followers have also spoken at the close of their lives, he, as the Son of Mary and Son of Man, bade farewell to his earthly existence among men, in order to descend to the grave where he would remain briefly.

Christ gave up his spirit voluntarily, having completed the necessary work of salvation. His death was a fulfilment of the words he had spoken earlier: "Just as the Father knows me and I know the Father-- and I lay down my life for the sheep. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father" (John 10:15,18). Thus, he gave up his spirit because he had completed the work which he had come to do. This helps to explain his rather sudden death upon the Cross, after only six hours of crucifixion. He was nailed to the Cross

at the hour of the morning sacrifice, and surrendered his spirit at the hour of the evening sacrifice. Those who die by crucifixion normally do not die on the day they are nailed upon a cross.

Christ had fulfilled the Law of Moses in every detail, and thus the Old Testament faded into the New. He had completed his walk among men as the Incarnate God. Henceforth, he would no longer associate with people as he had before, but would appear only to his disciples intermittently in his glorified body after his resurrection.

#### **4.14. An Earthquake Shakes Jerusalem**

"At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split. The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs, and after Jesus' resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people." (Matthew 27:51-54)

When Christ gave up his spirit, nature convulsed over the death of the King of Life. As a result of this tremor, many of the saints, who were already dead, arose and went up from their graves, entering the Holy City and appearing to many. This and other miracles which occurred when Christ hung upon the Cross resemble those which attended his entrance into the world roughly 33 years earlier. In both instances, he had no hand in them; neither did any human agency participate. This only serves to strengthen the attestation of these miracles to his unique person.

We also read that the tearing of the veil in the Temple from top to bottom was one of the miracles accompanying the death of Christ and its aftermath. In its original setting, this veil was a sign that the favour of God was inaccessible to human beings -- even the priests -- by reason of their sin. The door of access into the immediate presence of God was closed in the face of all. The high priest in the Temple, however, was the only exception to this rule because he prefigured the true High Priest, the beloved Son of God. But even so, he could only enter the inner sanctuary of the Temple alone, once a year, and not without the necessary blood offering for the sins of the people (Hebrews 9:3).

The veil in the Temple was also a symbol of the human nature of Christ which veiled and displayed his divine nature simultaneously. Thus, when the body of Christ was torn on the Cross, the veil in the Temple which symbolised that body was also rent in two, and the result was that the door of heaven was opened to all mankind. There is another deep meaning behind the tearing of the Temple veil: the passing away of the Mosaic order with its Temple ceremonies, the human priesthood, animal sacrifices, and the old symbols. These were all fulfilled in the person and work of Christ.



#### **4.15. Christ is Truly the Son of God**

"When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, 'Surely he was the Son of God!' Many women were there, watching from a distance. They had followed Jesus from Galilee to care for his needs. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee's sons." (Matthew 27:54-56)

Along with the twelve guards, there was an officer with the rank of centurion who helped organise the crucifixion of Christ and the two thieves that day. No doubt, he and his soldiers were aware of the injustice surrounding the death of Christ, and as a result of the darkness and earthquake, they were all filled with the terror of the vengeance of God. But despite their dread, they acknowledged the divine hand upon Christ which made him different from other men. Therefore, they glorified God and bore witness to the righteousness of Christ. The centurion excelled in his testimony of Christ, confessing that he was surely the Son of God. Thus, he was numbered among the many whom Christ said would come from east and west to take their place at the feast with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 8:11). Furthermore, we read that all the people in the crowd came together and beat their breasts, seeing what had been done (Luke 23:48).

### **5. Christ In The Tomb**

#### **5.1. He Truly Died**

"Now it was the day of Preparation, and the next day was to be a special Sabbath. Because the Jews did not want the bodies left on the crosses during the Sabbath, they asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken down. The soldiers therefore came and broke the legs of the first man who had been crucified with Jesus, and then those of the other. But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water. The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe. These things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled: "Not one of his bones will be broken", and, as another scripture says, "They will look on the one they have pierced." (John 19:31-37)

Because the Great Feast was only two hours away, the Jewish elders asked the governor to break the legs of the prisoners, in order to hasten their death. The governor complied, assuming that none of them could possibly have died yet. One of the rules in the preparation of the Passover lamb during the Great Feast was that none of its bones could be broken, and Christ, as the final Passover Lamb, would have none of his bones broken either. An Old

Testament prophecy ensured this: "He protects all his bones, not one of them will be broken" (Psalm 34:20). But how could this prophecy be fulfilled after this order had been given by the governor? The answer is that Christ was already dead by the time the soldiers wanted to break his legs, and so they did not. Thus, the hand of God stopped them from breaking his bones.

Had the soldiers left Christ at this point, however, the absolute certainty of his death could still have been in question. In fact, a group eventually arose that denied the authenticity of his resurrection, claiming that he was laid in the tomb while in a swoon, and that he revived there. But divine providence has given us sufficient evidence with which to remove any doubt as to whether Christ actually died on the Cross or not, for we read that one of the soldiers thrust his spear deep into the side of Christ, and that blood and water issued forth. This was another fulfilment of prophecy: "They will look on me, the one they have pierced..." (Zechariah 12:10). The reality of this wound is what would prompt Christ's words to his doubting disciple, Thomas, after his resurrection: "...Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe" (John 20:27). In order to stress the veracity of the death of Christ, John the Evangelist wrote that he, having seen, has testified, and that testimony is true. He knew without doubt that he was telling the truth, so that we could believe too.

Thus, the events surrounding the crucifixion of Christ were concluded. Christ, who restored bodies afflicted with painful and deadly diseases into wholeness, transformed the Cross -- a cursed symbol of shame and savagery -- into an emblem of honour and triumph, a token of graciousness, love, pity, devotion, and eternal salvation. When the Apostle Paul said, "May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (Galatians 6:14), he was almost alone in his exultation. But today the glory of the Cross increases generation by generation, and more and more share with the Apostle in his adulation.

## 5.2. A Request for Burial

"It was Preparation Day (that is, the day before the Sabbath). So as evening approached, Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the Council, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. Pilate was surprised to hear that he was already dead. Summoning the centurion, he asked him if Jesus had already died. When he learned from the centurion that it was so, he gave the body to Joseph. So Joseph bought some linen cloth, took down the body, wrapped it in the linen, and placed it in a tomb cut out of rock. Then he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Jesus saw where he was laid." (Mark 15:42-47)

There was a secret disciple of Christ named Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the

Sanhedrin. He owned a garden in which there was a rock-hewn tomb, most likely for his own burial near Jerusalem, the Holy City. This man had prestige, wealth, and was on good terms with Pilate, the governor. When Joseph of Arimathea learned that Christ had died, and that his disciples had scattered, he feared that the sacred body of the only-begotten Son of God would be abused, and so he boldly asked for it, in order to provide a proper burial. Although Joseph of Arimathea was not an open follower of Christ in the days of his acceptance and acclaim, he followed him in his rejection, thus showing genuine faith. Pilate granted Joseph of Arimathea the body after receiving confirmation of the death of Christ from the centurion in charge of the crucifixion.

### **5.3. The Embalming and Burial of Christ**

"Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jews. With Pilate's permission, he came and took the body away. He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds. Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs. At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid. Because it was the Jewish day of Preparation and since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there." (John 19:38-42)

Joseph of Arimathea bought some very fine linen for embalming the body of Christ, and Nicodemus, another secret admirer of Jesus, joined him in this task. Nicodemus was the Jewish councillor who had come to Jesus by night roughly three years earlier, and to whom Jesus addressed the necessity of a "second birth" from above (John 3). Nicodemus now came with some precious spices for embalming, the quantity of which was suitable for a member of royalty. Undoubtedly, there were others assisting in this strenuous task they were undertaking.

Christ died a rejected man according to prophecy, but he was buried with the honour granted a king, owing to the zeal of Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea. Thus, another prophecy was fulfilled: "He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth" (Isaiah 53:9). Because Joseph of Arimathea was a wealthy man, his tomb was a large chamber, having an alcove at the side for the placement of the body. It was here that the men went through the appropriate burial rites such as washing the body, embalming it with spices, and wrapping it with linen. When they were finished, they rolled a large stone in front of the tomb. All the while, the faithful women who had followed Christ stood nearby watching.

### **5.4. The Tomb is Guarded**

"The next day, the one after Preparation Day, the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate. 'Sir', they said, 'we remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, "After three days I will rise again." So give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day. Otherwise, his disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that he has been raised from the dead. This last deception will be worse than the first.' 'Take a guard', Pilate answered. 'Go, make the tomb as secure as you know how.' So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard." (Matthew 27:62-66)

We shall now shift our focus from Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea to the hateful Jewish elders who fancied that they had succeeded in their plans which had so occupied them during the last three years. They believed that they had finally rid themselves of Christ, but it is doubtful whether they had peace in their hearts. Did not their consciences burn within them for shedding innocent blood -something which God, in their Law, had commanded them not to do? They recalled the words of Christ about his rising again on the third day, and they wondered if this would actually come true. In order to prevent this, they went to Pilate, told him about their concern, and obtained his approval to seal the tomb, making it foolproof against any possible tampering. It may even be that they instructed the Roman guards in front of the tomb to kill Christ, if he indeed would rise again as he had said.

In connection with the Crucifixion, we read in Luke 23:49 that all the acquaintances of Christ stood at a distance, watching what transpired. All these were downcast and despairing. Their Shepherd had been taken from them, and, they wondered what would happen to them as his flock. They, as reflective, honest observers probably stood in front of the sealed tomb wondering if Christ would rise again or if he would remain in the tomb and experience corruption like everyone else. If he were to rise, it was obvious that he would have no human assistance available to him. At the grave of Lazarus, they heard him describe himself as the Resurrection and the Life (John 11:25), and they had also heard him say that he had the authority to lay down his life and to take it again (John 10:17,18). Therefore, if Christ remained in the grave, his crucifiers would appear to have been right for having hinted at his unfitness to be the Saviour of mankind, as he hung on the Cross, being unable to save himself from the shameful ordeal of crucifixion.

Sunset on Saturday marked the beginning of the third day after the death of Christ. The ensuing evening was considered as part of the third day, according to Jewish time-chronology. The resurrection of Christ occurred prior to the end of that night (before 6:00 a.m. Sunday morning).

The body of Christ rose out of the grave clothes without lifting or disturbing them; these remained as a collapsed heap which was previously wrapped around him. It is mentioned in Scripture that the cloth which was wrapped around his head was also present. His body was released from the cloth bindings, and he would soon appear visibly, without any restrictions.

### 5.5. The Women Visit the Tomb

"When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body. Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb and they asked each other, 'Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?' But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away." (Mark 16:1-4)

The women who were loyal to Christ had purchased embalming ointments on Friday, and they came to the tomb on Sunday morning, hoping to further embalm his body; they assumed it was still there. A heavenly council took notice of the zeal and faithfulness of these ladies in the face of difficult circumstances, for no sooner had their journey to the tomb begun than some angels preceded them to the tomb.

### 5.6. An Angel Rolls Away the Stone

"After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men." (Matthew 28:1-4)

When the body of Christ was interred on Friday, the women noticed that a boulder had been rolled against the entrance of the tomb. Knowing that they could never move such a stone, they wondered who it would be that would grant them access to the body. They were unaware that the Jewish elders had persuaded Pilate to place some Roman guards at the tomb, sealing it with the authorisation of the imperial government. Therefore, their coming to the tomb would be viewed as an attempt to steal the body of Christ, and they would be treated harshly. However, the fact that Roman guards were stationed at the tomb of Christ was hidden from them, so as not to deter them from their noble enterprise. Divine providence often hides certain things from our sight! Seeing their affection for him, and their dutiful interest over the condition of his body, the Lord did away with both problems; the stone was moved and the Roman guard was scattered. The stone was rolled away by an angel he had sent. This caused an earthquake which terrified the guards who, seeing the angel in dazzling white and feeling the earth shake beneath their feet, shook for fear.

The women departed for the tomb while it was still dark. They walked until they reached the site, their eyes fixed on the tomb from a distance. Mary, the mother of Christ, was not with them because she had gone to stay with John, the beloved disciple. As for Mary Magdalene, she was at the front of the group because she keenly felt the greatness of her debt to the Saviour. She loved much because she had been forgiven much, and she could not offer

enough service and praise to him who had released her from the yoke of seven demons.

### 5.7. Good News for Peter and John

"Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!' So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. Then Simon Peter, who was behind him, arrived and went into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen. Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) Then the disciples went back to their homes..." (John 20:1-10)

When Mary Magdalene saw that the stone had been rolled away from the tomb, she thought that perhaps an enemy had removed the precious body of her Lord. She could not bear the thought of an enemy possibly abusing that body, so she ran back to the city to tell Peter and John the news. When the men heard this, they ran to the tomb, driven by outrage and concern. John got there first, and Peter, not content with a distant view, also got there and looked inside. They both searched the inside of the tomb carefully in an attempt to discover exactly what had become of the body of Christ. The mysterious absence of his body from the grave clothes indicated that a divine hand had been at work, and after seeing all this, Peter went away puzzled. John, however, saw and believed because he knew that the strange absence of Christ's body from the grave clothes could not have been due to human intervention, but to divine mediation. The orderly condition of the grave clothes was a sufficient evidence that no hostile or malevolent hand was involved. They also, being his intimate companions, knew that no one else from Christ's loved ones had removed the body.

The empty tomb is an undeniable proof of the resurrection of Christ. If the Jewish elders or the Romans had taken the body of Christ, they could have easily refuted the claim of the apostles that Jesus had risen from the dead, for they would have had his body in their possession. None of the followers of Christ could have removed the body either, owing to their own despair, fear, and weakness. Also, the Romans had sealed the stone to the entrance of the tomb with the authorisation of the government, and they had placed a garrison at the outside of the tomb to prevent anyone from tampering with the grave. Even if the disciples of Christ had stolen the body as the Jewish elders had falsely accused, how can we explain their hiding in fear in the Upper Room in Jerusalem that Sunday night, unable to believe that their Master had truly risen?

## 6. Christ Is Risen Indeed!

"The angel said to the women, 'Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples: "He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him." Now I have told you.' So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples." (Matthew 28:5-8)

After Peter and John had seen the empty tomb, they returned to the city. But the women stayed nearby, and then went inside. While they puzzled over the matter of the missing body, an angel appeared to them, and they were startled. Seeing their alarm, the angel reassured and comforted them, revealing to them that he knew of their purpose, and that Christ had indeed risen from the dead as he had promised. Then, he invited them to see for themselves the place where he had lain. As they were still afraid, with their faces downcast, two angels appeared to them in shining garments, saying: "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: 'The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again'" (Luke 24:5-7). These angels, like the first, instructed the women to hasten with the news of Christ's resurrection to the disciples, especially to sorrowing Peter. Thus, they left the tomb in haste with both fear and joy in their hearts -- fear over all the strange events they had witnessed, and joy because their master had truly risen from the dead. These emotions prompted them to tell the disciples the news as quickly as they could.

When Christ arose in his glorified body, the grave clothes did not cling to him, for they were as linens in which he slept for only a short while. Those who looked for him within the wrappings could not find him, for he was actually present with them. Likewise, those who search for him only in the annals of history do not truly find him in his pure essence, because he is present now, although unseen. History cannot reveal him as he truly is, but the eye of faith alone brings his being into focus; and none can know him except through his blessed personal presence.

Having had knowledge of Christ in the past does not meet the need of the present; therefore, a renewed experience of him is essential. We see this to be the case of the disciples of Christ. What they knew of Christ before his death did not meet their needs in the present. Their last sight of him was in the tomb, so they needed a new experience of him in his resurrected, glorified body.

### 6.1. Christ Appears to Mary Magdalene

"But Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the

other at the foot. They asked her, 'Woman, why are you crying?' 'They have taken my Lord away', she said, 'and I don't know where they have put him.' At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. 'Woman', he said, 'why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?' Thinking he was the gardener, she said, 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.' Jesus said to her, 'Mary.' She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, 'Rabboni!' (which means Teacher). Jesus said, 'Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, "I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God."' Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: 'I have seen the Lord!' And she told them that he had said these things to her." (John 20:11-18)

After telling Peter and John what the angel had told her at the tomb, Mary returned to the site and was weeping at the entrance. She bent to peer inside for the first time and was amazed to see two angels sitting face to face at either end of the place where Christ had lain. We do not read that she was surprised or frightened at the sight. This was due to the great sorrow in her heart. The two angels asked her why she was crying, so she gave them the same message she had relayed to Peter and John. She was weeping over the tomb being empty, but this could have been a reason for great jubilation, had she only grasped the truth of what the angels had told her previously. How often like Mary have we sorrowed over things which appeared to be calamities, but were actually blessings in disguise!

Mary had hardly finished replying to the angels when she saw an ordinary-looking man whom she assumed to be caretaker of the garden. He asked her what she was doing, and she replied that if it was he that had taken the body of her Lord, she would like to know of its whereabouts, so that she could find another suitable grave for it. After waiting for his reply, she heard that all-too-familiar voice say, "Mary!" He is the Good Shepherd who calls his sheep by name, and they know him. When he had tenderly called out her name, she recognised him and turned to gaze upon him with her heart of love. She addressed him as *Rabboni*, that is, "Teacher". But Jesus told her not to hold on to him because of the total physical transfiguration he had undergone during his resurrection. He wanted people to understand that, from now on, they were to cling to him spiritually, not physically. His people are to learn this vital lesson because "God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). We are not to seek outward supernatural manifestations or a tangible divine presence.

Christ told Mary to go at once and tell his disciples that she had seen him, and that he had indeed risen. Moreover, he told her to convey the message that he would soon return to heaven whence he had come. He would ascend to his Father and to his God in both his divine and human capacities.

Jesus honoured his disciples with a new title. Previously, he had referred to them as "friends" and "disciples", but now, for the first time, he called them "brothers". Considering the fact



that they had forsaken him in the garden, how great indeed was his love which condescended to embrace them as brethren, especially now after his recent glorification. He did, however, reveal that there was not an absolute unity between him and them, for he said, "I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God." He did not say, "our God" because God was his Father by personal begetting, as it is said in the Psalms: "I will proclaim the decree of the LORD: He said to me, 'You are my Son; today I have become your Father'" (Psalm 2:7). God was their Father by spiritual adoption as it is said in the book of Romans: "...For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father.' The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children." (Romans 8:15,16). The sonship of Christ to the Father is an original, intrinsic reality, whereas the sonship of man to God is possible only because of what Christ has done; it is derived from him through a personal relationship.

## **6.2. Christ Appears to the Women**

"Suddenly Jesus met them. 'Greetings', he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, 'Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.'" (Matthew 28:9,10)

The second appearance of Christ after his resurrection was like the first; it was not to his men but to the women as they departed with the message from the angels. But the eleven disciples and the others with them did not believe their message. In fact, they accused the women of having had hallucinations. But divine providence transformed the scepticism of the disciples into the greatest blessing, because it turned out to be one of the most important proofs of the truth of the Resurrection. One commentator has remarked that the doubts of the disciples disappeared gradually only as the decisive proofs followed one another successively. Thus, their initial uncertainty strengthens our confidence in their testimony once they became sure. They doubted for a time, so that we need not doubt at all!

## **6.3. The Guards Report the Resurrection**

"While the women were on their way, some of the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened. When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, telling them, 'You are to say, "His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep." If this report gets to the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.' So the soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed. And this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day." (Matthew 28:11-15)

The Jewish elders convened to discuss the news which the Roman guards had delivered to them. They were offered a bribe to say that the disciples of Christ had stolen his body while

they slept. The sin of the Jewish elders was very great because they attributed the resurrection of Christ to a theft which they knew had never occurred; it was actually wrought through the power of the Holy Spirit. Thus, they blasphemed against the Holy Spirit just as they did when they attributed the miracles of Christ to a demonic source. But what greater proof could have been given to them than the resurrection -- to those who boasted of their readiness to believe in Christ, if he would only give them a sign from heaven? What greater confirmation to the true identity of Christ could have been given than his own resurrection from the dead and all the other miracles he had performed previously? Which sign is greater -- to come down from the Cross while still alive as they dared him to do, or to come up from the grave after having been dead for three days?

If the faith of the Jewish elders really depended upon proof, they would have undoubtedly believed because the evidence was plentiful -- the righteous life of Christ for thirty years, his amazing miracles during his last three years, and then his resurrection, the greatest supernatural occurrence ever! Had not Christ said earlier in "the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus" that those who do not believe, when having access to the Scriptures, will not believe even if one were to rise from the dead (Luke 16:30)? Faith is not the result of sufficient proof, but is first and foremost a divine gift. As such, the condition of the heart and the extent of its readiness to receive are of utmost importance. Reason by itself -- however accurate and genuine -- will not lead a soul to heaven. No person having convincing proofs should ever imagine that he can win souls for heaven merely by argument, even if he possesses vast knowledge, logical aptitude, and eloquent rhetorical skill!

#### **6.4. The Greatest Proof for the Resurrection**

The most solid evidence for the resurrection of Christ came in the events following his ascension. Only seven weeks after Jesus' crucifixion, we see the disciples before a large assembly in Jerusalem, boldly declaring the truth of his rising from the dead. They openly rebuked the Jewish elders for their instrumentality in his death upon the Cross. We read in the book of Acts that thousands came to faith in Christ as a result of the boldness of the disciples and the miracles they performed, which they attributed to his having risen from the dead. If there were even the remotest possibility that the reality of Christ's resurrection could be refuted, the disciples could not have been as fearless and daring in their declaration as they indeed became. Further, their argument would not have stood merely on the basis of the tomb being empty; it was the literal, bodily resurrection of Christ that gave their argument its force.

We know from history that criticism from the enemies of Christianity appeared quite early, because those who do not believe in miracles will naturally deny the Resurrection, the greatest of miracles. Therefore, in their preaching, the apostles always emphasised the resurrection of Christ as a miracle distinct from all others. If one believes the resurrection of

Christ, he will also believe in his other miracles.

## **6.5. The Resurrection Is no Fabrication**

If the account of the Resurrection were invented, those who reported it would have recorded Christ appearing to others, and not only to his disciples; this would have reinforced their case. Also, had the disciples really stolen the body of Christ, as the Jewish elders falsely alleged, these elders would not have remained as quiet as they did; nor would the disciples have been concerned about removing the grave clothes and laying them neatly in place, since the Roman guard was stationed just outside the tomb. Also, how could the disciples have moved the large stone at the entrance without waking the guards (whom the elders bribed to say they slept)? And why would the women, some of the foremost and dearest of the followers of Christ, have gone to anoint his body in the morning, knowing all the while that his disciples had just stolen it a few hours earlier? Moreover, the character, high principles, and the later unwavering testimony of the disciples for the certainty of the Resurrection are matters which are not at all consistent with the charge of devious fabrication.

Some have stated that the disciples, being good and honest men, did not invent the story of the resurrection of Christ, but they saw an apparition which they assumed was actual. But to this argument we must answer that the investigation of the resurrection of Christ did not begin with only a personal testimony but with sensory proof: the empty tomb. Also, hallucinations usually only appear in accordance with the hopes of an individual; yet, the resurrection of Christ was the farthest thing from the disciples' minds. None of them ever expected such a thing because their hearts were hardened to this fact. Jesus himself was often frustrated with the disciples because they just could not seem to understand or believe that he would die and rise again. Thus, the disciples confined themselves to facts perceived by the senses of sight, hearing, and touch. When Christ appeared to them, he encouraged them to touch him. He also asked for food to eat so that they would know he had really undergone a physical, bodily resurrection.

## **7. The Post-resurrectional Appearances Of Christ**

### **7.1. On the Road to Emmaus**

"Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognizing him. He asked them, 'What are you discussing together as you walk along?' They stood still, their faces downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, 'Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things

that have happened there in these days?' 'What things?' he asked. 'About Jesus of Nazareth', they replied. 'He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see.' He said to them, 'How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?' And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus acted as if he were going farther. But they urged him strongly, 'Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over.' So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. They asked each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?' They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together and saying, 'It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.' Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread." (Luke 24:13-35)

The third appearance of Christ was not to his eleven disciples but to two other followers of his from Emmaus. It maybe that the reason for this was to prevent the future leadership of the Church from giving undue attention to the inner circle of disciples. On the ten-kilometre-long journey from Jerusalem to Emmaus, Jesus appeared behind the two travellers. He then caught up with them and began to speak with them. He inquired as to the topic of their conversation because they appeared to be sad. No doubt, the recent events of the crucifixion and burial of Christ weighed heavily upon them. In their discussion, there was a mixture of hope and despair as well as references to his resurrection -- some leading to assurance, others leading to doubt. From the tone of their dialogue, it was apparent that they loved Christ and were bold enough in that love to reveal their association with him to a stranger. When Cleopas responded to the inquiry of Christ, he was amazed that one coming from the city would be ignorant of a topic that had so occupied everyone's thoughts lately. After Christ urged them to clarify what they meant, they reviewed all the events of the last three days and revealed how disappointed they were over the outcome. Sensing that their new fellow traveller was listening attentively, Cleopas revealed the hopes that he and his companion had had in Christ, which now appeared to be dashed.

Much of Jewish history had revolved around great deliverances achieved through renowned leaders such as Moses, Joshua, David, Hezekiah, and others. Like many of their day, these

two had wished that Christ would have brought political salvation from Rome. Cleopas confessed that it was already three days since Christ had died, and by this he seemed to be justifying his discouragement. Could it be that the two had taken Christ's reference to rising on the third day seriously? Could it be that they had stayed in Jerusalem until the third day and were now returning home, because the resurrection of Christ had seemingly not materialised?

Cleopas mentioned that the women who had visited the tomb early that morning found it to be empty. Were these men along the road to Emmaus belittling this testimony because it had come from women? Did they perhaps think that the angels would have first appeared to the disciples; or, if indeed the angels would have appeared to women at all, would they not have visited the grieving mother of Christ instead?

Christ needed to teach these two some important lessons before he would reveal himself to them. Therefore, he chided them, saying, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!" They were foolish because they did not believe what was written in the Old Testament about the Christ needing to suffer before he could be glorified. They knew of his distress on the Cross because this was the subject of everyone's conversation in Jerusalem, but had they really known the Scripture, they would have understood that his rising from the dead and glorification would also surely come to pass. These men, like the other disciples, thought that what had happened to Jesus was a denial of his Messiahship. But the truth is that the anguish of Christ on the Cross was necessary, because he indeed really was the Messiah. Jesus did not rebuke these men for disbelieving the report of the women about the empty tomb or the message from the angels, but rather for not understanding the Scriptures, the divinely-inspired Book which is a sure foundation for solid understanding. In the Scriptures, the prophets teach that the Christ first needed to suffer before he would be glorified.

Jesus gave a thorough exposition to these two men. He began with Moses and the prophets, expounding those things which pertained to him in the Scriptures. If we were asked what the greatest loss is among those sayings of Christ which were not recorded, it would be this revelation of the prophecies, signs, and symbols throughout all of the Old Testament which pointed to his sufferings, atoning death, and resurrection. How great the amazement of these two must have been as they heard this great dissertation which made the Old Testament seem like a new book to them. Christ opened their minds to understand, and aroused their hearts to perceive what he was saying. Such a twofold work is accomplished by the Holy Spirit in those who listen earnestly as he interprets the Scriptures to them, imprinting the message on their hearts. Cleopas and his companion described their encounter with Christ in this way: "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"

As this group of three approached the village of Emmaus, Jesus bade the two farewell,

indicating that he wanted to go further. But they convinced him to stay with them, owing to the lateness of the hour. He agreed, and they broke bread together. As Christ sat at the table with them, he assumed the role of host, for he took the bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. At that instant, they knew who he was; their eyes were opened and they recognised the resurrected Lord. But as soon as they understood his true identity, he vanished from their sight. Nevertheless, they got up quickly and returned to Jerusalem to tell the disciples the good news. If only everyone to whom Christ makes himself real would hurry to tell others of his saving grace and mercy, the greatest blessing would rest upon that person as well as those who listen!

## 7.2. Christ Appears to Peter

As Cleopas and his friend returned to Jerusalem by moonlight, Christ made his fourth appearance -- this time to Peter. As the two arrived to tell the disciples about their having seen Christ, the eleven in Jerusalem greeted them, saying, "It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon." (Luke 24:34). However, we are not given any details as to the place, hour, or manner of this encounter, nor do we know the subject of conversation between the Saviour and his foremost disciple. But it is most likely that Christ confirmed his love for Peter and let him know that he had accepted his repentance after his grievous fall. This would head off any despair resulting from that tragic episode.

## 7.3. Christ Appears to Ten Disciples

"On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you!' After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. Again Jesus said, 'Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.' And with that he breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.'" (John 20:19-23)

On that Sunday evening, the disciples met secretly, fearful that the Jewish elders would try to kill them, as they had their master. The news of the resurrection of Christ had greatly disturbed the leaders, so the disciples met behind closed doors for security. Thomas, for some reason, was absent.

Sometime prior to this meeting, Peter told the others that the risen Christ had appeared to him. Thus, when Cleopas and his friend arrived with the news of having seen Christ, the others told them that Peter had met with the Lord as well. These two related their account of what happened along the road to Emmaus, and how they had recognised Jesus when he broke bread with them. But among those present, it appears that there were still some who doubted

the fact of the resurrection, explaining away the appearances of Christ to Mary Magdalene, the other women, and Peter as mere illusions. Thus, they did not believe the story from these two either.

During this evening meeting, Christ appeared suddenly, without any door being opened. He stood among them and greeted them -- not with the usual "Peace be upon you", signifying an outward, temporal peace, but with "Peace be with you", for he would now give them an inner, spiritual peace in the midst of their fear and disturbance. This peace was the legacy he left with them when at his earlier parting address he said: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid" (John 14:27). Thus, he sought to still their troubled hearts with his peace just as he had stilled the raging Sea of Galilee during the storm. In him alone is the peace a believer needs with God and the relief he seeks from his own condemning conscience. In him is found the harmony we all need to live with others daily, according to the apostolic command: "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone" (Romans 12:18).

The disciples, however, were not prepared for this peace, on account of their weak faith. They were terrified, thinking they were seeing a spirit. But we can excuse them because his sudden appearance was a shock to them. His post-resurrectional appearances were distinct each time; he would come and go suddenly, and each time in a different way.

Because Christ had so often spoken to them in parables, the disciples considered his references to death and resurrection to be figurative. Thus, they did not pay much attention to his words; neither did they heed the witness of the women because they believed females to be particularly prone to delusions. Considering these circumstances, Christ censured them gently, saying, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds?" (Luke 24:38). But then, he lovingly invited them to see for themselves that he was real flesh and bones, showing them his hands, feet, and side. This is one more instance where Christ valued sensory proof as confirmation of fact, and he affirmed it in the most important of events; that is, his resurrection.

"And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, 'Do you have anything here to eat?' They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate it in their presence. He said to them, 'This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.' Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, 'This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.'" (Luke 24:41-49)

After eating some food in front of the disciples, Christ offered them what he had done for the two from Emmaus: he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, reminding them of the ancient prophecies, and repeating the predictions he had often made earlier. He went on to stress the importance of preaching repentance and forgiveness of sins in his name to all nations, starting in Jerusalem. By so doing, they would be eyewitnesses of what they had seen, heard, and been convinced of. He repeated to them his pledge to send the Holy Spirit, promised by the Father, and instructed them not to leave Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit had empowered them from above. He then delivered to them his commission: "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you" (John 20:21).

After he had said this, he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (John 20:22). Jesus is the Word who was with God at the beginning (John 1:2), and the one through whom God made the worlds (Hebrews 1:2). Thus, as he had breathed the breath of natural life into Adam, the first man, he now breathed the breath of a new spiritual life into his disciples.

#### **7.4. Christ Hallows Sunday**

The first day of that week was hallowed by the resurrection of Christ and by the five appearances he made on it. It is no wonder that his followers came to honour Sunday, for it was on that day that Christ instituted a new order, the foundation for the Church, and a new world in a spiritual sense. He consecrated this day for his followers as a memorial of the new creation which came into being through his atoning death. Thus, it took the place of the Jewish Sabbath which commemorated the completion of the original Creation. What further supports this conviction is the fact that Christ was absent from his followers an entire week before he reappeared for the sixth time on the following Sunday. Moreover, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at the birth of the Christian Church took place on Sunday, coinciding with the Jewish Feast of Pentecost (Acts 2).

#### **7.5. Christ Appears to Thomas**

"Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord!' But he said to them, 'Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it.' A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you!' Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.' Thomas said to him, 'My Lord and my God!' Then Jesus told him, 'Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.'" (John 20:24-29)

When Christ appeared the sixth time on the following Sunday, the disciples were again



indoors; but now Thomas was with them. Christ entered despite the doors being shut, and he stood in their midst. It seems he made this special appearance just for Thomas, for this disciple had refused to believe unless he saw and touched Christ for himself. He had rejected the proofs that convinced his companions, insisting that he wanted to put his own hands into the wounds of Christ.

Perhaps Thomas was ashamed of his words once Christ appeared to him. It could be that he shrank back from actually putting his hands into Jesus' wounds; we do not know. However, we do know that he immediately stopped doubting and declared the absolute certainty of his faith, saying, "My Lord and my God!" Christ was no doubt pleased that Thomas finally believed, but he chided him for insisting on sensory proof. He elevated the position and blessed state of those who believe even when no visual proof exists. This blessedness is for all believers. Therefore, let us not follow those who base their faith merely on visible evidence.

Although we pity Thomas' lack of faith, we do commend him for demanding sufficient proof before accepting a fundamental religious truth. It is not permissible to base one's religious conviction on what others have seen or experienced. The intelligent person is not content to receive what has been passed down from his forefathers, lest he should receive what is false; for error is passed down just the same as truth. Likewise, no one should be satisfied in basing his faith on what the scholars lay claim to, without first investigating and testing their evidence for himself. Doubt in religious matters can actually be a door to certainty, because it leads to examination which, in turn, leads to firmness of belief. There can be no real assurance or conviction in religious matters without personal searching.

Why then did Christ rebuke Thomas? It is because he went too far in demanding proof. He disbelieved as an excuse for denying the facts. He demanded sensory proof and belittled moral and spiritual evidence. We do not blame him for insisting on seeing as the others had seen, but for not accepting their testimony. If judges of the law were to do as Thomas did in reaching a verdict, they would not be able to pass judgement in any case. Imagine a judge insisting on seeing for himself what the eyewitnesses in the courtroom had witnessed concerning a lawsuit brought before him! If believers had followed the example of Thomas, all preaching would have ceased and the Christian Church would have disappeared soon after its inception.

## **7.6. Christ Appears to Seven Disciples**

"Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Tiberias. It happened this way: Simon Peter, Thomas (called Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. 'I'm going out to fish', Simon Peter told them, and they said, 'We'll go with you.' So they went out and got into the boat, but that night

they caught nothing. Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. He called out to them, 'Friends, haven't you any fish?' 'No', they answered. He said, 'Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.' When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish. Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, 'It is the Lord!' As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, 'It is the Lord', he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread. Jesus said to them, 'Bring some of the fish you have just caught.' Simon Peter climbed aboard and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, 'Come and have breakfast.' None of the disciples dared ask him, 'Who are you?' They knew it was the Lord. Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead." (John 21:1-14)

Jesus instructed his disciples to go ahead of him into Galilee, which was wise, because most of the believers were there, and these needed to hear from the disciples about the suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ. While at the Sea of Galilee, Christ appeared to a select group of seven. This was his seventh appearance after his resurrection. As for the verse that reads, ""This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead."" , John meant that it was the third time that Christ appeared to a group of his disciples, regardless of other visits he had made to individuals.

The Sea of Galilee is one of the most beautiful locations in the Holy Land and, on this occasion, Jesus appeared to seven of his disciples who were all together in one boat. These disciples, for the most part, had been fishermen, and when Jesus called them, they left their nets and enrolled in his service. After the crucifixion of Christ, however, they were thrown into a state of discouragement, so they returned to their former trade, forgetting all they had learned. But that night they caught nothing. Divine providence deprived them of fish in order to open their eyes to something far greater. God often deals with us in this way.

Christ well knew the extent of their toil that night and their resulting hunger. In his wisdom, he first took care of their temporal needs, inviting them to eat. Again, it was he who served them.

### **7.7. Christ Probes the Heart of Peter**

"When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?' 'Yes, Lord', he said, 'you know that I love you.' Jesus said, 'Feed my lambs.' Again Jesus said, 'Simon son of John, do you truly love me?' He answered, 'Yes,

Lord, you know that I love you.' Jesus said, 'Take care of my sheep.' The third time he said to him, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?' Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, 'Do you love me?' He said, 'Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.' Jesus said, 'Feed my sheep.'" (John 21:15-17)

After serving his disciples breakfast by the sea, Christ devoted special attention to Peter in order to assure him and the other disciples that he had accepted his repentance after his tragic fall, and that his apostolic rank remained unchanged. However, there was a note of mild rebuke aimed at everyone, especially Peter, for leaving the care of souls in order to catch fish.

Like a spiritual surgeon, Christ hurt Peter in order to heal him, asking, "Do you truly love me more than these?" In other words, Christ was asking Peter if he loved him more than his fellow disciples -- those who, although they had deserted him out of fear, never denied him as he had. Peter answered, saying, "Yes Lord; You know that I love You"; but he did not indicate whether he loved Christ more. Because Jesus inquires about the motivation of all that we do, he did not ask Peter about his deeds, knowledge, or intentions, but about the state of his heart -- how he felt inwardly. Had Jesus asked Peter about his actions, there would have been reason for embarrassment, for his performance had not been all that impressive as of late. But despite his fall, Peter was not a hypocrite, because his inward motivation was right. He had merely failed in his actions. It is the person who seeks to conceal his inward corruption with "good" behaviour that is a hypocrite. But since it is the desire of Christ that outward deeds reflect a righteous heart, he was not content with Peter's mere confession of love for him. He wanted exemplary deeds from him as well. It was wrong for Peter to leave the care of souls to catch fish, returning to serve his own interests instead of seeking the welfare of others. Therefore, Christ told him, "Feed My lambs", restoring him to the apostolic function he had lost through his fall. With these words, Christ also replaced the role of Peter as a "fisher of souls" with that of "shepherd of souls". And in this charge concerning the "lambs", we see the true task of all spiritual "shepherds": caring for the poor, the young, the weak, the dejected, and those frail in spirit.

Christ again asked Peter if he loved him, and again he got the same reply from him; but this time Christ said, "Take care of my sheep." Prior to Christ being seized in the Garden of Gethsemane, Peter had told him three times that he would not deny him, yet, he denied him thrice. We now see Christ asking Peter a penetrating question three times, and it cut Peter to the quick. Peter was overcome with emotion and answered passionately, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." The one who truly loves Christ will invariably obey him. Also, one can only do good to a neighbour if he loves Christ. This sort of love is possible because Christ has first loved us. He still asks us if we love him. What will our answer be?

## **7.8. Christ Appears to More Than Five Hundred**

"After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep." (1 Corinthians 15:6)

The book of Acts tells us that Christ showed himself alive after his suffering with many reliable proofs, being seen for forty days and speaking about the things pertaining to the kingdom of God (Acts 1:3). At the beginning of his public ministry, Christ had spent forty days battling Satan in the wilderness. At the end of his ministry, he spent another forty days declaring his decisive victory over Satan and the forces of darkness. He did this for his disciples to help them realise that his spiritual presence would abide with them continually.

The foremost post-resurrectional appearance of Christ is this, his eighth, which was also the second and last in his home country of Galilee. It is here that he appeared to more than five hundred brethren at once, most of whom were still alive when the Apostle Paul wrote his letter to the church in Corinth. Matthew, the Evangelist, says that when they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted (Matthew 28:17). Their doubt can be understood in view of the total transfiguration of Christ, which made it difficult for them to recognise him or even to believe that it really was him.

A gathering of five hundred people is quite an event! The fact that such a crowd came together indicates an appointment was set beforehand. In the account of this meeting, we have the clearest evidence recorded of the reality of Christ's resurrection. Scripture mentions the words which Christ addressed to his disciples -- words which he could not have uttered, had he not truly risen from the grave. Some of the paramount declarations of Christ will be discussed in the ensuing paragraphs:

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Matthew 28:18). Can anyone logically attribute such a claim to a man who had recently been shamefully crucified in view of a crowd gathered from many parts of the world? What Christ said next is also highly significant: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit..." (Matthew 28:19). From time immemorial, the aim of the Jews was to keep themselves separate from other nations, confining the teaching and associated benefits of their faith to their own people, despising other peoples from a religious prejudice. Is it reasonable then that the disciples of Christ would suddenly devise an evangelistic teaching based on the knowledge of the triune nature of God, when they had not even understood such concepts in their own religious instruction?

One of the grandest sayings of Christ, which attests most clearly as proof of his resurrection, is the following: "... And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:20); "... Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:16). If Christ had not truly risen, he could not possibly remain with them. But if he truly was, and would continue to be with them, then no uncertainty remains as to the reality of his resurrection. Because his presence with them was spiritual, he

substantiated it to them by signs, tangible to the senses, in those first years after his ascension into heaven; that is, by miracles which he would empower them to perform. When the accounts of these signs and wonders were faithfully documented, they became a sufficient proof to the world, and the need for them to be repeated generation after generation ceased.

Christ promised the apostles that certain signs would accompany believers: "And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well" (Mark 16:17,18). The miracles which the weak band of apostles performed in the name of Christ were sufficient confirmation of these words, for these men proclaimed the Christian message in many countries in just a short time, and millions from the Gentile nations joined the Church as a result. The authentic reports of the success of the Church demonstrate the reality of Christ's resurrection, and they prove that those powerful statements were uttered by none other than Christ himself!

The farewell address of Christ to his disciples in Galilee coheres as a philosophical whole. He declared that he had all power in heaven and earth, and he promised to perform miracles through them as proof of this. Such a claim necessitates his being present with them continually. These three truths are interdependent, each confirming the other. Moreover, Christ could not have claimed such authority, nor enabled his apostles to do miracles, nor have been present with them always if he had not truly ascended into heaven after his resurrection, taking his place at the right hand of majesty on high.

Christ instructed his disciples to preach his Gospel to the world, and this is a lasting command for all of his followers. It depends upon his promise to be with them when they carry it out. There is no more noble, sublime, and vital human activity than this task of preaching. The success which Christ promised would attend this venture depends upon the activity of the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of One God, who was given after Christ himself, the Incarnate Person of the Trinity, had ascended into heaven.

Christ instructed his apostles not to leave Jerusalem but to wait for the promise of the Holy Spirit from the Father. He told them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:7,8)

## **7.9. Christ Appears to James**

"Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles..." (1 Corinthians 15:7)

The ninth post-resurrectional appearance of Christ was to the Apostle James. It is noticeable

that all the post-resurrectional appearances of Christ were confined to his believing followers. This is proper because Christ knew that he could not bring his opponents to faith -- even if he appeared to them. He had said previously, "If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead." Thus, sensory proof is not enough to create faith in spiritual matters. In support of this, we can see how the Jewish leaders refused to believe that Christ had risen from the dead, despite the claims to the contrary from the Roman guards stationed outside of the tomb.

### **7.10. Christ Appears to Saul of Tarsus**

"And last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born. For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God." (1 Corinthians 15:8,9)

Included among the post-resurrectional appearances of Christ is one of notable importance one which occurred after his ascension into heaven; namely, that to Saul of Tarsus, a persecutor of the Church, who was brought surprisingly to faith in him. This last appearance of the risen Christ is especially decisive, for it silences the claim of critics who say that the accounts of Christ's post-resurrectional appearances are invalid because they were merely imagined by those who had loved him deeply and who were emotionally attached to him.

### **7.11. The Spiritual Kingdom of Christ**

"Until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: 'Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' So when they met together, they asked him, 'Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?' He said to them: 'It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.'" (Acts 1:2-8)

The death of Christ had put the disciples' initial hopes of a earthly, Jewish, political kingdom to rest. However, his resurrection had revived these aspirations. But the reply of Christ to them exposed the fallacy of their presupposition, while instilling legitimate hope within them -- that which would assure their success in their new work as witnesses to Christ the Saviour. He instructed them to begin their preaching in Jerusalem, but they were not to stop there; they were to reach out to the ends of the earth.

## 7.12. Rays of Light from the Resurrection Morn

It is not in vain that Arabic-speaking Christians call the Resurrection Morn, *Sabah Al-Nour*. This means "Morning of Light", and it describes the shining of the greatest light which the world has ever seen, when Christ arose from the grave. It was he who said, "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12). Truly, the empty tomb of Christ is a great source of spiritual light!

The first ray of this light confirms that Christ came from heaven, and it witnesses to the perfection of his work of salvation. It attests to his authority as the Son of God and Son of Man. Therefore, he is the sole and sufficient Saviour of mankind.

The second ray of light is that which illuminated the darkness of the tomb, removing its despair from the hearts of believers. Christ went down into the grave ahead of us so that we would not have to fear going down after him. In line with this truth are the words which Christ had uttered earlier: "A student is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master" (Matthew 10:24). We do not need to fear death because Christ has passed through it on our behalf.

The Apostle Paul proclaimed: "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" (1 Corinthians 15:55). Christ shared in our humanity so that by his death he could destroy him who held the power of death - that is, the devil - and free those who were held in bondage by their fear of death all their lives (Hebrews 2:14,15).

The third ray of the light from the Resurrection is a guarantee for the resurrection of believers in glory, for Christ's own resurrection is a model and pledge of this truth. Christ is referred to as "the firstborn from the dead" (Colossians 1:18), because he was the first to die and rise again, never more to die.

The fourth ray of Resurrection light is a prelude to the ascension of Christ in his glorified body to sit forever as the Son of God and Son of Man at the right hand of God in heaven, performing his office as Mediator, and illuminating the heavenlies with his resplendent glory. No wonder the Apostle Paul wrote to the church at Philippi that he counted everything as loss compared to knowing Christ and his resurrection power (Philippians 3:8).

The fifth ray is one of consolation for those whose loved ones have died. These have earned the commendation which says: "'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.' 'Yes', says the Spirit, 'they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them'" (Revelation 14:13). Those who are sorrowing also have the following beatitude to console them: "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted" (Matthew 5:4).

During the days of the apostles and Church fathers, Christians used to wear white garments when a loved one died, witnessing to the coming, glorious resurrection of the deceased. They

regarded the day of a believer's death to be his "birthday". Among the glorious promises of Christ is one in which he vows to wipe away every tear from the eyes of believers (Revelation 21:4). Thus, each Christian can say with Paul that "to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21). Believers shall rise as a result of Christ's own resurrection.

## 8. The Ascension Of Christ Into Heaven

"After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. 'Men of Galilee', they said, 'why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.' Then they returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day's walk from the city." (Acts 1:9-12)

Having finished his work which required his visible presence among men, Christ prepared his disciples for his final physical departure. As the disciples were returning to Jerusalem in obedience to his command, Christ appeared to them and led them out to Bethany, to a place on the Mount of Olives. After blessing them with outstretched hands, he left them and ascended into heaven. The disciples looked on until a cloud hid him from their sight. But as he was leaving them, two angels appearing as men dressed in white spoke to them, saying: "Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven." This instilled within them a deep sense of worship, and their confidence in his oneness with God was reinforced.

The disciples returned to the city with great joy and spent their time in the Temple worshipping God. They rejoiced over the momentous mission which their master had completed, even though they did not have his bodily presence with them any longer. They were being sent even as Christ himself had been sent by the Father, and they were glad to be entrusted with a task that would promote and support his work. They were assured that his spiritual presence would continue with them, and they were grateful for his promise of sufficient power to enable them to be his witnesses throughout the world.

The disciples were filled with joy when the two angels proclaimed the eventual return of their master to earth. Christ himself had often told them of this, but it seems that the effect of his words on them was weak. Therefore, they needed to hear the message of the angels at this moment of separation. The theme of the glorious second coming of Christ is among the most important subjects for the Church today. This is her great hope, even though the exact time of his return is not known. We cannot be dogmatic in the details of the Second Coming because the literal words cannot be sifted from the figurative in those prophecies pertaining to his return. But all faithful believers who are attentive to the commands of their Lord can repeat



the prayer at the end of the New Testament: "...Even so, come, Lord Jesus!" (Revelation 22:20).

## **8.1. The Disciples Preach**

"After the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, he was taken up into heaven and he sat at the right hand of God. Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it." (Mark 16:19,20)

After the ascension of Christ, the disciples went out preaching everywhere, and the Lord worked with them, confirming their words with miracles. The Master from his heavenly throne spread a protective canopy over them, and he would not permit his and their enemies to treat them at that stage in the way they had dealt with him. As they continued to frequent the Temple, we do not know which Jewish expressions of worship they retained and which they dropped. But they no doubt presented the more important offerings and sacrifices which were acceptable to God; namely those of a broken spirit, praise, and thanksgiving (Psalm 51:17; Hebrews 13:15).

Lest we should think that these reports are all that matters in the history of Christianity, we have the following verse recorded at the close of the Gospel according to John: "Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written" (John 21:25). This then is the conclusion of the account of this uniquely divine Person for the duration of his visible presence on earth.

The title by which people knew him during the roughly three years of his ministry was Master, and his teachings rather than his miracles comprise the greater and more important part of his work. Christ taught that the One God, who is Spirit, is the Father of all men, and that he loves them despite their wickedness. He stressed that the important thing in religion is not what a man does for God but what God does for man, and what he gives us out of love. Man's works, however fine they might be, do not merit salvation because this is only given by faith in the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross. Therefore, religion does not consist in ceremonials and external ordinances which are only the outward garment of belief; the true essence of religion is inward and spiritual, and its source is the heart -- not the body or mind. Christ emphasised the seriousness of hypocrisy, for it is delusive. This sin causes a person to believe himself to be something he is not, and this is one of the most despicable forms of evil in the sight of God. With regard to this sin, Christ taught that sinners are nearer to the kingdom of heaven than religious leaders who are hypocrites. Christ also taught that honour goes to the humble, that the value of the world and all it contains is as nothing compared to righteousness and divine commendation, that a man's service to others is the basis of true greatness, that the emphasis of the Scriptures is the spirit of its teaching and not its letter, and

that it is not permissible to add human traditions to divine teachings in order to placate the conscience.

## 8.2. Christ is Alive Here and Now

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is for all the world and for all time until the end of the age. It is not, like the annals of the great, a record of the actions of a person who is no longer with us, but rather a proclamation of an ever-present Saviour and of matters of present importance for all. It is Christ who gave the following promise to believers being tossed about in the storms of life: "Do not fear. I am the first and the last, the Living One who was and is and is to come. See, I am alive forever. Have faith my son. I have overcome the world. According to your faith be it unto you." We can feel the touch of his able hands, knowing that they bestow healing and life. In the knowledge of him we can find eternal life. In Emmanuel, our companion, we as believers can receive comfort in times of loneliness, relief in times of distress, encouragement in the hour of fear, warning in the hour of temptation, correction in the time of failure, refreshment during work, guidance and instruction in the hour of doubt and defeat, forgiveness at the moment of repentance, and praise in the hour of victory.

Whoever studies the life of Christ can discover that many of the standards of the world are false. He can come to understand that a departure from these standards is a necessary result of a new spiritual nature implanted within him through faith in Christ.

Throughout our study of the life of Christ, we have witnessed the hallelujahs of the angels at his birth, the star convincing the magi of his greatness, the opened heavens allowing the Holy Spirit to descend upon him at the Jordan, the voice from heaven confirming his rank with God, the ministry of the angels after his victory in the wilderness, his shining appearance at his glorious transfiguration and the accompanying visit from Moses and Elijah -- not to mention the voice from heaven saying: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased" (Luke 3:22). We have noted the third voice from heaven in the Temple during the Passion Week, saying, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again" (John 12:28), the ministry of the angels to Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane, the darkening of the sun, the earthquake, the splitting open of the rocks and the graves at Golgotha, the second earthquake which frightened the Roman guards at Christ's resurrection, the angel rolling away the stone from the tomb, the repeated angelic appearances at the site of the tomb, and the ten appearances of Christ to his disciples after his resurrection. We recall the ease with which he performed his miracles and their great number and joyful outcome, his moral and spiritual perfection, his ascension into heaven in his chariot of cloud, and his being seated at the right hand of God. We stand amazed at the teachings of Christ and their fruit, his patient, invincible love, his righteous indignation, his direct rebukes, his wonderful, boundless patience to both friend and foe, his total victory over all the plots of his enemies -- and all this for the salvation of mankind! Beholding all these things, we can understand the prelude

of the Gospel according to John, where the Beloved Disciple writes: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:1,14). We also see an adequate foundation to confirm the conclusion of this same book, where John writes: "...But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:31).

## **9. Quiz**

If you have studied this book, you can answer the questions easily. Mail them to us. Please do not forget to write your full name and address clearly.

1. What is the meaning of "Gethsemane"? What are we to understand from its definition in relation to what happened there to Christ?
2. Complete the following statement: "Christ, when transfigured, displayed the brilliance of his greatness, like the sun on the earthly horizon. But while at Gethsemane...."
3. How did the elders of the Jews make certain that they would seize Christ and not another?
4. What did you learn from the following words of Christ to Judas in the Garden of Gethsemane: "...Are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?"
5. Peter cut off the ear of Malchus, but Christ healed him. What do we learn from this incident?
6. The high priest asked Jesus if he was the Christ, the Son of God. What was Jesus' reply?
7. Write down the words to the following verses: Isaiah 1:18; 43:25; and Psalm 32:1.
8. How did Christ explain to Pilate that his kingdom was spiritual?
9. What do we know about Barabbas?
10. What did the wife of Pilate tell her husband during the trial of Christ?
11. Quote four of the seven utterances of Christ from the Cross.
12. Why did Christ tell the women of Jerusalem to weep for themselves and their children?
13. What did the repentant thief see in Christ which made him say, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom"?
14. Why did Christ cry out: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me"?
15. What did the centurion, who supervised the Crucifixion, say about Christ?
16. How did Pilate and the Jewish leaders make certain that Christ was truly dead on the Cross?

17. Which prophecy was fulfilled when Christ was buried in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea?
18. How did Peter and John make sure that Christ had actually risen from the dead?
19. Who was the first person that saw Christ after he had risen from the dead?
20. Explain why it was impossible for the disciples to have stolen the body of Christ.
21. How did the two disciples from Emmaus recognise Christ?
22. Why did Christ hallow Sunday in place of Saturday? What proofs do we have of this?
23. How did Christ remove the doubts from the heart of Thomas?
24. Mention three rays from the light of the Resurrection Morn.
25. What did the angels say to the disciples after the ascension of Christ?

If you have any questions about the Christian faith, we will be happy to answer them for you. Do not forget to write your full name and address inside the letter as well as on the envelope.  
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