

CHAPTER 26, THE HOUR OF DARKNESS

TIMELESS TRUTH: IT IS FINISHED!

CHAPTER SUMMARY (Have someone in your group read the summary section.)

Knowing that His time had come, Jesus spent His last few hours with His disciples. The Passover was approaching so they prepared a customary feast. But this was no ordinary Passover meal; Jesus was about to change history. At His “last supper,” He taught the disciples a significant lesson by washing their feet. He even washed Judas’ feet, although He knew Judas would betray Him. Then Jesus took the unleavened bread and cup of wine from the Passover meal and instituted the New Covenant, the Covenant that Jeremiah and Ezekiel had promised centuries ago. Aware of His God-ordained destiny, Jesus clarified His relationship to the Father so that His disciples might understand what lay ahead. He promised them that an advocate, the Spirit, would come and help after His own departure. After a lengthy prayer to the Father for His glorification, Jesus led this rag-tag group through the night to the Garden of Gethsemane.

What Peter lacked in judgment, he made up for in zeal. Peter pledged to even die with his Lord rather than abandon Him. But Jesus knew that He would go through His ordeal alone. He told Peter that he would disown Him three times before dawn. Jesus’ anguish for what was to come drove Him to agonizing prayer. Peter and his companions quickly exchanged fidelity for forty winks while Jesus prayed, searching to see if there was any way to avoid what was awaiting Him. He answered His own prayer when He acknowledged that He would do God’s will and not His own. Then Jesus’ betrayer and conspirators arrived to arrest Him. They escorted Him to Caiaphas’ kangaroo court. No one could find legitimate charges against Jesus until He affirmed His identity—Messiah, the Son of God. The Sanhedrin charged Him with blasphemy and sentenced Him to death. The religious henchmen beat and belittled their legitimate King. Watching from a safe distance, Peter denied knowing Jesus three times before the rooster crowed. Stunned and ashamed, he left in bitter humiliation. Judas, in a sudden moment of remorse, returned the blood money and opted for a rope.

Meanwhile, Pilate was stuck between a rock and a hard place. The Jews wanted Jesus crucified, and he wanted Caesar’s sustained support. What’s a governor of a no-name, backwater region of Rome to do? Interrogating Jesus himself, he found no legitimate charge to pin on this man. Yet the pressure was escalating from the crowd as they threatened to turn him in to Caesar as a rebel sympathizer. Pilate’s thug soldiers clothed, beat, and crowned Jesus with contempt before they marched Him to the cross.

Crucifixion was an exceptionally cruel way to die. The public execution drew hordes of scornful onlookers. Their jeers challenged Jesus to save Himself. They failed to grasp that Jesus was there to save them. One of the two criminals crucified with Jesus, however, got the picture. His faith secured his place in paradise. Even the creation itself testified to the enormity of this event. As sin overcame Jesus, darkness eclipsed the whole land. For the first time in eternity, Jesus was forsaken by His Father.

“It is finished,” He proclaimed. At that very moment, the temple curtain was torn, an earthquake split rocks and tombs were opened. It was finished. What could compel the Son of God to endure such torture? Finishing. Finishing the work that the Father sent Him to do. The debt of all sinners was put on Jesus, who alone could pay it in full. God is holy, loving, and just. His love compels Him to pursue His people, but His holiness requires justice for sin. The mob of mockers witnessed a Lower Story drama. A few faithful disciples witnessed a Lower Story injustice. But God witnessed the Upper Story culmination of a plan prepared before the foundation of the world. It was no surprise. It was justice. And it was finished.

ICEBREAKER QUESTION: Which of the unusual events surrounding the crucifixion of Jesus do you find most compelling, and why?

1. In what ways does Jesus' preparation and celebration of his final Passover meal parallel the original Passover? What does this teach us about the purpose of Jesus' death? (Review Exodus 12:1-13 and 21-27, John 1:29, and 1 Corinthians 5:7-8.)
2. What was Jesus trying to teach the disciples when he washed their feet? What are some ways you can wash each others' feet as a small group?
3. Review Jeremiah 31:34 and Ezekiel 36:26-28, where the prophets describe the new covenant. What are some of the characteristics of the new covenant listed in these verses? How does Jesus fulfill these promises?
4. Look back at pages 369-370. How would you describe Jesus' special relationship to the Father?
5. How is the Spirit described on p. 370? How have you experienced the Holy Spirit in your life?
6. What can we learn about Jesus and about prayer from the Garden of Gethsemane (p. 372-373)?
7. Compare Judas with Peter after each betrayed Jesus (p. 375). How can you tell the difference between remorse and repentance?
8. The Sanhedrin could find no evidence to charge Jesus (p. 374). (Jewish Law, Deuteronomy 17:6, required two witnesses.) Three times Pilate declared, "*I find no basis for a charge against him*" (p. 376-377). Why is this important? Why was Jesus crucified?
9. Discuss the irony of the statement, "*He saved others but He can't save himself.*" How do you feel that such a price was paid for you?
10. Compare Jesus as King to Israel's and Judah's former kings and the religious leaders of Jesus' day to Israel's religious leaders in the past. Why did Israel need King Jesus?

In the time remaining ask your group members to share any of their personal reflection insights from their journal entries.

CLOSING PRAYER