

# WHAT TO BELIEVE

A Student's Guide to the 7 Final Words of Jesus



by  
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## **SESSIONS**

4 Gospels, One Jesus

- Luke 23:34 - The Word of Forgiveness
  - Luke 23:43 - The Word of Salvation
  - John 19:26–27 - The Word of Care
- Matthew 27:46 & Mark 15:34 - The Word of Worship
  - John 19:28 - The Word of Distress
  - John 19:30 - The Word of Triumph
  - Luke 23:46 - The Word of Reunion
  - Easter
- Afterwards, or Now What?

# 4 GOSPELS, 1 JESUS

## Where did the Gospels Come From?

The Four Gospels were written based on eye witness testimony and investigation within 50 years of the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ, the Son Incarnate. These accounts are the earliest and most reliable documents about the life of Jesus. They are also the most reliable ancient documents of all time.

Each Gospel is based on eye witness testimony: The Gospel According to Matthew is from Matthew, one of Jesus' disciples and focuses on Jesus as the prophesied Kind of Israel, the Son of David, represented by a Lion; The Gospel According to Mark (the earliest Gospel written) is from John Mark, who is also found in the Acts of the Apostles and one of Paul's letters and focuses on Jesus as an Ox, being a servant and sacrifice, and this is based on Peter's, another of Jesus' disciples, testimony; The Gospel According to Luke is from Luke's investigation and research and focuses on Jesus as Man, and is part one of Luke's two part work (the second is Acts). These three Gospels are called the Synoptic Gospels because they sync up on over 75% of their content. The Gospel According to John has 90% original content that isn't found in the Synoptic Gospels, and focuses on Jesus as God, symbolized as an Eagle or Griffin since Eagles are the only animals that can look directly into the Sun and Griffins, with a body of a lion and the head, wings, and front talons of an eagle, since they represented both Heaven and Earth in Medieval symbology.

## Why Four Gospels?

Each Gospel has a specific theological goal: Matthew to show Jesus as King, Mark to show Jesus as Servant, Luke to show Jesus as Man, and John to show Jesus as God. The authors did not "swap notes" but were each written independently from each other. As King, Jesus rules over his people with perfect justice and love; as Servant, Jesus serves his friends, family, and enemies; as a Man, Jesus experiences the effects of a sinful world while never sinning himself; as God, He is perfect, and able to change our hearts and minds to agree with how He sees the world and what must be done to redeem it and all within it, would they believe.

While each Gospel is beautiful on its own, the combination of all Four Gospels presents a fuller image of Jesus on earth. Imagine four colors: Purple for Matthew, Red for Mark, Green for Luke, and Blue for John. By themselves, each color has many different variants and shades, rich and complex, and a single color can't be a wonderful piece of art. However, when all four colors are available for use, a richer, more complex and whole painting can be created. SO it is with the Gospels.

## Are There Other Gospels?

About 150-200 years after the original Four Gospels were written and accepted by the Church, fabricated Gospels (called Gnostic Gospels) written under pseudonyms began to circulate. These "gospels" contradicted or rewrote what the original Gospels affirmed and taught. You can think of them as really bad fan-fiction. So, these "new" gospels were rejected by most but were kept by some.

## Four Gospels, One Jesus

While Jesus was on the Cross, He said 7 Words. These are called *words* even though they are *sentences*. Not all 7 Words are from the same Gospel, but all were said by Christ before his death. Before we reach the resurrection, we should look at Jesus' final Words.

## Questions for Reflection

1. Which Gospel is your favorite and why?
2. Would you be able to tell if you were reading a false Gospel?
3. What would your "final words" be?



# THE WORD OF FORGIVENESS

## Before you Read

Ask yourself this question: *Could you forgive those who were killing you while you were dying?*

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## First Word in Scripture

***“Then Jesus said, “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.”  
And they cast lots to divide his clothing.”***

-The Gospel According to Luke 23:34, NRSV

## Forgiveness for the Unforgivable

I think we would all say something like, “I would never kill Jesus.” However, this simply isn’t the case. As harsh as it sounds, to sin against God is not only an act of defiance and disobedience, but it is also an act of death: to sin is to declare that we wish God were dead so we wouldn’t be held accountable for our wrong doings. We want to do things our way, not God’s way. Even when we are Christians, we will learn to let God be God in our lives, because God is good. Even though we weren’t the ones who put him on the Cross, Jesus suffered willingly for our crimes against God as though we had.

And while Jesus is dying, His body beaten and torn beyond recognition, He looks upon his executioners, and says the most counter-intellectual, unexpected, surprising thing:

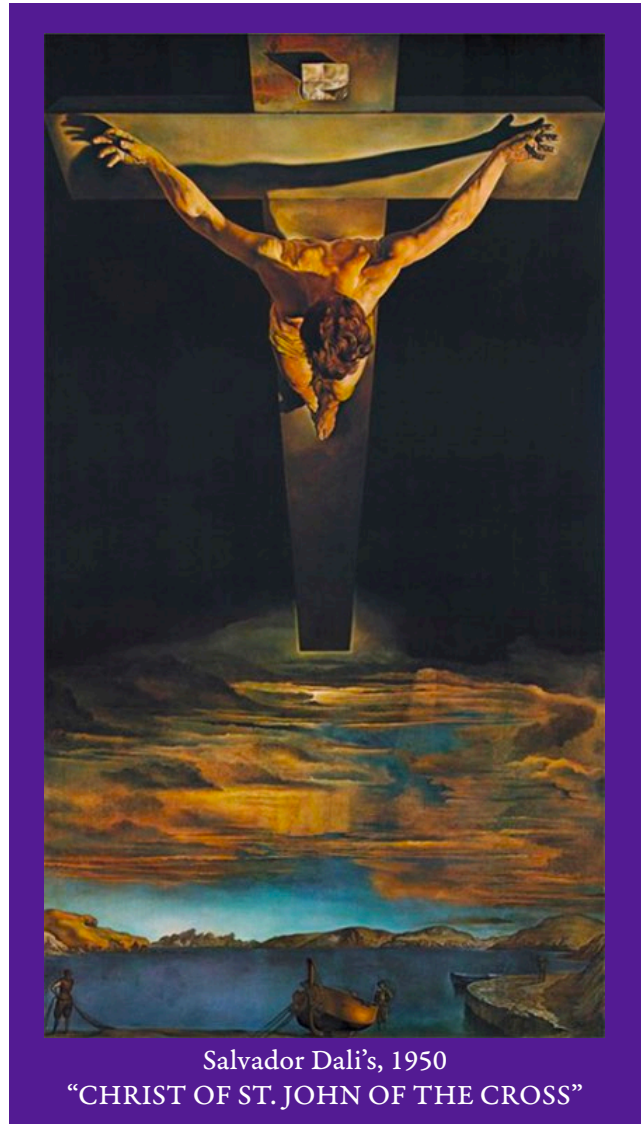
*“Father, forgive them...”* **Why?** *“...for they do not know what they are doing.”*

It is likely that the soldiers were just following orders and had no recognition of Jesus as the Messiah (except that one soldier). Jesus is asking God to forgive their ignorance and their mocking him, which further illustrates the limitless compassion of divine grace.

This Word of Forgiveness shows us the kind of God we believe in and serve: Jesus is the God who desires all to repent and offers them opportunities to do so. His hope is that all will be saved, but he also made us with free wills, able to go against both God and ourselves. Jesus is showing us that we are called to forgive those who have sinned against us just as God forgives us when we sin against him. Jesus is the God of Forgiveness.

## Questions for Reflection

1. Why is forgiveness so hard?
2. Why does God forgive?
3. How does Jesus’ forgiveness show his love for God and his neighbor?



Salvador Dali's, 1950

“CHRIST OF ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS”



# THE WORD OF SALVATION

## Before you Read

Ask yourself this question: *Would you accept someones apology as they were dying?*

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## Second Word in Scripture

**“He replied, *“Truly, I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”*”**

-The Gospel According to Luke 23:43, NRSV

## Accepting Repentance

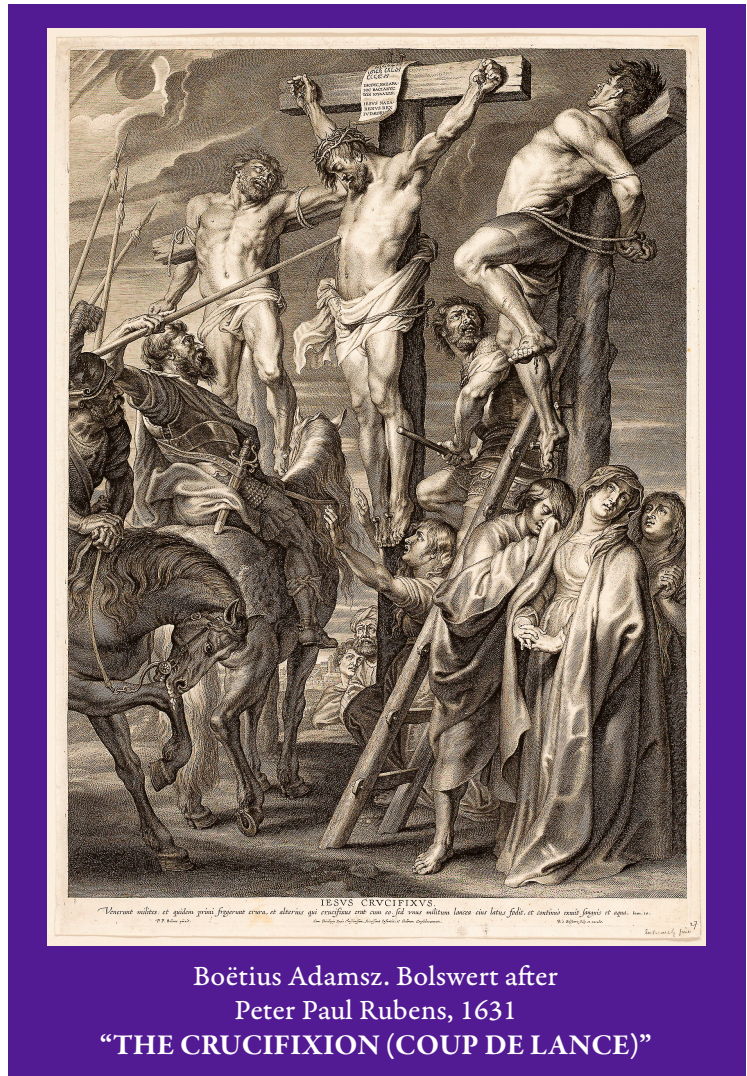
The verse above tells us how Jesus responded to one of the two thieves He was crucified between. One thief echoed the taunts of the crowd while the other confesses Jesus as Lord. Death is a powerful revealer of a what a person truly believes. While we don't know the heart of the second thief who asked Jesus to remember him when Jesus entered his Kingdom, the Bible does tell us Jesus' response to this type of “death bed” confession: Jesus accepted it.

As hard as it may be, we should desire that everyone comes to a moment of clarity, like the Prodigal Son at the pig trough, which leads to repentance and confession. We should also consider the attitude in which Jesus responded to this. Ultimately, we do not know the intention of most people's actions. Many people have done bad things with good intentions while others have done good things with bad intentions. Regardless, God will always accept a repentant sinner, welcoming them into the family of faith.

Jesus' words further emphasizes that even the most vile of sinners can be saved. Our hope should be for the salvation of all. However, we must remember that there were two thieves next to Jesus: both had heard and seen Jesus' ministry, teachings, miracles, yet only one believed while the other mocked. Jesus allowed both to happen.

## Questions for Reflection

1. Why is sin hard for us to forgive?
2. Did the thief deserve to be saved?
3. How do Jesus' words to the thief affect how we see non-Christians?



Boëtius Adamsz. Bolswert after  
Peter Paul Rubens, 1631  
“THE CRUCIFIXION (COUP DE LANCE)”



## Before you Read

Ask yourself this question: *How concerned will you be for others when you are dying?*

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## Third Word in Scripture

***“When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, “Woman, here is your son.” Then he said to the disciple, “Here is your mother.” And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.”***

-The Gospel According to John 19:26-27, NRSV

## Compassion in Pain

When we are in pain or are suffering, we tend to focus on ourselves. It’s natural. We want to stop the pain, end the suffering, ease the discomfort, leave the awkwardness. Escape seems to be the only thought we have.

However, Jesus did something incredible while he was suffering: he took care of his mother. Since Joseph is absent (for whatever reason) in the Gospels after Jesus’ teaching in the temple as a boy, Mary would have been without protection and provision with the death of her son. In his pain, Jesus was kind. He charges his best friend, John the Beloved, to take care of her after his death.

This moment is both intimate and grand! Even in his pain, God is concerned with the wellbeing of his family. Jesus was not only the Son of God, but also the Son of Mary: she carried him for 9 months, she raised him, disciplined him, trained him, taught him, nurtured him, loved him. Jesus was Mary’s son, and Jesus made sure she would have life...while he was dying for her.

## Questions for Reflection

1. How do we treat our Neighbor when we are suffering?
2. Why are Jesus’ words counterintuitive to what a “normal” person would say at this moment?
3. Why is it hard to care for others when we are not being cared for?





# THE WORD OF WORSHIP

## Before you Read

Ask yourself this question: *How concerned will you be for others when you are dying?*

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## Fourth Word in Scripture

***“And about three o’clock Jesus cried with a loud voice, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” that is, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?””***

-The Gospel According to Matthew 27:46, NRSV

***“At three o’clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?” which means, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?””***

-The Gospel According to Mark 15:34, NRSV

## The Psalms

Jesus is quoting the first verse from Psalm 22. Before you continue this lesson, take some time and read Psalm 22 and take note of any similarities between the psalm and the events of Jesus’ trial, beating, and crucifixion.

Some think this was Jesus crying out as He experienced what we could experience if we don’t repent of our sins and confess Jesus as Lord. Others think that the Father “turned his back” on the Son sin Jesus was the once and for all sacrifice for sin, meaning that all of the sins of the world were upon him at this time. And still others think that Jesus was, even now, associating himself with his people by reciting their liturgy. All of these hold some truth to them, but there is a fourth option that is not always addressed. Jesus is teaching us what to do when we are suffering: worship.

The Psalms were a collection of prayers and songs used as a sort national hymnal for Israel. Many early Christian hymns were Psalms put to melodies or music. Since God can never truly be separated from himself, the Father does not abandon the Son, despite what the Son in the flesh might be feeling. *The Son’s cry is not against the Father, but to Him.* He is not praying for deliverance but acknowledgment of what is being accomplished through him. Jesus was worshipping while he suffered.

## Questions for Reflection

1. Why is it difficult to worship when we are suffering?
2. Why does suffering often stop us from worshipping?
3. What do you pray when you are suffering?
4. Why is it hard to accept that some suffering is good for us?



Jacob Cornelisz. van Oostanen, late 15th - early 16th  
“THE CRUCIFIXION”





# THE WORD OF DISTRESS

## Before you Read

Ask yourself this question: *How human was Jesus?*

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## Fifth Word in Scripture

***“After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfill the scripture), “I am thirsty.””***

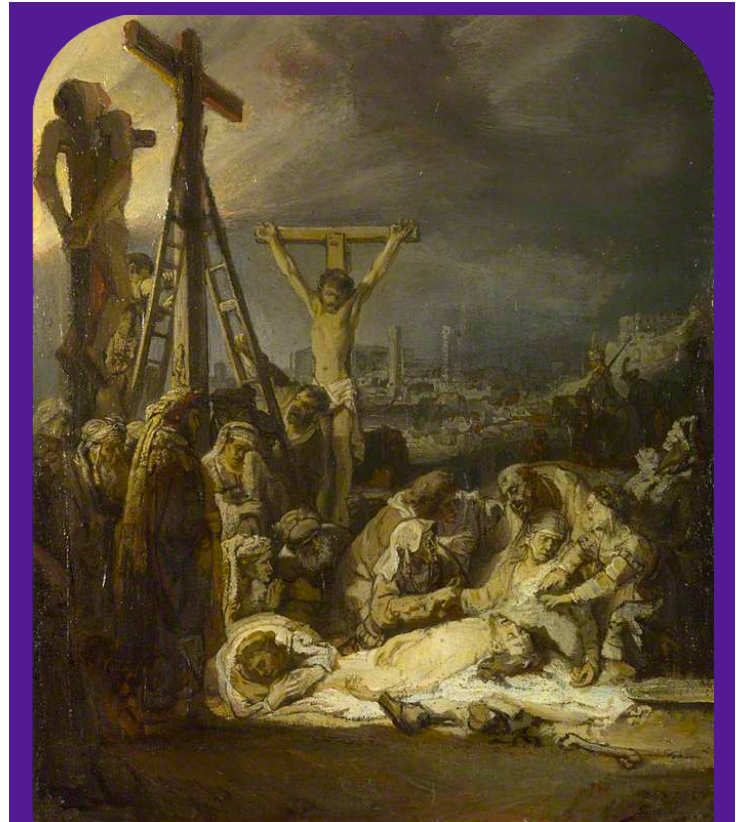
-The Gospel According to John 19:28, NRSV

## The God-Man

Jesus is God. We hear this often enough in Church. This is also the thing most non-Christians reject. God can't be Human. All the mythologies of the world are just that: stories, not histories. However, the Gospels are *not* stories: they *are* histories. The whole of Christianity rests on the truth of Christmas: God became man. To us, this is amazing. God isn't like Zeus or Artemis, all too-human-like gods full of flaws, nor is He like Heracles who ascended to godhood through trials and good works. No, God came down to earth as a man: the Incarnation.

But just how human was the Son? The answer: truly. The Son was Truly Human. This is a mystery that cannot be fully understood apart from faith. Just because we don't know *how* it happened doesn't mean it didn't happen. So, if Jesus was truly human that means he experienced everything humans do: he learned to walk, eat, talk, read, write, and use the restroom. He went through all the biological stages that you and I go through: he went through puberty and all that entails for boys. This means he was also tempted to sin and rebel against God, just like we are. However, He was without sin.

This means that Jesus also felt every physical affect of his suffering on the Cross. When Jesus asks for a drink, it is because he was thirsty because his body was shutting down, his organs were turning off. God was dying and he felt it.



Rembrandt van Rijn, 1635

**“THE LAMENTATION OVER THE DEAD CHRIST”**

## Questions for Reflection

1. Why is it hard for us to emphasize the humanity of Jesus?
2. What parts of Jesus' adolescence do you wish were written about?
3. What do you think about when you think about God as a Man?



# THE WORD OF TRIUMPH

## Before you Read

Ask yourself this question: *What does victory or success look like to you?*

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## Sixth Word in Scripture

***“When Jesus had received the wine, he said, “It is finished.” Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.”***

-The Gospel According to John 19:30, NRSV

## The End of His Work

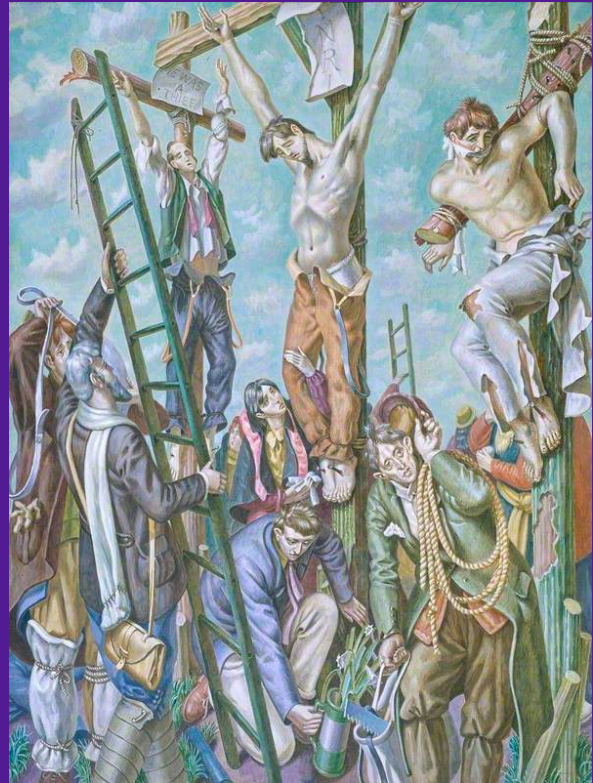
Isaiah 52:13-53:12 is one of the Servant Songs which predict the Messiah’s earthly work and activities. Before you continue this lesson, take some time and read Isaiah 52:13-53:12 and take note of any similarities between the psalm and the events of Jesus’ trial, beating, and crucifixion.

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The Son was not incarnated for a holiday. Nor was this a spur of the moment, Hail Mary pass that may or may not work. No, the Son became Man to become the ultimate sacrifice for our sins. Sin needs a punishment: life. This was the foundation of the Sacrificial System in the Old Testament: a life for a life, offering for disobedience, acts of repentance for forgiveness. But the old sacrificial system was only present to show that forgiveness was possible. The old system was also a ‘foreshadow’ as ‘type’ of Christ Israel should be anticipating. Jesus is the better sacrificial system; Jesus is the better sacrifice; Jesus is the better sacrificer.

In the Crucifixion, Jesus Jesus Christ dies in order to defeat the powers of evil in order to free mankind from their bondage: He is Christus Victor (Victorious Christ). In the Crucifixion, Jesus died to satisfy God’s wrath against our sin by being punished in our place in order to satisfy the justice of God: He is the Lamb of God.

“It is finished” is translated as “It is accomplished” in some translations. Both are correct and both grasp why the Son came to earth. The death of Jesus was only a defeat by worldly appearances. Actually, the death of Jesus was a victory. This was the “plan” all along. Man now has life from God’s death. God did what he planned to do.



Michael Rothenstein, 1937  
“THE CRUCIFIXION”

## Questions for Reflection

1. Why does our *life* come from Christ’s *death*?
2. How does our *life* com from Christ’s *death*?
3. What does the death of Christ tell us about who God is?



# THE WORD OF REUNION

## Before you Read

Ask yourself this question: *What does victory or success look like to you?*

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## Seventh Word in Scripture

***“Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.” Having said this, he breathed his last.”***

-The Gospel According to Luke 23:46, NRSV

## I and the Father are One

The Incarnation is a mystery. How God can become Man is a thing that can't be explained. This *doesn't* mean it didn't happen. It *does* mean that we simply don't know how it happened. This is not a cop out, since God is God and we are not, there are things that Christians can't fully comprehend or explain. However, there are Christian truths that can only be understood by faith, that is trust in and loyalty to God.

In this moment, Jesus dies. By this, we mean His body dies. God experienced physical death, as we all will, but there is another death we find in Scripture: separation from God. Death is first presented in Genesis when God protects Adam and Eve from “death” by commanding them to *not* eat the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, not because knowledge of good and evil is bad but because that knowledge should be grounded in God. God's morality is our standard, not our own. The serpent didn't tempt Adam and Eve with knowledge, but with knowledge apart from God. Adam and Eve already had knowledge of Good and Evil from God. Now, however, they had knowledge based on disobedience and rebellion, no based on right relationship with God. In this moment, Humanity dies. We are spiritually, emotionally, physically, consciously separated from God. Why death? Because God is the God of Life: there is no life apart from Him.

So did Jesus really die? Yes, as we all will, physically. But he will not experience the second death, that is, the Lake of Fire we read about in Revelation. Here, we see that God's love is clearly seen in Jesus dying as the ultimate sacrifice for our sins, for the sins of all who will believe in Him as Lord and Savior.



Theyre Lee-Elliott, 1963  
“CRUCIFIED TREE FORM”

## Questions for Reflection

1. What have you learned during these lessons about God?
2. What have you learned during these lessons about yourself?
3. What do these 7 Words reveal about the relationship between God and Man?

# EASTER

## Before you Read

Ask yourself this question: *What is Easter?*

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## Easter Word in Scripture

***“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.***

***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. 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.”***

-The Gospel According to Matthew 28:1-10

## He is Risen; He is Risen Indeed!

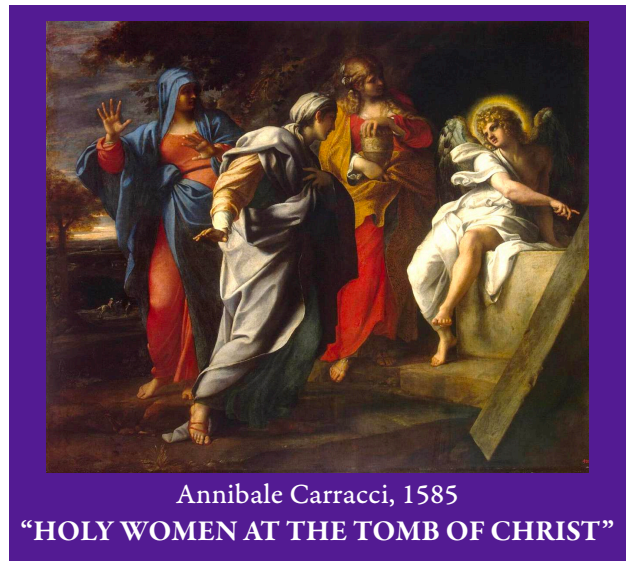
The Trial, Torture, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus occurred during Passover, which is a Jewish holy day where the Jews celebrated how God rescued them from slavery in Egypt. Before you continue this lesson, read Exodus 12.

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Just as the lamb’s blood above the house’s door was a symbol of that household faithfulness in God, so are Christians “covered” in the blood of Jesus Christ. In fact, this is what Communion symbolizes: a New Covenant between God and Man.

Jesus is the Lamb of God, the final, ultimate sin sacrifice that pays the debt of our sin. Jesus is also the Priest who makes the sacrifice on behalf of his people. Jesus is both Sacrifice and Sacrificer. However, Jesus does not stay dead. No, He is resurrected, that is, He reverses death. Jesus’ resurrection was not only a historical event but a prophetic event: all who are faithful to Him His way will be resurrected after death (although, not immediately).

Paul teaches in 1 Corinthians that if Jesus did not rise from the dead, then our faith is in meaningless because we would still be “in our sins.” Everything about our faith depends on whether or not Jesus was resurrected...and He was! We have over 500 eyewitness that affirm this event. Jesus is alive never to die again for our sins.

"He is risen; He is risen, indeed!"



Annibale Carracci, 1585

**“HOLY WOMEN AT THE TOMB OF CHRIST”**

# AFTERWARDS, or NOW WHAT?

I hope this has been helpful. The point of the “**What to Believe**” publication series is to provide answers to students about their faith from a distinctly Pentecostal perspective.

My hope is that you will return to this Guide as you talk about Jesus with your neighbor and as you engage in those wonderful conversations.

So, now what?

Go & Tell, and do so in the confidence that God loves you enough to save you from what you could not save yourself from. Now, you get to tell your story, your distinct part in the great narrative of salvation and the Great Commission.

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*Dosvedanya and Blessings,*

Taylor Drake, *Series Author*

*4:12 Ministries Director for New Horizons Ministries*



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