

The Longest Day

In 1959, Cornelius Ryan released a book that was later (1962) made into a movie by the same name: "The Longest Day". The book and the movie detailed the invasion of Normandy by the Allied Forces during World War II. The first waves of troops disembarked from their landing crafts around 6:30 AM and the assault continued until dark. In a gun battle, facing enemy fire for 10 to 12 hours would certainly seem like an eternity.

For those young men who stormed that beach in France, this is a faded history. Many or perhaps I should say most are now a part of history themselves. The fact that this happened nearly 76 years ago has dimmed this day from our thoughts or conversations.

Today, I want us to consider another long day in history. It is a day that should never be forgotten and it has even more historical significance than that battle in France in 1944. It the day that begins with an evening meal to celebrate the Passover and ended on a cross just outside the walls of Jerusalem.

Matthew records a few details about that Thursday night until Friday afternoon.

Now I don't know the sleeping habits of Jesus while He was on earth. I don't know if He was an early-riser or if He slept in so His day started later. It may not have a real bearing on our message as we see the activities that became of Jesus and His final day before the cross.

In Matthew the 26th chapter, we find the preparation and the gathering for the Passover meal.

Now on the first *day* of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Where do You want us to prepare for You to eat the Passover?" And He said, "Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, 'The Teacher says, "My time is near; I *am* to keep the Passover at your house with My disciples.'" The disciples did as Jesus had directed them; and they prepared the Passover.

Now when evening came, Jesus was reclining *at the table* with the twelve disciples. (Matthew 26:17-20 NASB)

Let's stop right here and reflect on the celebration and put it into the context of events. The Passover is the Jewish festival commemorating the occasion when the angel of the Lord passed over the homes of the Hebrews on the night, he killed all the firstborn sons of the Egyptians. The lambs used in the feast were slain on the fourteenth of Nisan (March/April), and the meal was eaten that evening between sundown and midnight. According to Jewish reckoning, that would be the fifteenth of Nisan, since the Jewish day began at sundown. The Feast of Unleavened Bread followed Passover and lasted seven days. The Last Supper was probably a Passover meal and took place on Thursday night.

This week had started with Jesus being received into Jerusalem. We remember the scene well. We find this entry recorded in Matthew 21:6-11.

The disciples went and did just as Jesus had instructed them, and brought the donkey and the colt, and laid their coats on them; and He sat on the coats. Most of the crowd spread their coats in the road, and others were cutting branches from the trees and spreading them in the road. The crowds going ahead of Him, and those who followed, were shouting,

**“Hosanna to the Son of David;
BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD;
Hosanna in the highest!”**

When He had entered Jerusalem, all the city was stirred, saying, “Who is this?” And the crowds were saying, “This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth in Galilee.” (Matthew 21:6-11 NASB)

The entry of Jesus into Jerusalem is one of only a few that appears in all 4 gospels. John’s account is the only one that actually suggest that the tree branches either included or were palm branches.

On the next day the large crowd who had come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, took the branches of the palm trees and went out to meet Him, and *began* to shout, “Hosanna! BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD, even the King of Israel.” (John 12:12-13 NASB)

Monday and Tuesday were filled with Jesus showing His indignation for those who had turned the temple into “a robber’s den” (Matthew 21:13); multiple parables, and answering questions from both the Sadducees and Pharisees.

The Bible is silent about the events of Wednesday. Some commentaries offer that the deal with Judas and the plans to arrest Jesus were finalized on Wednesday. This brings us to the Thursday evening around the table for the Passover meal.

The events of the week are recorded in the various gospel narratives. All of the events were leading to the climax that plays out starting on Thursday evening and continues until Friday afternoon. Last week, we took a look at the prayer of Jesus in that upper room. We will pick up as they are ready to leave that room.

Then Jesus came with them (*the 12 apostles*) to a place called Gethsemane, and said to His disciples, “Sit here while I go over there and pray.” And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee (*James and John*), and began to be grieved and distressed. Then He said to them, “My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death; remain here and keep watch with Me.” (Matthew 26:36-38 NASB)

We are all too familiar with the events in the garden. Peter, James, and John slept while Jesus pour out His heart to God. We remember the famous way in which Jesus ended His plea with; **yet not as I will, but as You will.** Then one last time Jesus said **“My Father, if this cannot pass away unless I drink it, Your will be done.”**

Jesus is arrested and taken out of the garden. It is speculation but it is reasonable to place the time of Jesus' arrest between midnight and 2:00 AM. Regardless of the time, it is clear from the events recorded in all four gospels that Jesus did not sleep on that Thursday night.

We now begin a whirlwind of legal maneuvering. Jesus is taken to six different trials before, Mark records: **Then they brought Him to the place Golgotha, which is translated, Place of a Skull. They tried to give Him wine mixed with myrrh; but He did not take it. And they crucified Him, and divided up His garments among themselves, casting lots for them to decide what each man should take. It was the third hour (9:00 AM) when they crucified Him. (Mark 15:22-25 NASB)**

Six trials occur within a span of 7 to 9 hours. This marathon of trials is totally a sham. The religious leaders have already made up their minds and there is only one outcome that they will accept. The three trials before the various Jewish courts are illegal for several reasons. Under the Mosaic Law, there cannot be any trial during a festival (Passover), trials cannot be conducted at night, the sentence for a capital offense must wait until the next day to be carried out, and the Jews, while under Roman rule, could not sentence anyone to death.

We will review the six trials very quickly and please realize that the times given are estimated and are not to be taken as an exact chronology. The first trial happened around 2:00 AM. Jesus is taken from the garden to the house of Annas. Annas is the father-in-law of the current high priest and himself is a former high priest. During this trial, Jesus offers this defense: **Jesus answered him, "I have spoken openly to the world; I always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together; and I spoke nothing in secret. Why do you question Me? Question those who have heard what I spoke to them; they know what I said." When He had said this, one of the officers standing nearby struck Jesus, saying, "Is that the way You answer the high priest?" Jesus answered him, "If I have spoken wrongly, testify of the wrong; but if rightly, why do you strike Me?" So, Annas sent Him bound to Caiaphas the high priest. (John 18:20-24 NASB)**

It is now around 2:30 AM and Caiaphas questions a silent Jesus. Finally, Caiaphas stood up and addressed Jesus: **"I adjure You by the living God, that You tell us whether You are the Christ, the Son of God." Jesus said to him, "You have said it yourself; nevertheless, I tell you, hereafter you will see THE SON OF MAN SITTING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF POWER, and COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN." (Matthew 26:63-65 NASB)**

At this point Caiaphas tears his clothes.

At daybreak, or around 6:00 AM Caiaphas assembles the rest of the council or the Sanhedrin where they determine that Jesus is guilty of blaspheming against God and is worthy of death.

The Jews were not allowed to exact the death penalty so they now take Jesus to the governor's residence and present their case to Pilate the Roman governor over Jerusalem. It is now around 6:30 AM. They accuse Jesus of forbidding Jews to pay taxes and claiming to be king. In their charge, the Jews tell that Jesus "stirs up people from Galilee all the way to Jerusalem."

Upon hearing that Jesus is from Galilee, Pilate sends Jesus to Herod Antipas, the governor from Galilee. He has made the journey to Jerusalem for the feast. It is now around 7:00 AM. Jesus remained silent before Herod.

By 7:30 AM, Jesus is back in front of Pilate. At this time Pilate addresses the crowd that demands death for Jesus. Pilate says: **“You brought this man to me as one who incites the people to rebellion, and behold, having examined Him before you, I have found no guilt in this man regarding the charges which you make against Him. No, nor has Herod, for he sent Him back to us; and behold, nothing deserving death has been done by Him. Therefore, I will punish Him and release Him.” (Luke 23:14-16 NASB)**

As you can see, Jesus has endured a long and grueling day. But, it’s not over. After being beaten, Jesus is taken to the hill outside the city gates of Jerusalem where He is nailed to a cross. The death process for crucifixion was that of asphyxiation. The person would die from lack of oxygen. The only way they could breathe was to push up on their feet to allow them to relieve pressure on their arms and inhale. Remember the nails in the feet would hurt and they would slump down again. It is a slow and painful death. Typically, by late afternoon, the soldiers would break the legs to hasten the process.

In the case of Jesus, after His non-stop day that began on Thursday afternoon, He died before they needed to break His legs. If we stop and really think about all that happened during that time from the Passover meal on Thursday evening until around 3:00 PM on Friday afternoon, Jesus truly endured the longest day.

He did it all for you and me.