

# “Six Hours One Friday”

Multiple Texts <sup>1</sup>

Good evening. As I’m sure you know, today is a very significant day. This is what you’re accustomed to call “Good Friday,” and you’ve come tonight to remember the events of the day that actually *was* “Good Friday.”

That particular Friday was the Preparation Day for Passover. Because the Jewish Calendar is a lunar calendar, and your Western, or Gregorian, Calendar is a solar calendar, your observance of Good Friday seldom coincides with Passover these days. But since we’re remembering and imagining, let’s imagine that today really was the Preparation Day for Passover. I’ve come tonight to tell you about six hours of that day, one thousand nine hundred and eighty-three years ago.<sup>2</sup>

My name is John. My father, Zebedee, operated a large and successful fishing business out of the town of Capernaum on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. He owned the business in partnership with two brothers, Peter and Andrew, and I and my older brother, James, worked in the business as well. I enjoyed fishing, and I expected to be doing it for the rest of my life.

Our mother, Salome, was the sister of Mary, the wife of Joseph, the carpenter of Nazareth. And I’m sure you know that Mary and Joseph’s oldest child was named Jesus, who was obviously my first cousin. Dad would often trade fish with Joseph in return for his help in keeping up our boats.

I’m not sure just how it happened, but I seem to have gotten the reputation of being something of a wimp since my writings that have been preserved in your “New Testament” talk a lot about love. But here’s the deal. Have you ever known any commercial fishermen? We’re not a wimpy lot. If you’ve seen the movie *The Perfect Storm*, you might think of me as one of those guys.

When Jesus asked Peter and Andrew, James and me to become part of His group, I was a selfish, stormy, and angry man. I’d been one of John the Baptist’s followers, hoping to be part of an armed rebellion against Rome. In fact, James and I were so hot-headed in the beginning that Jesus nicknamed us “the Sons of Thunder.” We were actually rather like the ISIS fighters of your own day.

And I’m sorry to have to tell you that being hot-headed was not the only fault James and I shared. The two of us were so proud and arrogant that we actually asked Jesus if we could sit on his left hand and his right in His coming kingdom—we wanted Him to make us the most important of all His friends. He said “No,” of course, and you’d not be wrong if you thought that the other ten disciples were pretty hard on us about such arrogance. Looking back, I’d say they had a right to be.

For reasons that He kept to Himself, Jesus seemed to feel especially close to Peter, James, and me. The three of us were the only ones who got to be with Him when He raised Jairus’s daughter from the dead. We three got to be there when Jesus met with Moses and Elijah on the

---

<sup>1</sup> A sermon by Dr. David C. Stancil, delivered at the Columbia Baptist Fellowship in Columbia, MD on March 25, 2016, Good Friday. For a thorough study of Jesus’ final days and hours, see Andreas Köstenberger and Justin Taylor, *The Final Days of Jesus* (Crossway, 2014).

<sup>2</sup> The actual date was April 3, A.D. 33. Neither the calendar date nor the relation to Passover are the same tonight, but we are at the same point in Holy Week as was the original event.

mountain in what you call “the Transfiguration.” And Jesus and I eventually became so close that the others sometimes called me “the disciple who Jesus loved.”

We all thought, of course, that Jesus was preparing us to join Him in mounting the rebellion against Rome that we’d been hoping for from John the Baptist . . . before he was arrested and executed. We had seen Jesus perform so many amazing miracles that kicking Rome’s behind didn’t seem like much of a stretch at all, and all the signs seemed to point to the Passover of what you call the year 33 A.D. as the time when Jesus would make His move. We were all pretty pumped about that.

On the evening of what would prove to be our last Passover together, Jesus sent Peter and me on ahead to get the room ready, and then He asked me to sit next to Him at dinner. (Maybe that was a consolation prize for not getting to sit next to Him in His kingdom.) Jesus told us some very important things at that supper, many of which I later recorded in my book—the document you know as “The Gospel of John.”

Jesus often took the twelve of us to the Garden of Gethsemane to talk and pray when we were in Jerusalem, so it wasn’t surprising that we went there after the Passover meal. Once we got there, Jesus took Peter, James, and me farther into the Garden than the rest, and then He Himself went even farther in. We could hear bits and pieces of His agonized conversation with His Father, and that bothered us, but we were still pretty clueless about what was about to happen.

It was late in the night when Judas—who had been one of the Twelve but had now become a traitor—led a detachment of soldiers from the Temple Guard to arrest Jesus. They did this in the middle of the night because the city was full of Passover pilgrims who were very fond of Jesus and would have never allowed Him to be arrested in the light of day.

When Jesus was arrested, all the other disciples ran for their lives except Peter and me. Peter and I were scared to death, too, but we followed at some distance as the soldiers took Jesus to the High Priest’s residence. I had had some dealings with the High Priest in the past, so I had no trouble being admitted to the mansion, but I had to leave Peter outside for a while, and I came back to get him later.

After spending the rest of the night and the very early morning in what can only be called “kangaroo courts,” Jesus was subjected to unspeakable torture, after which the Romans took Him to Skull Hill—sometimes called Golgotha—and nailed Him to a wooden cross. I was the only one of the Twelve willing to risk being on the hill, and I watched Jesus’ suffering together with Aunt Mary, my mother, Mary Magdalene, and Mary, the wife of Clopas.

Jesus was crucified at about 9 in the morning, with criminals crucified on either side of Him. Jesus hadn’t been on the cross for very long when I heard Him say, “**Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.**” Jesus had taught us a lot about forgiveness during the years we’d spent with Him, but I thought that asking God to forgive even this was going much too far.

The civic and religious leaders of Jerusalem mocked Jesus unmercifully, as did many of the pilgrims walking by as they approached the city . . . to worship. The Roman soldiers who had crucified Him made fun of Him, and even one of the criminals crucified with Jesus insulted Him. It was all so totally horrible that I couldn’t believe it was really happening, but there were some pretty amazing things happening, too.

After the first criminal had insulted Jesus, the other criminal rebuked him: “Don’t you fear God even when you have been sentenced to die? We deserve to die for our crimes, but this man

hasn't done anything wrong." And then he turned to Jesus and said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom."

And Jesus replied, "***I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise.***"

Just before noon, when Jesus had been on the cross for about three hours, He noticed that his Mom and I were standing not far from Him. Looking at His mother, and motioning slightly toward me with His head, Jesus said, "***Dear woman, here is your son.***" And then, looking at me, He said "***Here is your mother.***"

Uncle Joseph had died a few years before, and without Jesus to run the carpentry shop, His family was having a hard time making ends meet. Our family was better off, and Dad was still working hard at our fishing business, so Jesus was asking me to be sure that His Mom—my Aunt Mary—was cared for, which I was very glad to do.

At midday, an unnatural darkness came over the city. This darkness was much darker than an eclipse, and whereas an eclipse doesn't last long, this darkness lasted for three hours. The darkness felt supernatural, and we were all pretty spooked by it. During most of the darkness, Jesus was silent in the agony of His struggle to breathe. But because I knew Him so well, it also seemed to me that Jesus was silent because He was engaged in a tremendous interior warfare of some sort.

At about three o'clock, Jesus cried out, surprisingly loudly, "***My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?!***" I wasn't sure what to make of that, and while I wondered about that, Jesus said, more matter-of-factly, "***I'm thirsty.***"

The Roman guards put some sour wine on a sponge and lifted it to Jesus' lips, after which He spoke a single word in our language—τετελεσται!—which means, "***It is finished!***" I didn't really know what Jesus meant, then. I understand it better, now.

Jesus spoke only one more time during those awful six hours on the cross. With a loud, and strangely victorious shout, He cried out, "***Father, I entrust my spirit into your hands!***" And then He was gone.

You'll remember that we'd been standing in spooky darkness for three hours. At the very moment that Jesus died, an enormous, rock-splitting earthquake was added to the darkness. As the earthquake rumbled on and on and on, the Roman officer in charge of the crucifixion detail said in awestruck terror, "This man must really have been the Son of God!"

The soldier was right about that, of course. Jesus of Nazareth, my cousin, my friend, my Lord, was the same eternal Son of the Father who had long ago spoken all that is into existence through His Word of Power, and Creation groaned at His death, sharing its Master's agony. Here's some of what Paul would later write about Jesus:

*<sup>15</sup> Christ is the visible image of the invisible God. He existed before anything was created and is supreme over all creation, <sup>16</sup> for through him God created everything in the heavenly realms and on earth. He made the things we can see and the things we can't see— such as thrones, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities in the unseen world. Everything was created through him and for him.*

*<sup>17</sup> He existed before anything else, and he holds all creation together. <sup>18</sup> Christ is also the head of the church, which is his body. He is the beginning, supreme over all who rise from the dead. So he is first in everything. <sup>19</sup> For God in all his fullness was pleased to live in Christ, <sup>20</sup> and through him God reconciled everything to himself. He made peace with*

*everything in heaven and on earth by means of Christ's blood on the cross (Colossians 1:15-20).*

And here's part of what I would later write about Jesus:

*<sup>1</sup> In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup> He existed in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup> God created everything through him, and nothing was created except through him. <sup>4</sup> The Word gave life to everything that was created, and his life brought light to everyone. <sup>5</sup> The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it (John 1:1-5).*

During those awful six hours one long-ago Friday, the Blood that brings us Salvation was freely poured out. The Sacrifice by which we are made Perfect was willingly offered. The Sting of Death was victoriously removed. The battle was over. It was finished, complete. Darkness had been defeated. Conquest had begun.