

Jesus' Passion reached a climax on a Friday. After the chaos of His betrayal and arrest, the scattering of His disciples in fear and confusion, a couple of sham trials, and brutal torture, Jesus was ultimately sentenced to death in the most passive-aggressive manner imaginable by the local Roman authority, and marched to Golgotha to be crucified. Crucifixion was the most brutal and ignominious manner of execution available to the Romans, fit only for the worst of the worst. The Lord of Life was being put to death.

Wait, what? How did we get here? Well, that story starts all the way back in *Genesis 3*, and is a little too complicated to review right now. Suffice it to say that we squandered the free will afforded to us in our creation. We'd been paying for it ever since, but as our story opens, Jesus, Son of God, fully divine and fully human, was poised to *pay our debt* to the God who created us *once and for all*.

Jesus' work of salvation was complete on that awful Friday afternoon, but that wasn't the end of the story! Jesus' life, death, and resurrection catalyzed the birth of Christianity at Pentecost. The last week of Jesus' life, the week of His Passion became a key part of Christian worship experience. In many churches, the events from Christ's institution of the Lord's Supper on Thursday evening until the discovery of His empty tomb early on Easter morning are commemorated by church services that blend into one. There's often no benediction offered from Maundy Thursday until Easter Sunday! And Good Friday is the fulcrum of that long, long service.

Many churches celebrate Good Friday with a service of darkness (*Tenebrae*, in Latin). The usual colorful décor and candles of a typical service are absent. The cross is draped in black. In place of the usual candles, there's often a special candle stand, called a *hearse*, containing up to 15 candles. A *Tenebrae* service recounts the events of Jesus' betrayal, arrest, trials, torture, crucifixion, and death. The service usually includes reading the seven last sayings Jesus utters from the cross. As the service proceeds, one by one, the candles are extinguished. The service ends in darkness and in silence.

But right before that dark, silent ending of a *Tenebrae* service, there's often a cacophonous event, known by its Latin name, *strepitus*. The *strepitus* can be

created with drums, by congregants' stamping their feet on the floor, or by *slamming a book shut*.

Everything about a Good Friday service is atypical, but for me that noise fading to literal black is the most jarring part of all. But what does *strepitus* symbolize? The interpretation differs. The cacophony could reflect the chaos of the moment Jesus died: fear, incomprehension. It might reflect the chaos felt by *all creation* as the *Lord and Giver of Life* died. It could symbolize rolling that big old stone across the front of the tomb where Jesus' body was laid. THUNK... and then the deep silence of the grave. Or – and this is my favorite – it just might represent: slamming a book shut.

But not *a book*. The book. The Scriptures, as the people of 30 AD (give or take) knew them: the Law and the Prophets. They all provided a testament and described a covenant between the LORD God and his wayward Creation (that's be *us*). A history of our bad lifestyle choices, contrasted with God's constant patience with us, and His utter devotion to us, through it all, using us as instruments to carry out His plan, culminating with the birth, in Palestine under rough circumstances, of our Savior, true God and true Man, robed in flesh, sent to redeem us. *Strepitus* could represent the first century equivalent of a *mic drop*.

That story was finished, the book slammed shut, when Jesus said "It is finished" from the cross, and He "gave up his spirit". Notice what the Gospels *don't* say. They don't say "Jesus died". They don't say, "Well the cross did its ugly job very effectively on this poor Jew. He was in bad shape when they put him up there; He didn't even make it to sunset." In fact, Luke describes events thus: *Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When he had said this, he breathed his last.*

One doesn't expect a tortured and crucified person to *call out in a loud voice*. Jesus's death as voluntary! Jesus was clear minded and *fully in control* for the whole experience, and *gave up his spirit* of his own volition, when the time had fully come. Whoa.

He *gave up his spirit*. For us. And He didn't cry out "... and so, I die" like some sort of Shakespearean precursor. His words in *John 19* were a simple,

declarative statement: *It is finished*. In the original Greek, *tetelestai*. an accounting term! Literally: *Your debt is paid in full*. *Our debt*. Paid in full, right then and there. We see similar language one more time, at the very end of the New Testament, in Revelation 21:6 *And he also said, "It is finished! I am the Alpha and the Omega—the Beginning and the End. To all who are thirsty I will give freely from the springs of the water of life.*

Strepitus.

Two other thoughts I'd like to share about that original, Good Friday. First, I'd like to reflect on the most horrific part of the day. Matthew 27:45-46 says: *At noon, darkness fell across the whole land until three o'clock. At about three o'clock, Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" which means "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?"*

Jesus's words, taken straight from David and *Psalms* 22, tell us all we need to know. As He hangs on the cross in agony, all (!) of the sins of all humankind, past, present, and to come, are laid on Him. His Father God, perfect in His Holiness, cannot abide presence of sin, and *turns his back on Jesus*. This is something that we will never, *NEVER* experience. But Jesus did. He had to. For us. Think on that.

And, finally, I want to look *just past* Jesus' death. At the moment Jesus died, the Gospels tell us something very interesting happened. Matthew describes it in Chapter 27: *At that moment the curtain in the sanctuary of the Temple was torn in two, from top to bottom*. The Temple in Jerusalem was "God's dwelling place" on Earth. The most sacred part of the temple was a central chamber, divided into two parts by a huge, thick curtain. The innermost sanctuary, the Holy of Holies, was the dwelling place of God on Earth, and off limits to men – except on one day a year. On that day, *Yom Kippur*, a single priest entered the Holy of Holies to offer a blood sacrifice to atone for the sins of the people. This was serious business! So serious that the other priests *tied a rope* to the high priest's ankle so that they could *pull his body out* in case *he died in there doing his job!* For anyone else to enter the presence of God would be certain death!

But on Good Friday, the situation changed forever. God was no longer separated from His sinful, broken creation. Jesus' death sealed the deal *once and for all*. I love that phrase, as in Scripture it's meant literally. The rending of the Temple curtain signified that, at that instant, God no longer needed a special chamber, and He no longer needed intermediaries -- priests -- offering blood sacrifices on behalf of sinful humanity anymore. The division between God and fallen humanity had just been obliterated. I feel like saying that as Captain Kirk might have on the old *Star Trek*: JUST. BEEN. OBLITERATED. Jesus' death repaired the schism between God and Man.

Revelation 21:3 I heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, "Look, God's home is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them."

I won't even comment on that "loud shout", but I will encourage you to dwell on the intense significance of the reunification represented by the demise of the Temple curtain. It really was a Good Friday, after all! The deep, unimaginable darkness of Friday afternoon would soon be replaced by the glorious dawn of Easter Sunday, and an empty tomb. It's a *little* premature for me to be saying this, but *Hallelujah!*
And *Amen*.