



Episode 8: God Dies for the World

The Gospels

Key Verse:

“For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him. (John 3:16–17)

Lisa Scheffler, author

Even over the pounding drums their words are discernable. Arms extended to the sky, the crowd joins the voice from the stage: “Can you save...can you save my...can you save my heavy, dirty soul? From me?” Red lights pulse as the crowd keeps chanting. The voices of thousands plead, “Can you save my heavy, dirty soul?” No one answers.

The scene is from a 21 Pilots concert — a popular band with a young, fiercely devoted following. It’s evidence that even in 21st America, people still acknowledge that their souls are heavy, dirty and in need of saving. Although our culture prefers to talk about symptoms rather than sin, we know things are not how they’re supposed to be. Rescue has been promised, but no one is delivering — not doctors, intellectuals, politicians, entertainers, or advertisers. Something more is needed.

Of course, our problems are not new. As we’ve followed along in the Bible’s big story, we’ve seen over and over that humanity is trapped in a cycle of rebellion and sin. We need someone to lift our burdens and wash us clean. Happily, the hero we need has come — Jesus Christ. Last week, we focused on his life, this week we’ll think through the implications of his death and resurrection.

Day 1

The Jewish people had recognized their need for a Messiah. God had made promises to their ancestors that one day a King and Savior would come. He was the offspring of Eve who would be victorious over evil, the descendant of Abraham who would bless the world, and the rightful heir of King David who would establish his reign. Other would-be Messiah's had come and gone, but there was something different about Jesus of Nazareth.

When Jesus enters Jerusalem for the final time, his life and ministry are coming to a climax. Jesus had caused quite a stir in the outer provinces of Judea. He taught with undeniable authority, openly challenged the religious leaders, healed the sick, and even raised the dead. Many people were beginning to recognize that Jesus was more than a Rabbi or even a prophet. Could it be that he was the long-awaited Messiah, King of Israel?

When Jesus arrived in Jerusalem for the Passover celebration, tensions were high. Two views of Jesus were in conflict. The Jewish religious leaders saw him as a trouble-making, rabble-rouser and were plotting his death. Many of the people were expecting a great liberator who would free them from Roman oppression and re-establish the earthly kingdom of Israel. The manner of Jesus' arrival into Jerusalem announced his kingship without contradicting its unexpected nature. Before the king would reign, he would choose to die.

Read the Word

John 12:12–33 (NIV)

¹² The next day the great crowd that had come for the festival heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. ¹³ They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting,

“Hosanna!”

“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”

“Blessed is the king of Israel!”

¹⁴ Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, as it is written:

¹⁵ “Do not be afraid, Daughter Zion;

see, your king is coming,

seated on a donkey's colt.”

¹⁶ At first his disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realize that these things had been written about him and that these things had been done to him.

¹⁷ Now the crowd that was with him when he called Lazarus from the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to spread the word.

¹⁸ Many people, because they had heard that he had performed this sign, went out to meet him. ¹⁹ So the Pharisees said to one another, “See, this is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after him!”

²⁰ Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the festival. ²¹ They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. “Sir,” they said, “we would like to see Jesus.” ²² Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus.

²³ Jesus replied, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴ Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. ²⁵ Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶ Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.

²⁷ “Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. ²⁸ Father, glorify your name!”

Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.” ²⁹ The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him.

³⁰ Jesus said, “This voice was for your benefit, not mine. ³¹ Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. ³² And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” ³³ He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.

- What did the people expect from Jesus? Who was opposing him?
- How does Jesus explain the necessity of his death?

Reflect

All four Gospels record Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem. They depict him riding a donkey as the crowd lay their cloaks before him, wave palm branches and shout “Hosanna!” which means “Save us!” Jesus’ arrival is being treated as a royal procession, and the people are looking to him for rescue. If Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead, what couldn’t he do?

Jesus tries to prepare his disciples. He will be the king who saves his people, but not in the way the people expect. Jesus promises that he will be glorified, but not because he will claim the Jewish throne. His glorification will come through his death.

Jesus uses the metaphor of a seed. Only by dying does the kernel of wheat become fruitful. It's a paradox that Jesus needs people to understand. Jesus' imminent death will look like tragedy and defeat, but it will be a triumph of God's self-giving love that will bring new life to creation. Though his soul is troubled, Jesus will not ask to be saved from what he is about to endure. Instead, he will die to offer salvation to others.

It's interesting that Jesus makes this enigmatic statement about a kernel of wheat in answer to a request to speak to some Greeks who'd come to see him. He's indicating that the salvation he offers will extend to all people, not just the children of Israel. As he explains in verse 32, his death will draw all people, including these Gentiles, to himself. We can trace God's desire to save the world all the way back to Abraham's promise. God would use his chosen people to bless all the nations of the earth through his one and only Son.

Although those waving palm branches were probably looking to Jesus to free them from Rome, God had a much bigger plan. The King would sacrifice his life to save those oppressed by an enemy even more powerful than the Roman Empire. His sacrifice would not just be for his own people, but for everyone. He would conquer the enemy that enslaves all of humanity — sin and death.

Here in these verses, Jesus reminds us that we are to follow in his footsteps. Our path to honor is service and the way of Jesus is to lay our lives down. Glory comes not from seizing power, but in a willingness to give it up. These are lessons our world rejects, even though they are found in every kernel of wheat.

Pray

If it's helpful, use the following to begin your own prayer time with God.

Precious Lord Jesus, my Savior and King, thank you for your willingness to lose your life so that I might gain mine. You are worthy of all praise and honor, yet you chose to suffer and die. How can I ever express my gratitude for what you've done for me?

Day 2

We're inching closer to the climax of our story, when the death and resurrection of God's Son will change the world forever. Since the first sin was committed in the Garden of Eden, humanity has been looking for a way back home. Our return could only come through the sacrifice of God himself who would willingly give himself up for his creation. We could not come back to God, so he came to us. As we'll see today, he chose to follow his Father's will in another garden.

It's no coincidence that at the end of his life, Jesus enters the city during the Passover festival. For the Jewish people, Passover reminded them of God's great rescue when he freed them from slavery in Egypt and brought them into the promised land. It also reminded them that

this rescue had come with a price. Death passed over their families because of the blood of a lamb. God himself had instructed the people to commemorate these events (Exodus 12).

Passover was a symbol for the ultimate victory that Jesus would have over death and the ultimate rescue he would offer to all people. Jesus is the Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world. During his final hours with his disciples, he celebrated Passover with them and then retires to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray.

Read the Word

Luke 22:14–20

¹⁴ When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table. ¹⁵ And he said to them, “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. ¹⁶ For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God.”

¹⁷ After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, “Take this and divide it among you. ¹⁸ For I tell you I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.”

¹⁹ And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.”

²⁰ In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.”

- Here Jesus institutes the Lord’s Supper. What does the Lord’s Supper mean to you?
- What do you think Jesus means by a “new covenant” in his blood?

Jesus would do for the whole world what God did through Moses at the Exodus. The chains of slavery were about to be broken. Using the poignant symbolism of the bread and the cup, Jesus was showing his disciples in a tangible way what he would do for them in the hours that would follow, but also in the age to come. Christ’s sacrifice, the breaking of his body and the spilling of his blood, will enable all his followers to sit at their Lord’s table in a future age after their conquering king has returned and put all things right.

Woven together in this meal are the threads of the past, present, and future. God’s plan is coming to pass. Jesus makes a new covenant rooted in his sacrifice, one that will fulfill the prophecy of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 31:31). With their sins forgiven, God’s people will be united with him once and for all, safe under his guidance and provision. And how we will feast at the Lord’s table one day! So like the Israelites who celebrated the Passover as a reminder of what God had done and would do, Christians celebrate the Lord’s Supper in remembrance of the sacrifice Jesus has made, but also in eager expectation of his future return.

After Jesus and his disciples finished their meal, they went to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray. There Jesus would agonize over the sacrifice he was about to make.

Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him. On reaching the place, he said to them, "Pray that you will not fall into temptation." He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. (Luke 22:39-44).

It wasn't just the pain that he dreaded, nor the humiliation, though that could have been enough to prompt his prayer. In order for God's justice to be met, all of humanity's sins had to be atoned for. That meant that Jesus had to bear them all and the judgment of God would fall on the Son. Jesus submitted to that judgment willingly. If there had been another way, no doubt the Father would have offered it. Jesus masters his temptations and doubts and accepts the Father's will.

As Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, he likely saw them coming. It's not hard to imagine that in the dark night, his accusers would have appeared as a line of torches snaking along the hillside to where he met with his Father. Although he could have easily escaped, Jesus accepted his fate, and waited for them to arrive. He would be the King who sacrificed his life for his people and the Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world.

Pray

If it's helpful, use the following to begin your own prayer time with God.

Lord Jesus, it's hard for me to imagine the agony that you suffered. Your love for me is impossible to fathom, but the cross demonstrates it so clearly. Every time I take the Lord's Supper, may I remember your great love.

Day 3

The hatred poured out on Jesus is inconceivable. Every moment he had demonstrated the goodness of God by living according to his will. He lived as humanity would have lived if sin had not corrupted God's world. Living in obedience to the Father, Jesus never sinned. Yet, as Paul says, "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor 5:21). The God of justice endured the ultimate injustice to save humanity.

Execution by crucifixion was reserved for the most reviled criminals. Stripped naked, nailed to a cross and left to a slow and excruciating death, there was no more tortuous or humiliating way to die. Tried and convicted by both the Jewish rulers and the gentile Roman authorities,

this is how the beloved Son of God was treated by the very people he came to save. He hung on that cross utterly alone, separated from the Father as he bore the sins of a rebellious world.

Read the Word

John 19:1–30 (NIV)

¹⁹ Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. ² The soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head. They clothed him in a purple robe ³ and went up to him again and again, saying, “Hail, king of the Jews!” And they slapped him in the face.

⁴ Once more Pilate came out and said to the Jews gathered there, “Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no basis for a charge against him.” ⁵ When Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe, Pilate said to them, “Here is the man!”

⁶ As soon as the chief priests and their officials saw him, they shouted, “Crucify! Crucify!”

But Pilate answered, “You take him and crucify him. As for me, I find no basis for a charge against him.”

⁷ The Jewish leaders insisted, “We have a law, and according to that law he must die, because he claimed to be the Son of God.”

⁸ When Pilate heard this, he was even more afraid, ⁹ and he went back inside the palace. “Where do you come from?” he asked Jesus, but Jesus gave him no answer. ¹⁰ “Do you refuse to speak to me?” Pilate said. “Don’t you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?”

¹¹ Jesus answered, “You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin.”

¹² From then on, Pilate tried to set Jesus free, but the Jewish leaders kept shouting, “If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar.”

¹³ When Pilate heard this, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judge’s seat at a place known as the Stone Pavement (which in Aramaic is Gabbatha). ¹⁴ It was the day of Preparation of the Passover; it was about noon.

“Here is your king,” Pilate said to the Jews.

¹⁵ But they shouted, “Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him!”

“Shall I crucify your king?” Pilate asked.

“We have no king but Caesar,” the chief priests answered.

¹⁶ Finally Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified.

So the soldiers took charge of Jesus. ¹⁷ Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha). ¹⁸ There they crucified him, and with him two others—one on each side and Jesus in the middle.

¹⁹ Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross. It read: jesus of nazareth, the king of the jews. ²⁰ Many of the Jews read this sign, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and the sign was written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek. ²¹ The chief priests of the Jews protested to Pilate, “Do not write ‘The King of the Jews,’ but that this man claimed to be king of the Jews.”

²² Pilate answered, “What I have written, I have written.”

²³ When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes, dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining. This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom.

²⁴ “Let’s not tear it,” they said to one another. “Let’s decide by lot who will get it.” This happened that the scripture might be fulfilled that said,

*“They divided my clothes among them
and cast lots for my garment.”
So this is what the soldiers did.*

²⁵ Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶ When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, “Woman, here is your son,” ²⁷ and to the disciple, “Here is your mother.” From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.

²⁸ Later, knowing that everything had now been finished, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, “I am thirsty.” ²⁹ A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus’ lips. ³⁰ When he had received the drink, Jesus said, “It is finished.” With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

- What charge is brought against Jesus?
- What were his last words from the cross?

Reflect

The charge brought against Jesus is darkly ironic. Here the King of kings is charged with leading a coup against Roman authority. The Jewish people reject him as their king, but Pilate

insists that he bear that title. If he had only known! The Lord of all submits to the world's greatest injustice to bring his justice to all.

While Jesus is the King, he's also the sacrifice. In the Old Testament book of Leviticus, the priests were instructed on how to atone for the sins of the people. Among the sacrifices were two goats. One was slaughtered as a sin offering and its blood sprinkled on the mercy seat of the Ark of the Covenant. The other goat takes on the sin of the people:

“[The priest] is to lay both hands on the head of the live goat and confess over it all the wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites—all their sins—and put them on the goat’s head. He shall send the goat away into the wilderness in the care of someone appointed for the task. The goat will carry on itself all their sins to a remote place; and the man shall release it in the wilderness” (Leviticus 16:21–22).

The Old Testament model for atonement showed that sins are atoned for through sacrifice and then removed and carried away, never to be seen again. Jesus is the once and for all sacrifice who both atones for and takes away our sins. Christ's sacrifice removes sin and judgment and therefore transforms the offender. Rebellious sinners are made clean and adopted as beloved children into the family of God.

At the end of his torment, Jesus announces “It is finished” or as we might translate it, “It is done!” This is actually a single word in the original language, and it's one that a merchant might write on a bill after it had been paid. Nothing more can be held against us, our debt is paid in full. In Christ, we are forgiven and our relationship with God is made right.

For those of us raised in a culture that insists that the key to thriving is to “believe in yourself,” the harsh, but glorious truth of the atonement is a relief. Many of us have looked deep within ourselves, seen our heavy, dirty souls and are wary of putting our faith there. Instead let's look to our Savior who gave up his life to rescue us.

Pray

If it's helpful, use the following to begin your own prayer time with God.

Jesus, it's inadequate to merely say the words “thank you” for the atonement you have provided through your shed blood. I must show you my gratitude by living for you. Even though I could never repay you, I owe you everything.

Day 4

With his dying breath, Jesus announces that “It is finished.” The evil one who has opposed God since the beginning has been crushed, and the sins of the world have been atoned for. The

cycle of sin and rebellion has been broken by the one who always trusted and obeyed. Yet, there is one last enemy we get to see conquered — death itself.

Today we get to focus on resurrection and new life. What happened on the first Easter was a kind of new creation and the beginning of a new era for the world.

Read the Word

John 20:1–21 (NIV)

***20** Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. ² So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put him!”*

³ So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. ⁴ Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵ He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. ⁶ Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, ⁷ as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus’ head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. ⁸ Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. ⁹ (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) ¹⁰ Then the disciples went back to where they were staying.

¹¹ Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb ¹² and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus’ body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

¹³ They asked her, “Woman, why are you crying?”

“They have taken my Lord away,” she said, “and I don’t know where they have put him.” ¹⁴ At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

¹⁵ He asked her, “Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?”

Thinking he was the gardener, she said, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.”

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, “Mary.” She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means “Teacher”).

¹⁷ Jesus said, “Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”

¹⁸ Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: “I have seen the Lord!” And she told them that he had said these things to her.

¹⁹ On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” ²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

²¹ Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.”

- Imagine yourself going to the tomb to attend Jesus’ body and finding it empty. Imagine seeing the resurrected Lord face to face. What would your reaction have been?
- What was Jesus’ message to the disciples after he suddenly appears?

Reflect

Death could not hold Jesus Christ because it had no claim on him. Jesus was fully vindicated by the resurrection. The Romans, at the urging of the Jewish leaders, not only wanted to kill Jesus, they wanted to shame him. Crucifixion was reserved for the worst criminals, so by choosing this means of execution, they marked him and all his followers as utterly condemned. The resurrection and ascension showed that God himself had overturned Jesus’ guilty verdict. By justifying Jesus, God validated all of his teachings and actions as true expressions of God’s will.

Christ’s resurrection also opens the way for us to overcome death as his followers. By his blood we are forgiven and made right with God, so his resurrection can be a foretaste of our own. The resurrection of Jesus also holds the promise of renewal for all of creation. The reversal of sin’s corruption began when Jesus stepped out of the tomb. He is the “firstborn from the dead” (Colossians 1:18) and his new life foreshadows ours.

All the pain, humiliation, and violence led to resurrected life. And now, *we* can have new life. Everything changed on that Sunday morning. God raised his Son from the dead and gave him all the authority in heaven and on earth. He is the eternal victor, and as his followers, we are victorious too. Death does not defeat us, and sin is not our master. We have hope. If God can make something beautiful out of the horror of the cross, how much more can he transform us, making something beautiful out of our lives, no matter what our circumstances or failures.

The very disciples who ran and hid after Jesus’ arrest were emboldened by the appearance of their risen Lord. Jesus empowered these followers to spread his message far and wide. “He is

risen!” became the cry of those who proclaimed God’s redemption and renewal to the world. It’s the message we still proclaim as his followers today. Nothing is impossible for God, nothing can separate us from his great love. Not the powers of hell or the darkness of death will keep our Savior and King from bringing us home.

Pray

If it’s helpful, use the following to begin your own prayer time with God.

Jesus, death could not defeat you! Nothing would keep you from rescuing your people and bringing us home to you. Your resurrection gives hope to a broken world. Show me when and how to proclaim it to those who do not know you. As the Father sent you, I know that you are sending me.

Day 5

It’s Friday! It’s our day to reflect and worship. Let’s work to put the pieces of our story together. We’re getting close to the end. How well do you know God’s story? Review each episode and focus on each key verse. Challenge yourself to learn the story so you can share it with others.

The Story

Episode 1: God creates

- **Key Verse:** So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. (Genesis 1:27)
- **Key Passages:** Genesis 1–2
- **Key Figures:** Adam and Eve

Episode 2: God is rejected

- **Key Verse:** And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.” (Genesis 3:15)
- **Key Passages:** Genesis 3–11
- **Key Figures:** Adam, Eve, and Noah

Episode 3: God forms a family

- Key Verse: "He took him outside and said, 'Look up at the sky and count the stars—if indeed you can count them.' Then he said to him, 'So shall your offspring be.'" (Genesis 15:5)
- Key Passages: Genesis 12–21
- Key Figures: Abraham and Sarah

Episode 4: God rescues his people.

- The Lord said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them..." (Exodus 3:7–8)
- Key Book: Exodus
- Key Figure: Moses

Episode 5: God reigns

- Key Verse: "'The Lord declares to you that the Lord himself will establish a house for you: When your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.'" 2 Samuel 7:11b–13
- Key Books: 1–2 Kings
- Key Figure: David

Episode 6: God judges rebellion.

- Key Verse: "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed." (Daniel 7:13–14)
- Key Books: The Prophets
- Key Figures: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel

Episode 7: God comes to earth

- Key Verse: "*But what about you?*" he asked. "*Who do you say I am?*" Peter answered, "*God's Messiah.*" (Luke 9:20)
- Key Books: The Gospels
- Key Figure: Jesus

Episode 8: God dies for the world

They waved palm branches and laid their cloaks along his path as they shouted “Hosanna!” — the heart cry of Israel when they desired the Lord’s help and salvation. As Jesus entered Jerusalem for the final time a crowd of people lift their voices to plead, “Lord, save us!”

Something had convinced them that he was the one who could.

Jesus had done an astonishing miracle when he raised Lazarus from the dead and the people responded. Surely this man was more than a teacher, maybe even more than a prophet. Could he be the long-awaited Messiah of Israel? The Savior and King they’d been waiting for? Jesus had demonstrated to them that the kingdom of God had come. Now at the climax of his life and ministry, he’s entered Jerusalem but he didn’t come to raise an army or demand a throne. The King entered the city to die.

Jesus had warned his disciples what was coming and tried to help them understand. He gathered them together to show them something words alone could not explain. Using the Passover meal the Father had designed centuries before, Jesus offered them a new covenant. The bread as his broken body and the cup as his blood poured out for them.

As Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, he could see his accusers coming to arrest him. In the black of night, the line of their torches may have snaked along the hillside to where he waited. And though he prayed in agony to be spared the ordeal to come, he trusted in his Father’s will. Before he could set the captives free, he would have to become one himself. The time had come. The serpent would bruise his heel, but he would crush its head.

As he was led away, his disciples abandoned him. Alone he stood through a mockery of a trial. He was beaten and humiliated, ridiculed and whipped. A crown of thorns was pressed upon his head. The Roman soldiers mocked him as the King of the Jews.

Those soldiers had no idea who they were nailing to that cross to suffer and die. They didn’t understand that he was King of kings and Savior of all, who willingly took on the weight of the world’s sins, including theirs. The forgiveness that would be offered to all was offered first to them. “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” Then at the last Jesus cried out “It is finished!” and died.

The Romans reserved crucifixion for the worst of criminals. It should have brought shame to Jesus. But God raised Jesus from the dead. After three days in the tomb, Jesus is raised, and his resurrection shows that without a doubt, everything has changed. Everything that he taught, everything that he promised, everything that he did is all true. His resurrection promises new life and the renewal of all things, including you and me. In Christ, we will be raised one day too.

Since Adam and Eve were kicked out of the Garden, and banished from God’s presence, humanity has been lost. Because of Jesus we get to return from exile and live with him forever. Our Savior and King has rescued us from our sin, and we will flourish under his reign. Every cry of “Hosanna” has been answered.

Key Verse

Meditate on our key verse for the week. Allow the Spirit to speak to you through God's Word.

“For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. 17 God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him. (John 3:16–17)

Finding your place in God's story

Ask the Spirit to guide you, then consider these questions. Ponder the ones that speak to you:

- As you reflect on what you've read this week, what's your biggest takeaway? How is Jesus established as the true King? How does Jesus' death on the cross save us from sin and death? What part does the resurrection play in the gospel message?
- How did you see yourself reflected in the stories we read this week? For example, are you in the habit of confessing your sins and also accepting the forgiveness Christ offers you on the cross? Are you willing to be sent by God to share the message that “He is risen!”? Easter is coming. Who will you invite?
- For what do you want to praise and thank Jesus?
- What requests do you want to bring to Jesus?

Tune in Next Week:

Our story doesn't end with the resurrection. In fact, we've come to the point on the timeline that says, “You are here!” Through the Spirit, God will continue to expand his kingdom as the gospel message spreads, and you and I get to be a part!