

THE PASSION, THE PAIN, & THE PROMISE



By Max Lucado

Introduction

It's the end of the most significant week in the history of the world.

A week of final moments. Jesus and the apostles' last meal together. The last time Jesus prays in the Garden. The concluding confrontation with enemies. The final encounter with pain.

And the last event. . . a daring display of unleashed divine power. The entombed Savior unbound by a holy explosion. What was a sepulcher is now a symbol...landmarking the greatest victory in the most crucial battle.

A week of final moments. A week of endings.

Or is it the beginning. . . .?

Chapter One

IN THE UPPER ROOM

When I was a young boy I was part of a church corps which took communion to the shut-ins and hospitalized. We visited those who were unable to come to church but still desired to pray and partake of communion. I must have been ten or eleven years of age when we went to one hospital room that housed an elderly gentleman who was very weak. He was asleep so we tried to wake him. We couldn't. We shook him, we spoke to him, we tapped him on the shoulder, but we couldn't stir him.

We hated to leave without performing our duty, but we didn't know what to do.

One of the young guys with me observed that even though the man was asleep his mouth was open. Why not? We said. So we prayed over the cracker and stuck a piece on his tongue. Then we prayed over the grape juice and poured it down his mouth.

He never woke up.

Neither do many today. For some communion is a sleepy hour in which wafers are eaten and juice is drunk and the soul never stirs. It wasn't intended to be as such.

It was intended to be an I-can't-believe-it's-me-pinch-me-I'm-dreaming invitation to sit at God's table and be served by the King himself.

When you read Matthew's account of the Last Supper, one incredible truth surfaces. Jesus is the person behind it all. It was Jesus who selected the place, designated the time, and set the meal in order. "The chosen time is near. I will have the Passover with my followers at your house."¹

And at the Supper, Jesus is not the guest, but the host. "And [Jesus] gave to the disciples." The subject of the verbs is the message of the event: "he took...he blessed...he broke...he gave...."

And, at the Supper, Jesus is not the served, but the servant. It is Jesus who during the supper put on the garb of a servant and washed the disciples' feet.²

Jesus is the most active one at the table. Jesus is not portrayed as the one who reclines and receives, but as the one who stands and gives.

¹ Matthew 26:18

² John 13:5

He still does. The Lord's Supper is a gift to you. The Lord's Supper is a sacrament³, not a sacrifice.⁴

Often, we think of the Supper as a performance, a time when we are on stage and God is the audience. A ceremony in which we do the work and he does the watching. That's not how it was intended. If it was, Jesus would have taken his seat at the table and relaxed.⁵

That's not what he did. He, instead, fulfilled his role as a rabbi by guiding his disciples through the Passover. He fulfilled his role as a servant by washing their feet. And he fulfilled his role as a Savior by granting them forgiveness of sins.

He was in charge. He was on center stage. He was the person behind and in the moment.

And he still is.

It is the Lord's table you sit at. It is the Lord's Supper you eat. Just as Jesus prayed for disciples, Jesus begs God for us.⁶ When you are called to the table, it might be an emissary who gives the letter, but it is Jesus who wrote it.

It is a Holy invitation. A sacred sacrament begging you to leave the chores of life and enter his splendor.

He meets you at the table.

And when bread is broken, Christ breaks it. When the wine is poured, Christ pours it. And when your burdens are lifted, it is because the King in the apron has drawn near.

Think about that the next time you go to the table.

One last thought.

³ A sacrament is a gift from the Lord to his people.

⁴ A sacrifice is a gift of the people to the Lord.

⁵ There are sacrificial moments during the Supper. We offer up prayers, confessions, and thanksgivings as sacrifice. But they are sacrifices of thanksgiving as a salvation received, not sacrifices of service for a salvation desired. We don't say, "Look what I have done." We instead, in awe, watch God and worship what he has done.

Both Luther and Calvin had strong convictions regarding the proper view of the Lord's Supper.

"Out of the sacrament and testament of God, which ought to be a good guest received, they (the religious leaders) have made up for themselves A good deed performed." (Martin Luther, *Luther's Works American Edition*, 36:49)

"He (Jesus) bids the disciples to take: He himself, therefore is the only one who offers. When the priests pretend that they offer Christ in the Supper, they are starting from quite another source. What a wonderful case of topsyturvy, that a mortal man to deserve the body of Christ should snatch himself to the role of offering it." (John Calvin, *A Harmony of the Gospels*, 1:133.)

⁶ Romans 8:34

What happens on earth is just a warm-up for what will happen in heaven.⁷ So the next time the messenger calls you to the table, drop what you are doing and go. Be blessed and be fed and, most importantly, be sure you're still eating at his table when he calls us home.

Chapter Two

IN THE GARDEN

It's nearly midnight when they leave the upper room and descend through the streets of the city. They pass the Lower Pool and exit the Fountain Gate and walk out of Jerusalem. The roads are lined with the fires and tents of Passover pilgrims. Most are asleep, heaved with the evening meal. Those still awake think little of the band of men walking the chalky road.

They pass through the valley and ascend the path which will take them to Gethsemane. The road is steep so they stop to rest. Somewhere within the city walls the twelfth apostle darts down a street. His feet have been washed by the man he will betray. His heart has been claimed by the Evil One he has heard. He runs to find Caiaphas.

The final encounter of the battle has begun.

As Jesus looks at the city of Jerusalem, he sees what the disciples can't. It is here, on the outskirts of Jerusalem, that the battle will end. He sees the staging of Satan. He sees the dashing of the demons. He sees the Evil One preparing for the final encounter. The enemy looks as a spectre over the hour. Satan, the host of hatred, has seized the heart of Judas and whispered in the ear of Caiaphas. Satan, the master of death, has opened the caverns and prepared to receive the source of light.

Hell is breaking loose.

History records it as the battle of the Jews against Jesus. It wasn't. It was a battle of God against Satan.

And Jesus knew it. Jesus knew that before the war was over, he would be taken captive. He knew that before victory would come defeat. He knew that before the throne would come the cup. He knew that before the light of Sunday would come the blackness of Friday.

And he is afraid.

He turns and begins the final ascent into the garden. When he reaches the entry he stops and turns his eyes toward his circle of friends. It will be the last time he sees them before they

⁷ Luke 12:37

abandon him. He knows what they will do when the soldiers come. He knows their betrayal is only minutes away.

But he doesn't accuse. He doesn't lecture. Instead, he prays. His last moments with his disciples are in prayer. And the words he speaks are as eternal as the stars which hear them.

Imagine, for a moment, yourself in this situation. Your final hour with a son about to be sent overseas. Your last moments with your dying spouse. One last visit with your parent. What do you say? What do you do? What words do you choose?

It's worth noting that Jesus chose prayer. He chose to pray for us. "I pray for these men. But I am also praying for all people who will believe in me because of the teaching of these men. Father, I pray that all people who believe in me can be one . . . I pray that these people can also be one in us, so that the world will believe that you sent me."¹

You need to note that in this final prayer, Jesus prayed for you. You need to underline in red and highlight in yellow his love: "I am also praying for all people who believe in me because of the teaching." That is you. As Jesus stepped into the garden, you were in his prayer. As Jesus looked into heaven, you were in his vision. As Jesus dreamed of the day when we will be where he is, he saw you there.

His final prayer was about you. His final pain was for you. His final passion was you. He then turns, steps into the garden, and invites Peter, James, and John to come. He tells them his soul is "overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death," and begins to pray.

Never has he felt so alone. What must be done, only can he do. An angel can't do it. No angel has the power to break open hell's gates. A man can't do it. No man has the purity to destroy sin's claim. No force on earth can face the force of evil and win—except God.

"The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak," Jesus confesses.

His humanity begged to be delivered from what his divinity could see. Jesus, the carpenter, implores. Jesus, the man, peers into the dark pit and begs, "Can't there be another way?"

Did he know the answer before he asked the question? Did his human heart hope his heavenly father had found another way? We don't know. But we do know he asked to get out. We do know he begged for an exit. We do know there was a time when if he could have, he would have turned his head back on the whole mess and gone away.

But he couldn't.

¹ John 17:20-21

He couldn't because he saw you. Right there in the middle of a world which isn't fair. He saw you cast into a river of life which you didn't request. He saw you betrayed by those you love. He saw with a body which gets sick and a heart that grows weak.

He saw you in your own garden of gnarled trees and sleeping friends. He saw you staring into the pit of your own failures and the mouth of your own grave.

He saw you in your Garden of Gethsemane—and he didn't want you to be alone. He wanted you to know that he has been there, too. He knows what it's like to be plotted against. He knows what it's like to be confused. He knows what it's like to be torn between two desires. He knows what it's like to smell the stench of Satan. And, perhaps most of all, he knows what it's like to beg God to change his mind and to hear God say so gently, but firmly, "No."

For that is what God said to Jesus. And Jesus accepts the answer. At some moment during that midnight hour an angel of mercy comes over the weary body of the man in the garden. As he stands, the anguish is gone from his eyes. His fist will clench no more. His heart will fight no more.

The battle is won. You may have thought it was won on Golgotha. It wasn't. The final battle was won in Gethsemane. And the sign of conquest is Jesus at peace in the olive trees.

For it was in the garden that he made his decision. He would rather go to hell for you than go to heaven without you.

Chapter Three

AT THE TRIAL

The most famous trial in history is about to begin. The judge is short and patrician with darting eyes and expensive clothes. His graying hair trimmed and face beardless. He is apprehensive, nervous about being thrust into a decision he can't avoid. Two soldiers lead him down the stone stairs of the fortress into the broad courtyard. Shafts of morning sunlight stretch across the stone floor.

As he enters, Syrian soldiers dressed in short togas yank themselves and their spears erect and stair straight ahead. The floor on which they stand is a mosaic of broad, brown, smooth rocks. On the floor are carved the games the soldiers play while awaiting the sentencing of the prisoner.

But in the presence of the procurator, they don't play.

A regal chair is placed on a landing five steps up from the floor. The magistrate ascends and takes his seat. The accused is brought into the room and placed below him. A covey of robed religious leaders follow, walk over to one side of the room, and stand.

Pilate looks at the lone figure.

"Doesn't look like a Christ," he mutters.

Feet swollen and muddy. Hands tan. Knuckles lumpy.

Looks more like a laborer than a teacher. Looks even less like a trouble-maker.

One eye is black and swollen shut. The other looks at the floor. Lower lip split and scabbed. Hair blood-matted to forehead. Arms and thighs streaked with crimson.

"Shall we remove the garment?" a soldier asks.

"No. It's not necessary.

It's obvious what the beating has done.

"Are you the king of the Jews?"

For the first time, Jesus lifts his eyes. He doesn't raise his head, but he lifts his eyes. He peers at the procurator from beneath his brow. Pilate is surprised at the tone in Jesus' voice.

"Those are your words."

Before Pilate can respond, the knot of Jewish leaders mock the accused from the side of the courtroom.

"See, he has no respect."

"He stirs the people!"

"He claims to be king!"

Pilate doesn't hear them. *"Those are your words."* No defense. No explanation. No panic. The Galilean is looking at the floor again.

Pilate looks at the Jewish leaders huddled in the corner across the court. Their insistence angers him. The lashes aren't enough. The mockery inadequate. *Jealous*, he wants to say to their faces, but doesn't. *Jealous buzzards, the whole obstinate lot of you. Killing your own prophets.*

Pilate wants to let Jesus go. *Just give me a reason*, he thinks, almost aloud. *I'll set you free.*

His thoughts are interrupted by a tap on the shoulder. A messenger leans and whispers. Strange. Pilate's wife has sent word not to get involved in the case. Something about a dream she had.

Pilate walks back to his chair, sits, and stares at Jesus. "Even the gods are on your side?" he states with no explanation.

He has sat in this chair before. It's a curule seat: cobalt blue with thick, ornate legs. The traditional seat of decision. By sitting on it Pilate transforms any room or street into a courtroom. It is from here he renders his decisions.

How many times has he sat here? How many stories has he heard? How many pleas has he received? How many wide eyes have stared at him, pleading for mercy, begging for acquittal?

But the eyes of this Nazarene are calm, silent. They don't scream. They don't dart. Pilate searches them for anxiety. . . for anger. He doesn't find it. What he finds in them makes him shift again.

He's not angry with me. He's not afraid . . .he seems to understand.

Pilate is correct in his observation. Jesus is not afraid. He is not angry. He is not on the verge of panic. For he is not surprised. Jesus knows his hour and the hour has come.

Pilate is correct in his curiosity. Where, if Jesus is a leader, are his followers? What, if he is the Messiah, does he intend to do? Why, if he is a teacher, are the religious leaders so angry at him?

Pilate is also correct in his question. "What should I do with Jesus, the one called Christ?"¹

Perhaps you, like Pilate, are curious about this one called Jesus. You, like Pilate, are puzzled by his claims and stirred by his passions. You have heard the stories: God descending the stars, cocooning in flesh, placing a stake of truth in the globe. You, like Pilate, have heard the others speak; now you would like for him to speak.

What do you do with a man who claims to be God, yet hates religion? What do you do with a man who calls himself the Savior, yet condemns systems? What do you do with a man who knows the place and time of his death, yet goes there anyway?

Pilate's question is yours. "What will I do with this man, Jesus?"

You have two choices.

You can reject him. That is an option. You can, as have many, decide that the idea of God becoming a carpenter is too bizarre—and walk away.

Or you can accept him. You can journey with him. You can listen for his voice amidst the hundreds of voices and follow him. Pilate could have. He heard many voices that day—he could have heard Christ's. Had Pilate chosen to respond to his bruised Messiah, his story would have been different.

Pilate vacillates. He is a puppy hearing two voices. He steps toward one, then stops, and steps toward the other. Four times he tries to free Jesus, and four times he is swayed otherwise. He tries to give the people Barabbas; but they want Jesus. He sends Jesus to the whipping post; they want him sent to Golgotha. He states he finds nothing against this man; they accuse Pilate of violating the law. Pilate, afraid of who Jesus might be, tries one final time to release him; the Jews accuse him of betraying Caesar.

So many voices. The voice of compromise. The voice of expedience. The voice of politics. The voice of conscience.

¹ Matthew 27:22

And the soft firm voice of Christ. "The only power you have over me is the power given to you by God."²

Jesus' voice is distinct. Unique. He doesn't cajole or plead. He just states the case.

Pilate thought he could avoid making a choice. He washed his hands of Jesus. He climbed on the fence and sat down.

But in not making a choice, Pilate made a choice.

Rather than ask for God's grace, he asked for a howl. Rather than invite Jesus to stay, he sent him away. Rather than hear Christ's voice, he heard the voice of the people.

Legend has it that Pilate's wife became a believer. And legend has it that Pilate's eternal home is a mountain lake where he daily surfaces, still plunging his hands into the water seeking forgiveness. Forever trying to wash away his guilt . . . not for the evil he did, but for the kindness he didn't do.

² John 18:34

Chapter Four

BEHOLD THE LAMB OF GOD

Lord?

Yes.

I may be stepping out of line by saying this, but I need to tell you something that has been on my mind.

Go ahead.

I don't like this verse: "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" It doesn't sound like you; it doesn't sound like something you would say.

Usually I love it when you speak. I listen when you speak. I imagine the power of your voice, the thunder of your commands, the dynamism in your dictates. That's what I like to hear.

Remember the creation song you sang into the soundless eternity? Ah, now that's you. That was the act of a God!

And when you ordained the waves to splash and they roared, when you declared that the stars be flung and they flew, when you proclaimed that life be alive and it all began? . . . Or the whisper of breath into the clay-baked Adam? That was you at your best. That's the way I like to hear you. That's the voice I love to hear.

That's why I don't like this verse. Is that really you speaking? Are those words yours? Is that actually your voice? The voice which enflamed a bush, split a sea, and sent fire from heaven?

But this time your voice is different.

Look at the sentence. There is a "why" at the beginning and a question mark at the end. You don't ask questions.

What happened to the exclamation point? That's your trademark. That's your signature closing. The mark as tall and strong as the words which precede it.

It's at the end of your command to Lazarus: "Come out!"¹

It's there as you exorcise the demons: "Go!"²

It stands as courageously as you do as you walk on waters and tell the followers: "Have courage!"³

Your words deserve an exclamation point. They are the cymbal clash of the finale, the cannon shot of victory, the thunder of conquering chariots.

Your verbs form cannons and ignite disciples. Speak, God! You are the exclamation point of life itself. . .

So, why the question mark hovering at the end of your words? Frail. Bent and bowed. Stooped as if weary. Would that you would straighten it. Stretch it. Make it stand tall.

And as long as I'm shooting straight with you—I don't like to see the word *abandon*, either. The source of life . . . abandoned? The giver of love. . . , alone? The father of all. . . isolated?

Come on. Surely you don't mean it. Could deity feel abandoned?

Could we change the sentence a bit? Not much. Just the verb.

What would you suggest?

How about *challenge*? "My God, my God, why did you challenge me?"

Isn't that better? Now we can applaud. Now we can lift banners for your dedication. Now we can explain it to our children. It makes sense now. You see, that makes you a hero. A hero. History is full of heroes.

And who is a hero but one who survives a challenge.

¹ John 11:43

² Matthew 8:32

³ John 19:11

Or, if that's not acceptable, I have another one. Why not *afflict*? "My God, my God, why did you afflict me?" Yes, that's it. Now you are a martyr, taking a stand for truth. A patriot, pierced by evil. A noble soldier who took the sword all the way to the hilt; bloody and beaten, but victorious.

Afflicted is much better than *abandoned*. You are a martyr. Right up there with Patrick Henry and Abraham Lincoln.

You are God, Jesus! You couldn't be abandoned. You couldn't be left alone. You couldn't be deserted in your most painful moment.

Abandonment. That is the punishment for a criminal. Abandonment. That is the suffering borne by the most evil. Abandonment. That's for the vile—not for you. Not you, the King of Kings. Not you, the Beginning and the End. Not you, the One Unborn. After all, didn't John call you Lamb of God?

What a name! That's who you are. The spotless, unblemished Lamb of God. I can hear John say the words. I can see him lift his eyes. I can see him smile and point to you and proclaim loud enough for all of Jordan to hear, "Behold the Lamb of God. . ."

And before he finishes his sentence, all eyes turn to you. Young, tan, robust. Broad shoulders and strong arms.

"Behold the Lamb of God. . ."

Do you like that verse?

I sure do. God. It's one of my favorites. It's you.

What about the second part of it?

Hmmm, let me see if I remember. "Behold the Lamb of God who has come to take away the sins of the world."⁴ Is that it, God?

That's it. Think about what the Lamb of God came to do.

"Who has come to take away the sins of the world." Wait a minute. "To take away the sins. . ." I'd never thought about those words.

I'd read them but never thought about them. I thought you just, I don't know, sent sin away. Banished it. I thought you'd just stood in front of the mountains of our sins and told them to be gone. Just like you did to the demons. Just like you did to the hypocrites in the temple.

I just thought you commanded the evil out. I never noticed that you took it out. It never occurred to me that you actually touched it—worse still that it touched you.

⁴ John 1:29

That must have been a terrible moment. I know what it's like to be touched by sin. I know what it's like to smell the stench of that stuff. Remember what I used to be like? Before I knew you, I wallowed in that mire. I didn't just touch sin, I loved it. I drank it. I danced with it. I was in the middle of it.

But why am I telling you? You remember. You were the one who saw me. You were the one who found me. I was lonely. I was afraid. Remember? "Why? Why me? Why has all this hurt happened?"

I know it wasn't much of a question. It wasn't the right question. But it was all I knew to ask. You see, God, I felt so confused. So desolate. Sin will do that to you. Sin leaves you shipwrecked, orphaned, adrift, aban—

Oh. My goodness, God. Is that what happened? You mean sin did the same to you that it did to me?

I'm sorry. Oh, I'm so sorry. I didn't know. I didn't understand. You really were alone, weren't you?

Your question was real, wasn't it, Jesus? You really were afraid. You really were alone. Just like I was. Only, I deserved it. You didn't.

Forgive me, I spoke out of turn.

Chapter Five

THE TREASURE OF THE TOMB

“So what should I do with Jesus?”

Pilate asked it first, but we’ve all asked it since.

It’s a fair question. A necessary question. What do you do with such a man? He called himself God, but wore the clothes of a man. He called himself the Messiah, but never marshaled an army. He was regarded as king, but his only crown was of thorns. People revered him as regal, yet his only robe was stitched with mockery.

Small wonder Pilate was puzzled. How do you explain such a man?

One way is to take a walk. His walk. His final walk. Follow his steps. Stand in his shadow. From Jericho to Jerusalem. From the temple to the garden. From the garden to the trial. From Pilate’s palace to Golgotha’s cross. Watch him walk—angrily to the temple, wearily into Gethsemane, painfully up the Via Dolorosa. And powerfully out of the vacated tomb.

As you witness his walk, reflect on your own, for all of us have our own walk to Jerusalem. Our own path through hollow religion. Our own journey down the narrow path of rejection. And each of us, like Pilate, must cast a verdict on Jesus.

Pilate heard the voice of the people and left Jesus to walk the road alone.

Will we?

I hope that permanently planted in your soul is the moment the Father stirred you in the darkness and led you down the path to freedom. It’s a memory like no other. For when he sets you free, you are free indeed.

Can I tell you my story?

A Bible class in a small West Texas town. I don’t know what was more remarkable, that a teacher was trying to teach the book of Romans to a group of ten-year-olds or that I remember what he said.

The classroom was mid-sized, one of a dozen or so in a small church. My desk had carving on it and gum under it. Twenty or so others were in the room, though only four or five were taken.

We all sat at the back, too sophisticated to appear interested. Starched jeans. High-topped tennis shoes. It was summer and the slow-setting sun cast the window in gold.

The teacher was an earnest man. I can still see his flattop, his belly bulging from beneath his coat that he doesn't even try to button. His tie stops midway down his chest. He has a black mole on his forehead, a soft voice, and a kind smile. Though he is hopelessly out of touch with the kids of 1965, he doesn't know it.

His notes are stacked on a podium underneath a heavy black Bible. His back is turned to us and his jacket goes up and down his beltline as he writes on the board. He speaks with genuine passion. He is not a dramatic man, but tonight he is fervent.

God only knows why I heard him that night. His text was Romans chapter six. The blackboard was littered with long words and diagrams. Somewhere in the process of describing how Jesus went into the tomb and came back out, it happened. The jewel of grace was lifted and turned so I could see it from a new angle... and it stole my breath.

I didn't see a moral code. I didn't see a church. I didn't see the ten commandments or hellish demons. I saw my Father enter my dark night, awaken me from my slumber, and gently guide me—no, carry me—to freedom.

I said nothing to my teacher. I said nothing to my friends. I'm not sure I even said anything to God. I didn't know what to say. I didn't know what to do. But for all I didn't know there was one fact of which I was absolutely sure, I wanted to be with him.

I told my father I was ready to give my life to God. He thought I was too young to make the decision. He asked what I knew. I told him Jesus was in heaven and I wanted to be with him. And for my dad, that was enough.

To this day I wonder if my love has ever been as pure as it was that first hour. I long for the certainty of my adorning faith. Had you told me that Jesus was in hell, I would have agreed to go. Public confession and baptism came naturally for me.

You see, when your Father comes to deliver you from bondage, you don't ask questions; you obey instructions. You take his hand. You walk the path. You leave bondage behind. And you never, never forget.

I pray you never forget your walk or his: Jesus' final walk from Jericho to Jerusalem. For it was this walk that promised you freedom.

His final walk through the temple of Jerusalem. For it was on this walk that he denounced hollow religion.

His final walk to the Mount of Olives. For it was there he promised to return and take you home.

And his final walk from Pilate's palace to Golgotha's cross. Bare, bloody feet struggling up a stony narrow path. But just as vivid as the pain of the beam across his raw back is his vision of you and him walking together.

He could see the hour he would come into your life, into your dark cabin to stir you out of your sleep and guide you to freedom.

But the walk isn't over. The journey isn't complete. There is one more walk that must be made.

"I will come back," he promised. And to prove it he ripped in two the temple curtain and split open the doors of death. He will come back.

"The one who has redeemed us has returned!" we will cry.

And the journey will end and we will take our seats at his feast. . . forever.

See you at the table.

STUDY GUIDE

Chapter One IN THE UPPER ROOM

1. *For some, communion is a sleepy hour in which wafers are eaten and juice is drunk and the soul never stirs. It wasn't intended to be as such. It was intended to be an I-can't-believe-it's-me-pinch-me-I'm-dreaming invitation to sit at God's table and be served by the King himself.*

A. Be honest here—what has been your attitude toward communion? How do Max's words strike you?

B. Read Matthew 26:17-30. Try to imagine what it would have been like to sit with the Savior at this meal. What are you thinking? What are you feeling? What do you think of Jesus' quote in verse 29?

2. *It is the Lord's table you sit at. It is the Lord's supper you eat. Just as Jesus prayed for his disciples, Jesus begs God for us. When you are called to the table, it might be an emissary who gives the letter, but it is Jesus who wrote it.*

A. Who is the emissary Max mentions in the quote above? Why is it significant to remember that it's Jesus who calls you to the table?

B. Read John 17:20-23. What is the primary request Jesus makes in this passage? How is it relevant in talking about the Lord's Supper?

3. *What happens on earth is just a warm-up for what will happen in heaven. So the next time the messenger calls you to the table, drop what you are doing and go. Be blessed and be fed and, most importantly, be sure you're still eating at his table when he calls us home.*

A. What does Max mean when he writes, "Be sure you're still eating at his table when he calls us home"? What should we be careful to do?

B. Read Luke 22:14-18. What word does Jesus use to describe his attitude about eating the Lord's Supper with his disciples? What future event is emphasized in both verse 16 and 18? Do you come to the Lord's table with this emphasis in mind?

C. Read 1 Corinthians 11:26. What does this verse add to your understanding of the Lord's supper? How is it meant to shape the way we live our lives?

Chapter Two

IN THE GARDEN

1. *Jesus knew that before the war was over he would be taken captive. He knew that before the victory would come defeat. He knew that before the throne would come the cup. He knew that before the light of Sunday would come the blackness of Friday. And he is afraid.*

A. How does it make you feel to realize that Jesus was afraid? Why?

B. Read Matthew 26:36-46. How does Jesus describe his anguish of soul (verse 38)? What does his posture (verse 39) tell you? In what way were the events described in this passage like a battle?

2. *You need to note that in his final prayer, Jesus prayed for you. You need to underline in red and highlight in yellow his love, "I am also praying for all people who will believe in me because of the teaching" That is you. As Jesus stepped into the garden, you were in his prayers. As Jesus looked into heaven, you were in his vision. As Jesus dreamed of the day when we will be where he is, he saw you there.*

A. What effect does it have upon you to realize that even as Jesus prepared to go to the cross, he had you in mind?

B. Read John 17:24. What is Jesus' special request in this verse? Why does he make this request? How does this request make you feel? Why?

3. *It was in the garden that he made his decision. He would rather go to hell for you than go to heaven without you.*

A. In what way did Jesus go to hell for you? How should this knowledge affect the way we live? Does it? If so, in what way? If not, why not?

B. Read Ephesians 4:7-10. What light does this passage shed on Max's quote above? What is the significance of the phrase "in order to fill the whole universe"?

C. Read Hebrews 12:2. According to this verse, why did Jesus endure the cross, scorning its shame? What is important about him sitting down at the right hand of the throne of God?

Chapter Three

AT THE TRIAL

1. *Jesus is not afraid. He is not angry. He is not on the verge of panic. For he is not surprised. Jesus knows his hour and the hour has come.*
 A. Read John 2:4; 7:6,8,30; 8:20; 13:1. What progression do you see in these verses? In what way do these references make it clear that Jesus was perfectly aware of his mission?

2. *Perhaps you, like Pilate, are curious about this one called Jesus. You, like Pilate, are puzzled by his claims and stirred by his passions. You have heard the stories: God descending the stars, cocooning in flesh, placing a stake of truth in the globe. You, like Pilate, have heard the others speak, now you would like for him to speak.*
 A. Are you curious about Jesus? In what ways? Does he puzzle you? How? Which stories about him are the hardest for you to accept? Why?
 B. Read Luke 22:67-70. What claim does Jesus make for himself in this passage? Why is this the most phenomenal claim of all?

3. *You have two choices. You can reject Jesus. That is an option. You can, as have many, decide that the idea of God becoming a carpenter is too bizarre—and walk away. Or you can accept him. You can journey with him. You can listen for his voice amidst the hundreds of voices and follow him.*
 A. What choice have you made about Jesus? Whose voice are you listening for amidst the hundreds that vie for your attention?
 B. Read John 6:60-69. Why did some disciples turn away from following Jesus? Why did Peter continue to follow him? Which decision is most like your own? Why?

4. *Pilate thought he could avoid making a choice. He washed his hands of Jesus. He climbed on the fence and sat down. But in not making a choice, Pilate made a choice.*
 A. In what way did Pilate make a choice by not making a choice? How can we make exactly the same mistake?
 B. Read Matthew 12:30. In what way does this verse warn against fence sitting?
 C. Read John 5:22-29. How does this passage teach that it's impossible to be neutral about Jesus?

Chapter Four

BEHOLD THE LAMB OF GOD

1. *You are God, Jesus! You couldn't be abandoned. You couldn't be left alone. You couldn't be deserted in your most painful moment.*

- A. Why is it so hard to accept that Jesus really was abandoned for a time on the cross? Why do you think he was abandoned?
- B. Read Matthew 27:45-50. What image comes most clearly to your mind in this scene?
- C. Read Psalm 22:1. What impression does it leave upon you that even the words Jesus cried out from the cross were prophesied hundreds of years before they were spoken?
2. *I thought you just sent sin away. Banished it. I thought you'd just stood in front of the mountains of our sins and told them to be gone. Just like you did to the demons. Just like you did to the hypocrites in the temple. I just thought you commanded the evil out. I never noticed that you took it out. It never occurred to me that you actually touched it—or worse still that it touched you.*
- A. Why was it not possible for God simply to send sin away? Why did it have to be taken out?
- B. Read 2 Corinthians 5:21. What did God do to him who had no sin? Who is the one who had no sin? For whom did he do this? Why did he do this? What is your reaction to this?
- C. Read Galatians 3:13-14. Who redeemed us from the curse of the law? How did he do this? Why did he do this?
3. *Your question was real, wasn't it, Jesus? You really were afraid. You really were alone. Just like I was. Only, I deserved it. You didn't.*
- A. In what way did we deserve to be alone? Why did Jesus not deserve to be alone? Why did God reverse our roles?
- B. Read Isaiah 53:4-5. How many instances of this role reversal can you spot in this passage? With what main impression does this passage leave you?
- C. Read 1 Peter 3:18. For what did Christ die? What role reversal is described here? What was the purpose of this reversal? Have you personally appropriated what this verse describes?

Chapter Five

THE TREASURE OF THE TOMB

1. *What do you do with such a man? He called himself God, but wore the clothes of a man. He called himself the Messiah, but never marshaled an army. He was regarded as King, but his only crown was of thorns. People revered him as regal, yet his only robe was stitched with mockery.*

- A. Answer the question above: What do you do with such a man?
- B. Read Matthew 28:1-10. Why do you think the angel sat on the stone in verse 2? Why did he speak to the women but not the guards? How is it that the women could be both afraid and filled with joy at the same time (verse 8)?
2. *I hope that permanently planted in your soul is the moment the Father stirred you in the darkness and led you down the path to freedom. It's a memory like no other. For when he sets you free, you are free indeed.*
- A. Remember the moment you met the Savior? Describe the scene if you can.
- B. Read Acts 26:12-18. List the elements Paul uses in his testimony. Does the way he gives his testimony give you any ideas about the way you could give yours? Explain your answer.
3. *I told my father that I was ready to give my life to God. He thought I was too young to make the decision. He asked what I knew. I told him Jesus was in heaven and I wanted to be with him. And for my dad, that was enough.*
- A. How can you tell when someone is ready to give his life to God?
- B. Read Romans 10:9. How do you give your life to God, according to this verse?
- C. Read 2 Corinthians 6:1-2. According to the passage, when is it appropriate to give your life to God?
4. *The journey isn't complete. There is one more walk that must be made. "I will come back," he promised. And to prove it he ripped in two the temple curtain and split open the doors of death. He will come back. "The one who has redeemed us has returned!" we will cry. And the journey will end and we will take our seats at his feast...forever. See you at the table.*
- A. Are you looking forward to the day described in the quote above? If so, how does this expectation shape the way you live now? Do you expect to be at the table? If so, how? If not, why not?
- B. Compare 1 Thessalonians 3:12-13 and 5:23-24. How does Paul connect the expectation of Christ's coming with our conduct right now? What supplies the power for godly living (5:24)?
- C. Take time to pause and thank God for sending his Son to earth to die in your place. Thank him for his love. Thank him for his patience. Thank him for his provision.

Spend some uninterrupted time simply basking in the gracious presence of the One who does all things well.

The Passion, The Pain and The Promise

Published by UpWords Ministries

©1996 by Max Lucado

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form, or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or any other—except for brief quotations in printed reviews with the prior permission of the publisher.

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture references are from the New Century Version of the Bible, ©1987, 1988, 1991, Word Publishing.

Excerpts taken from "The Final Week of Jesus"

© 1994 by Max Lucado.

This electronic copy of *The Passion, the Pain, and the Promise* is brought to you by UpWords, the ministry of Max Lucado. UpWords is a non-profit ministry that exists because of the generosity of people like you. It is our prayer that this ministry will continue to encourage the lives of those who seek a deeper relationship with the Lord. If this material has been beneficial to your spiritual life, please prayerfully consider contributing to our ministry with prayer and financial support.

For information about UpWords' radio, online and tape ministries featuring Max Lucado,
Or to contribute to UpWords, write:

UpWords
PO Box 692170
San Antonio, TX 78269-2170
1-800-822-9673

or visit www.maxlucado.com

“The chief aim of UpWords is to create an arena in which the listener will have a personal encounter with the personality, teachings and claims of the Son of God.”