

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

Mankind's demise began in a garden long ago. Contrary to God's command, Adam ate the fruit of "*the tree of the knowledge of good and evil*" of which God had said, "*in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die*" (Gen. 2:17). Adam ate, Adam sinned, and Adam died. Worse, sin and death have been the lot of man ever since. The sons and daughters of Adam sin and die.

The good news is that there is one Son of Adam, "*born of woman*" — yes, "*born under the law*" (Gal. 4:4) — who is also the Son of God, who came down from the Father's side to be the One to rescue us from this demise, who came to redeem us who are under the law, to deliver us from the Law's condemnation and from death, and to give us righteousness and life.

And so, Jesus our Savior, the second Adam, began the climax of our salvation — again in a garden — though the rescue was more involved than the fall. In the fall into sin, Adam and Eve learned shame; in our salvation, Jesus, "*despising the shame*" (Heb. 12:2), endured all that sin and death and the devil could throw at Him over the next dozen or so hours.

As the deceiver of old knew where to find Adam in the garden, so the betrayer knew the garden where the second Adam was to be found. He led the "*band of soldiers and some officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees*" to arrest Jesus. They came with weapons in hand, but they didn't need them. Jesus wasn't surprised by this nighttime raid. He knew in advance that it was going to happen, and He was ready to complete His mission to unbar the way back to the garden paradise. He readily surrendered Himself to the soldiers. And though Peter had come out ready to fight, pulling out a sword and cutting off the High Priest's servant's ear, Jesus stopped him; I must "*drink the cup that the Father has given me.*"

The soldiers bound Jesus, perhaps symbolic of the sins which take us captive now bound to Jesus. They led Him to Annas for questioning, but he got nothing from Jesus, except perhaps a bit of blood. Annas sent Jesus on to Caiaphas. Meanwhile, there in the courtyard of the High Priest — I picture it a verdant courtyard — there bold Peter became timid Peter, denying his God. Oh, what wretched sinners are the sons of Adam, when even the boldest disciple lies so!

John doesn't tell us of the events of Jesus before Caiaphas, but we know that there the chief priests and Pharisees figured out how to accuse Jesus before Pilate. The Jews needed the Romans to execute Jesus, but Jesus had already foretold "*by what kind of death he was going to die*" — by being "*lifted up from the earth*" (John 12:32-33). And so, they brought Jesus to Pontius Pilate.

Pilate wanted nothing to do with Jesus. "*Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law,*" Pilate told them, but they wanted Jesus dead, and they couldn't do it. Their accusations fell flat with Pilate, however. Jesus admitted being a king, but

of a “*kingdom ... not of this world*” for Jesus’ kingdom is eternal and spiritual, and He promises a return to the sinless paradise of Eden. He was no threat to the earthly kingdom of Rome.

Pilate sought ways to get out of his dilemma. Jesus Himself was innocent; there was no cause to execute Him. If the mob wanted blood, perhaps he could offer up a notorious robber instead ... perhaps Barabbas? But, “No, not Barabbas. Crucify Jesus!” Perhaps if only he might mistreat Jesus, perhaps that would be enough. He presented the bruised, battered, and bloodied Jesus! “*Behold, the man!*” But “*Crucify him*” spewed forth from the enraged mob’s mouth. Perhaps mockery would satisfy the mob. He dressed Jesus with a purple robe and crowned Him with thorns. “*Behold your king!*” But no. “*We have no king but Caesar.*” “[A]way with him, crucify him!” Only Jesus’ death would appease the mob. As hard as it is to hear, it was perfect. Everything was going according to plan.

Thus Pilate sent forth Jesus to be crucified, and thus, another tree entered the picture, the tree of the cross. Eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the primordial garden brought sin and death and separation. But from the tree of the cross comes the antidote to all these effects of the fall and their consequences, from anxiety and distress, from misery and grief, from irritants and thorns, from weakness and imperfection, from disease and disability, from corruption and dysfunction, from sin and death and condemnation. For although this latter tree was the instrument of Jesus’ death, from this tree comes atonement — “*It is finished*”; we have been reconciled to God; from this tree comes forgiveness — “*pierced for our transgressions ... crushed for our iniquities,*” Jesus announced, “*Father, forgive them*” (Luke 23:34); from this tree comes life, through faith in the Crucified, a faith nourished by the blood and water that flow from His pierced side; “*whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life*” (John 3:16).

And so, we come full circle. The first Adam sinned and brought death to all. And he was banished from the garden. The second Adam, Jesus, in an act of righteousness bore the sin of all, becoming sin and dying; yet He was not banished, but was brought to another garden and planted in a tomb. The seed of woman fell to the ground and died, but in this garden’s fertile soil, this seed sprouted forth in three days, and it now bears much fruit in us. And though we too will die and likely be planted in the soil, because of Jesus, we too will sprout forth in resurrection victory. In the end, we will live, and we will be planted in a new garden, a garden paradise in which righteousness dwells (2 Pet. 3:13).

On this day of sober reflection on Christ, the crucified, we do not despair but rejoice in the promise that lies ahead for sinful men who are in Christ Jesus.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.