

Title: Paid In Full!**Good morning everyone:****Open with prayer**

For as long as I live I will never forget the sight, the sounds, and the terrible grief... The sky was blackened with ominous clouds; the winds tore across the land; and on the horizon stood three crosses with men clinging to life. The sign over the one in the middle read, "The King of the Jews." He brought great controversy and great hope, but that hope seemed to be fading with each passing minute. The unbearable sobbing and wailing from the mourners became exhausted only to erupt again when He painfully lifted Himself up to get another full breath. *The end was near, and hope was vanishing..*

I was there when He looked down at the soldiers casting lots for His clothes, and I heard the Pharisees mock Him... His only response... **"Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing."**

I was there when He said, **"I am thirsty,"** and after taking a drink, with His lips moistened, and His throat hydrated, He cried out in a loud voice, **"Paid in full!"** and then bowed His head and gave up His spirit...

Paid in full? What did He mean?

What debt did this Man owe? What sin had He committed?

I will never forget those words... I hope to understand them one day...

My name is Nicodemus and this is my story...

I am married, and I have a 7 year old son named Jonathan, and two beautiful little girls (4 & 2). I live in Judea in the village of Emmaus just outside of Jerusalem. I have been a dedicated follower of Gamaliel (Gu-Ma-Lee-el) for several years and last year earned the distinction of Pharisee. I have been teaching the law in my village ever since.

During my first Passover, I was given special duties and responsibilities that are reserved for Pharisees. I was particularly encouraged at that time to see my son beginning to understand our cultural and religious heritage. He was becoming a humble, kind and responsible young boy, and that year he got to care for one of our lambs. I remember when I was given the same privilege at his age. I still vividly recall the pride of raising my first lamb and later the sorrow.

On Sunday afternoon, the first day of the Passover week, it was sunny and warm, and the sky was remarkably beautiful. It was a perfect day to travel to Jerusalem. When we arrived, the city was packed with people shopping, walking, talking, and singing. It is such a wonderful to see so many people happy & enjoying the celebration.

Everything seemed perfect until the violent disruption at the temple courts.

The temple courts were filled with merchants selling cattle, sheep, and doves just as they have for as long as I can remember. There were people exchanging Roman money for the Temple currency as well. I am not sure what caused this Man to get so upset, but He made a whip from some ropes and chased all the merchants out of the Temple. He drove out the sheep and cattle, scattered the money changers' coins over the floor, and turned over their tables. 16 Then, going over to the people who sold doves, he told them, "Get these things out of here. Stop turning my Father's house into a marketplace!"

Watching this, I don't know what came over me; I was mesmerized by this Man.

His passion for the Temple stirred in me a great sense of awe. I was angry but stunned with wonder at the same time. I couldn't help notice that no one dared to try and stop Him. He had no one else helping Him, and He had no soldiers backing Him up. The Jewish leaders watched and so did the Roman soldiers. It was as if they were paralyzed. Finally, I overheard one of the Jewish leaders demanding, "What are you doing? If God gave you authority to do this, show us a miraculous sign to prove it." 19 "All right," HE replied. "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." 20 "What!" they exclaimed. "It has taken forty-six years to build this Temple, and you can rebuild it in three days?"

Hearing Him make this declaration, I was convinced that He was mentally ill.

Why else would the leaders have allowed Him to do this? They must have known who He was and showed compassion on Him by not having Him removed and arrested.

After He left the Temple, things got back to normal, at least to some degree.

I overheard people praising Him and others questioning the rumors about who He was and where He was from. Many people mentioned the miracles He performed, how He taught with authority but also with grace and compassion. I don't recall any of the officials from the Sanhedrin saying anything positive. They seemed more concerned about the lost income from the merchants.

On the way home that evening, His words would not stop running through my mind, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." ***In three days I will raise it up.*** Finally, I decided to turn back and return to Jerusalem. I had to find Him and ask some questions. I suspected the Pharisees wouldn't appreciate me talking to Him so the timing was perfect. I could meet Him late at night under the cover of darkness. ***I was nervous about approaching Him*** but decided I would speak with respect...

This is how our conversation went, “Rabbi, we all know that God has sent you to teach us. Your miraculous signs are evidence that God is with you.” **HE** replied, “I tell you the truth, unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God.”

What do you mean? How can an old man go back into his mother’s womb and be born again?” **He replied**, “I assure you, no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit. 6 Humans can reproduce only human life, but the Holy Spirit gives birth to spiritual life. 7 So don’t be surprised when I say, ‘You must be born again.’ 8 The wind blows wherever it wants. Just as you can hear the wind but can’t tell where it comes from or where it is going, so you can’t explain how people are born of the Spirit.”

He went on to talk about Moses and the bronze snake, how God loved the world by giving His one and only Son so all who believe in Him will not perish but have eternal life. He also talked about judgment for those who reject his Son...

Everything He said was amazing. The way He spoke was gracious, compelling, and believable, but I couldn’t really understand it. The very last statement He made has really made me think and has greatly impacted me. He said, **19 And the judgment is based on this fact: God’s light came into the world, but people loved the darkness more than the light, for their actions were evil. 20 All who do evil hate the light and refuse to go near it for fear their sins will be exposed. 21 But those who do what is right come to the light so others can see that they are doing what God wants.”**

People love the darkness... People love sin and their actions are evil...

Is this true of me? Do I love sin? Are my actions evil? What about my wife, my kids, my village, and our nation?

God's Word seems to support what He said...

In ancient times, God said to Cain, **Genesis 4:7** - You will be accepted if you do what is right. But if you refuse to do what is right, then watch out! Sin is crouching at the door, **eager to control you**. But you must subdue it and be its master.”

King David seemed to agree as well, he wrote...

Psalms 51:3-5 - For I recognize my rebellion; it haunts me day and night. 4 Against you, and you alone, have I sinned; I have done what is evil in your sight. You will be proved right in what you say, and your judgment against me is just. 5 For I was born a sinner—yes, from the moment my mother conceived me.

God's judgment against sin is just. God is light, He is holy, and in Him there is no darkness yet we are evil and love the darkness. Thankfully, God didn't leave us to live without hope and separation from Him. By bringing a sin offering to the priests and by the ritual sacrifice of the animal on The Alter, **the priest purified the people from their sin, making them right with the Lord, and they will be forgiven.** **22 In fact, according to the Law of Moses, nearly everything was purified with blood. For without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness.**

With His words etched in my mind, I began to notice the reality of His words more and more... Examining my own heart and the actions of others confirmed this truth. **What a wretched people!** Praise God for the sacrifice that brings us forgiveness!

The next year when Passover came around again, we prepared for the festivities as we always do, but this year would be different. It was a time of transition and growth for me and my son. The day before we left, I let Jonathan know that his lamb would be going to Jerusalem with us. He asked why? I told him how proud I was that he raised a perfect, spotless lamb without defect, and he was the best lamb we had. He asked, "Why does God want my lamb? Can't we take a different one?" God wants our best, and your lamb is our best; he is perfect with no blemishes. When he finally realized that his lamb had to be sacrificed in order for our sins to be forgiven, he was angry at me, his mom and everyone who sinned. I told him this is how God feels about sin. He is angry with sin because it separates us from Him. God is holy and perfect, and He can't be around anything corrupt, including us. This is why He requires us to be cleansed by blood. As I was sharing this with my son, I was reminded of His words... **God's light came into the world, but people loved the darkness more than the light...** Trying to comfort him, I shared the story about how God would one day send a perfect Lamb, and we would no longer have to sacrifice our animals. God promised, and He always keeps His promises.

My third year serving as a Pharisee was challenging to say the least. The Man who cleared the Temple two years ago was challenging the authority of the Sanhedrin, the Chief Priest, and threatening to bring rebellion to our nation. We have lived under Roman rule long enough to know what will happen if we allow a rebellious character to create chaos. It is so difficult to accept that the same Man who spoke to me two years ago would cause all the trouble He is accused of. One thing is certain. No one expected Him to show His face in Jerusalem during this Passover. In every meeting I attended, the leaders were brainstorming ways to arrest Him and even have Him executed. I even heard that the chief priest, Caiaphas prophesied **"...don't you realize that it's better for you that one man should die for the people than for the whole nation to be destroyed."**

Have you heard the saying, "Expect the unexpected?"

The unexpected happened, and it was an incredible sight. To begin with... The Man who cleared the temple, the One who performed numerous miracles, is said to have raised a man from the dead. This news erupted all around the country, and it created a great fervor. He must have known the Sanhedrin put out an arrest warrant for Him, but He entered Jerusalem with the greatest spectacle I have ever seen. He rode on a donkey, just like kings of ancient Israel, and His followers were singing and dancing proclaiming the amazing things He had done. They worshipped Him like He was the Messiah, the promised Savior of Israel. From what I could tell, many people were caught up in His story... At least until Thursday...

That is when the good fortunes of the Sanhedrin swiftly changed. All week He taught in the Temple, He healed people and performed incredible miracles. The crowds were with Him, and fearing a rebellion, the religious rulers wouldn't arrest Him during the day. That is when one of His followers named Judas came to them with a plan. He knew His habits and where He would be when the crowds were not around.

Early Friday morning, I was summoned to the high priest's home. The leading priests, elders and teachers of religious law were present and so was my good friend Joseph of Arimathea. Earlier that morning, Judas had led an armed contingent to the Garden of Gethsemane where they arrested Him with little fanfare.

As soon as everyone arrived and got settled, the leading priest and high council began questioning Him which was very unusual since it was unlawful to put a man on trial at this time of day and outside of public view. They brought numerous charges against Him, and He refused to defend Himself or even speak. Finally, one of the high priests asked him, ***"Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?" He said, "I am. And you will see the Son of Man seated in the place of power at God's right hand and coming on the clouds of heaven."***

At this ***the high priest tore his clothing to show his horror and said, "Why do we need other witnesses? 64 You have all heard his blasphemy. What is your verdict?" "Guilty!" they all cried. "He deserves to die!"***

Joseph and I were somber and angry during the questioning and couldn't believe they were going to send Him to Pilot to be executed. We kept silent during the proceeding as we had both grown to privately admire Him and believe in Him. We hoped God had sent Him to restore the glory of our nation. As I watched the trial unfold, His words, ***"God's light came into the world, but people loved the darkness more than the light..."*** echoed in my mind.

And when they declared Him guilty, I remembered, [“But those who do what is right come to the light so others can see that they are doing what God wants.”](#)

Was I wrong to remain silent? Do I love the darkness more than the light?

The scene at the garrison was riotous and violent.

Pilot found no reason to execute the Man accused by the Chief Priests. Repeatedly he tried to set Him free but finally relented when the crowd erupted in chants, "Crucify Him, Crucify Him!" Removed from the scene by the Praetorian Guard, He was next seen staggering out of the garrison with a crown made of thorns on His head. His body was so badly beaten it was a wonder He could walk let alone carry the cross...

The next few hours went as you would expect for a man condemned to die.

He was mocked, stoned, spit on, and cursed as He staggered through the streets of Jerusalem until He finally made it up the hill called Golgotha. There His wrists and feet were nailed to the cross, and He was lifted up for everyone to see. As I watched the soldiers raise Him up in the air, the thought came to my mind, [“4 And as Moses lifted up the bronze snake on a pole in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, 15 so that everyone who believes in him will have eternal life.”](#)

For the next six hours this was almost all I could think about. Some in the crowd wondered, "He saved others, why can't He save himself?" and I found myself thinking the same thing. I thought He was the Messiah. I thought He came to rescue Israel...

Then came the end and His final words... Words that I will never forget...

Paid in full!

What sin did He commit to deserve this?

What could He possibly owe to cry out, "Paid in Full!"?

Why did He sound like someone who won a victory with His last breath?

It is haunting me... What debt did He owe?

Later that afternoon, Joseph received permission from Pilot to take Jesus' body down and bury Him. It was the day of preparation so He was laid in a tomb nearby. I helped Joseph and can testify that He was indeed dead. We followed our burial customs and [wrapped Jesus' body with spices in long sheets of linen cloth.](#)

The Passover celebration ended the next evening, and everything seemed to go back to normal. The next week there were rumors that He was back to life, but the Pharisees were saying His followers stole His body from the grave...

God sent the light but people loved the darkness...

Those who do what is right come to the light...

Do I love the darkness more than the light?

Was I wrong to remain silent?

Paid in full... What did He mean?

It has been 50 days since that dark and heart wrenching afternoon...

And these questions rarely leave my mind...

At least they hadn't... Until the day of Pentecost...

It began with a loud noise in the city that drew hundreds of people to investigate.

Someone said it was a sound from heaven like the roaring of a mighty windstorm.

I decided to wait for the crowds to rush over. When I arrived, there was a man

speaking... I heard him say, "The sun will become dark, and the moon will turn blood

red before that great and glorious day of the Lord arrives. 21 But everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.' I recognized that quote from Joel... Joel 2:28-32.

And decided to keep listening... He began again...

Acts 2:22 - "People of Israel, listen! God publicly endorsed Jesus the Nazarene by doing powerful miracles, wonders, and signs through him, as you well know. 23 But God knew what would happen, and his prearranged plan was carried out when Jesus was betrayed. With the help of lawless Gentiles, you nailed him to a cross and killed him. 24 But God released him from the horrors of death and raised him back to life, for death could not keep him in its grip.

Could this be true? Immediately the words from the Prophet Isaiah flooded my mind.

Isaiah 53:3-6 - He was despised and rejected—a man of sorrows, acquainted with deepest grief. We turned our backs on him and looked the other way. He was despised, and we did not care. 4 Yet it was our weaknesses he carried; it was our sorrows that weighed him down. And we thought his troubles were a punishment from God, a punishment for his own sins! 5 But he was pierced for our rebellion, crushed for our sins. He was beaten so we could be whole. He was whipped so we could be healed. 6 All of us, like sheep, have strayed away. We have left God's paths to follow our own. Yet the Lord laid on him the sins of us all.

With tears streaming down my face, I began to sob uncontrollably as I whispered the words...

Jesus died on the cross for **MY** sins, He was pierced for my rebellion,

He was beaten so I could be whole, He was whipped so I could be healed...

I had the answer I was looking for, and something like scales fell from my eyes as my heart began to tremble...

I was there when they plotted His death.

I was there when they lied about Him, beat Him, mocked Him, and convicted Him.

I was there when the crowd cried out, "Crucify Him, Crucify Him!"

And I was there when they crucified Him!

I am guilty! I am guilty of shedding the blood of God's one and only Son...

What sin did He commit to deserve this? He committed none!

Just then the man finished his message by declaring, ["36 so let everyone in Israel know for certain that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, to be both Lord and Messiah!"](#)

At that very moment, I realized that I wasn't the only one sobbing uncontrollably...

Every face was wet with tears, every soul was pierced, and with a single voice our souls cried out, ["Brothers, what should we do?"](#)

I have my answer... I know why Jesus cried out in victory... ***Paid in full!***

My name is Nicodemus and this is my story...

[Pray before sharing the rest of the story...](#)

Jesus arrived in Jerusalem on Palm Sunday as a peace offering.

He finished the work God sent Him to do on the cross.

He was raised to new life proving He was God's Son...

His offer to save your soul is still available, to every person, His death on the cross paid the debt each of us owe for our sins. You can't earn it, you don't deserve it. You can only accept it, receive it and live it...

What did Peter say to the crowd?

["Each of you must repent of your sins and turn to God, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 This promise is to you, to your children, and to those far away—all who have been called by the Lord our God."](#)