

# The Death of the Messiah

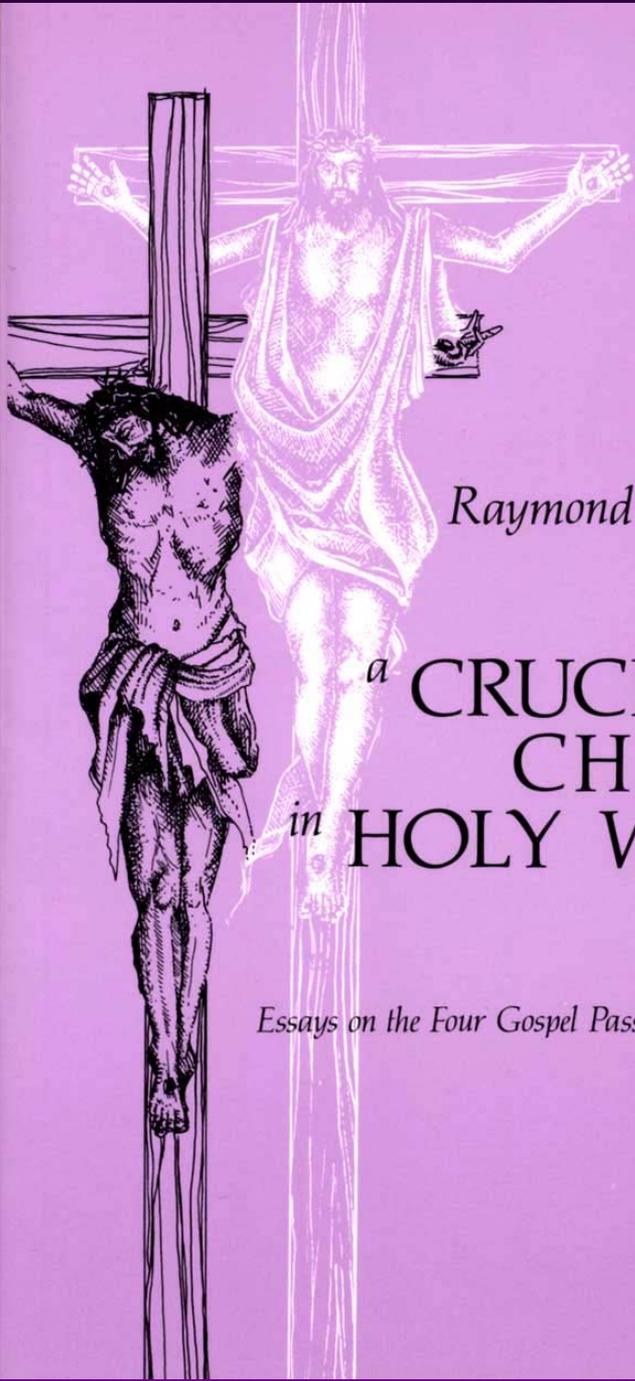
The Crucifixion, Death, and Burial of  
Jesus

# Series Outline

- **Mar. 14:** 1. Jesus prays and is arrested in Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives, Across the Kidron
  - Mark 14:26-52; Matt 26:30-56; Luke 22:39-53; John 18:1-11
- **Mar. 21:** 2. Jesus Before the Jewish Authorities
  - Mark 14:53—15:1; Matt 26:57—27:10; Luke 22:54—23:1; John 18:12-28a

# Series Outline

- **Mar. 28:** 3. Jesus before Pilate, the Roman Governor
  - Mark 15:2-20a; Matt 27:11-31a; Luke 23:2-25; John 18:28b—19:16a
- **Apr. 4:** 4. Jesus is crucified and dies on Golgotha. He is buried nearby
  - Mark 15:20b-47; Matt 27:31b-66; Luke 23:26-56; John 19:16b-42



*Raymond E. Brown*

*a* **CRUCIFIED  
CHRIST**  
*in* **HOLY WEEK**

*Essays on the Four Gospel Passion Narratives*

Each year during Holy Week the Church reads two different accounts of Jesus' passion. On Palm (Passion) Sunday the account is from one of the first three Gospels (Matthew, Mark, or Luke), while on Good Friday it is always from John. Thus the liturgy makes it possible to note how very different the Gospel passions are, each one offering a unique vantage point from which to see and understand a crucified Christ.

We have all heard of the seven words of Jesus on the cross. In fact, however, Jesus says only one "word" in Matthew and Mark, three other "words" of very different import in Luke, and still three more different "words" in John. Separating these words as the evangelists intended rather than gluing them together offers Christians a much richer way to understand the demands of the cross in their own lives.

Fr. Raymond E. Brown, S.S., (1928–1998) was the Auburn Distinguished Professor of Biblical Studies at Union Theological Seminary in New York City. Author of some twenty-five books on the Bible and past president of three of the most important biblical societies in the world, by appointment of two popes (Paul VI in 1972, John Paul II in 1996) he was a member of the Roman Pontifical Biblical Commission. *Time* magazine has called him "probably the premier Catholic Scripture scholar in the U.S."

# THE DEATH of the MESSIAH

From Gethsemane to the Grave:  
A Commentary on the Passion Narratives in the Four Gospels

RAYMOND E. BROWN



VOLUME 1

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# Mark

The Crucifixion, Death and Burial of  
Jesus. Mark 15:21-47

# Mark

- Shortest account of the crucifixion
- On the way to the cross:
  - Simon of Cyrene introduced through his sons Alexander and Rufus (perhaps men known in Mark's community)

# Mark

- Act of crucifixion:
  - Extremely laconic description
  - Highlights some curious details:
    - Offering of wine mixed with myrrh (Psalm 69:22 NRSV: “...and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink”)
    - Division of the garments (Psalm 22:18 NRSV: “they divide my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots”)

# Mark

- Uses an organizing “pattern of threes:”
  - Chronological pattern of third, sixth, and ninth hours (9 am, noon, 3 pm)
  - Between third (9 am) and sixth hours (noon), three groups mock Jesus:
    - 1. Chance passers-by refer to Sanhedrin charge he said he would destroy the temple and rebuild it, and challenge him to save himself (echoes Psalm 22:7 NRSV: “**All who see me mock at me; they make mouths at me, they shake their heads**”)
    - 2. Chief priests and scribes mock another Sanhedrin charge, that he was the Messiah, the King of Israel
    - 3. *Both* criminals crucified with Jesus mock him

# Mark

- From the sixth hour (noon) to the ninth hour (3 pm), nature is plunged into darkness covering the whole land
  - Echoes Amos 8:9 (NRSV): **“On that day, says the Lord GOD, I will make the sun go down at noon, and darken the earth in broad daylight.”**
- At the ninth hour (3 pm), Jesus cries out in a loud voice the *only words* that Mark reports: **“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”** (15:34 NRSV)
  - = the opening line of Psalm 22

# Mark

- Jesus' anguished cry should not be softened
  - Note that although the cry is quoted in Aramaic – Jesus' family language – Jesus refers to God as “God” rather than the more personal “Father”

# Mark

- Reaction to Jesus' cry:
  - Sponge filled with sour wine
  - Cynicism whether Elijah would help him
    - These cynical words are the last human words Jesus hears before he dies. No Elijah comes to deliver him
    - John the Baptist had come in Elijah's role and had died a martyr's death, pointing to Jesus' fate (Mark 9:12-13 NRSV [Jesus speaking]: **“How then is it written about the Son of Man, that he is to go through many sufferings and be treated with contempt. But I tell you that Elijah has come, and they did to him whatever they pleased...”**)

# Mark

- Jesus' death:
  - **“Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last.”** (15:37 NRSV)
  - **Evokes Joel 2:10-11 NRSV: “... The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining. The LORD utters his voice at the head of his army...”**

# Mark

- At the moment of Jesus' death the curtain in the temple is torn in two
  - Two possible meanings:
    - 1. God's displeasure at abandoning the Temple
    - 2. The opening of a once-closed sacred place to a wider audience – including the Gentiles
  - Brown suggests the first is more likely the intended meaning. The violent rending, like the High Priest tearing his garments at the Sanhedrin trial, evokes the sense of “schism”

# Mark

- The rending of the Temple curtain is also the incipient fulfillment of first charge made of Jesus at the Sanhedrin trial **“I will destroy this Temple that is made with human hands...”**
- Then the Roman centurion is moved to confess **“Truly this man was God’s Son!”** (15:39 NRSV) – answering the second charge against Jesus at the Sanhedrin trial, that he was the “Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One”
  - The first time in Mark’s gospel someone has recognized Jesus as God’s Son

# Mark

- At his death, Jesus is vindicated, and God answers his cry:
  - The **Temple is replaced** as the center of worship by God's own Son...
  - Who will now be confessed as **God's Son** by Gentiles and Jews
- Only after the centurion's confession does Mark tell us many women followers (but no men) had been looking on at a distance

# Mark

- Joseph of Arimathea, respected member of the Sanhedrin, “who was also himself waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God,” goes to Pilate that evening to ask for the body of Jesus
  - Note in Mark, *all* members of the Sanhedrin had found Jesus deserving of death

# Mark

- Both the centurion and Joseph of Arimathea had been moved to faith by Jesus' passion and death on the cross
- Dramatizes Mark's theological outlook on the passion: "People can believe and become true disciples only through the suffering symbolized by a cross which strips away human supports and makes one totally dependent on God." (Brown)

# Mark

- Mark's vision of crucifixion more severe and stark than the other Gospel writers'
  - Perhaps reflects a message on suffering to the community he wrote for, traditionally felt to be the Christian community in Rome, which had recently suffered a large number of brutal martyrdoms under Emperor Nero

# Mark

- End of the Passion narrative:
  - *Unique to Mark among the Synoptic Gospels:*  
Pilate checks whether Jesus is really dead
  - Mark also stresses that Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses both witnessed where the body was laid, preparing us for their Sunday visit to the tomb

# Matthew

The Crucifixion, Death and Burial of  
Jesus. Matthew 27:32-66

# Matthew

- As in the rest of the Passion narrative, closely follows Mark's account
- Simon of Cyrene compelled to carry the cross
- Matthew makes correspondence to Old Testament texts more precise
  - Jesus offered sour wine *mixed with gall*, more closely echoing Psalm 69:21: **“The gave me poison (gall) for food, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar (sour wine) to drink”**

# Matthew

- Three groups, as in Mark, mock Jesus on the cross:
  - 1. Passers-by mock claim to destroy the temple
  - 2. Chief priests, scribes, and elders mock claim to be the Son of God
  - 3. *Both* bandits crucified with Jesus mock him
- Matthew's phrasing of mockery strengthens reference to Psalm 22:7-8 (NRSV): **“All who see me mock at me, they make mouths at me, they shake their heads; “Commit your cause to the LORD; let him deliver – let him rescue the one in whom he delights!”**

# Matthew

- Darkness covers the land from the sixth (noon) to the ninth hour (3 pm)
- At the ninth hour (3 pm): Jesus cries out Psalm 22:1 in his only statement in Matthew: **“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”**
  - Matthew’s Aramaic quote is the more Hebraized *Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani* versus Mark’s *Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani*, making the misunderstanding that he was calling for Elijah more understandable

# Matthew

“Matthew, following Mark, does not hesitate to show Jesus in the utter agony of feeling forsaken as he faces a terrible death. We are not far here from the christology of Hebrews which portrays Jesus as experiencing the whole human condition, like us in everything except sin.”

- Brown, page 44

# Matthew

- At Jesus' death, the Temple curtain is torn in two (common to Mark, Matthew, Luke)
  - *Unique to Matthew*: earthquake, rocks split, tombs opened, the dead rise
  - Jewish historian Josephus described such wondrous events when Romans destroyed the temple

# Matthew

- Strengthens evocation of Old Testament apocalyptic passages:
  - Joel 2:10 (NRSV): **“The earth quakes before them, the heavens tremble. The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining.”**
  - Ezekiel 37:12 (NRSV): **“Thus says the Lord GOD: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel.”**
  - Isaiah 26:19 (NRSV): **“Your dead shall live, their corpses shall rise. O dwellers in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For your dew is a radiant dew, and the earth will give birth to those long dead.”**

# Matthew

- Nahum 1:5-6 (NRSV): **“The mountains quake before him, and the hills melt; the earth heaves before him, the world and all who live in it. Who can stand before his indignation? Who can endure the heat of his anger? His wrath is poured out like fire, and by him the rocks are broken in pieces.”**
- Daniel 12:2 (NRSV): **“Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.”**

# Matthew

- Just as Jesus' birth is marked by Matthew with a wondrous sign (a new star in the heavens), so too is his death – even more so
- The Centurion, as well as those with him, seeing these wonders, are moved to confess **“Truly this man was God's Son!”**
- Matthew also mentions the many women who had been looking on from a distance

# Matthew

- Tradition of Joseph of Arimathea, common to all the Gospels, is embellished:
  - A “rich man”
    - In Matthew’s community, model of a rich saint not repugnant
  - A “disciple of Jesus”
  - Laid Jesus in his *own* tomb

# Matthew

- If Joseph was a disciple of Jesus at that time, why did the women not participate with the burial?
- Perhaps Matthew's Joseph reflects a memory of him as a pious Jew who buried Jesus per Deuteronomy 21:22-23, and who later became a disciple
  - Deut. 21:22-23 (NRSV): **“When someone is convicted of a crime punishable by death and is executed, and you hang him on a tree, his corpse must not remain all night on the tree; you shall bury him that same day.”**

# Matthew

- *Unique to Matthew*: chief priests and Pharisees go to Pilate and ask that guards be posted on the tomb, because **“that imposter said while he was still alive ‘After three days I will rise again’”** (27:42 NRSV)
  - Historicity of this questioned by some:
    - Followers of Jesus showed no expectation that Jesus would rise
    - In other Gospels, no sense the women coming to tomb Easter morning would face armed guards

# Matthew

- Guards at the tomb:
  - This information perhaps important to Matthew's community in their battle with the synagogue
  - Chief priests after the resurrection bribe the soldiers to lie and say his disciples had stolen the body. **“And this story is still told among the Jews to this day”** (28:15 NRSV)

# Matthew

- Guards at the tomb:
  - Theologically, helps Matthew illustrate the awesome power of God:
    - Earth shakes on Sunday morning
    - Guards grovel in fear
    - Tomb opens

# Luke

The Crucifixion, Death and Burial of  
Jesus. Luke 23:26-56

# Luke

- Luke offers a particularly unique portrait in this section of the Passion narrative
- There is no mocking of Jesus in Luke by the Roman soldiers after sentencing by Pilate
- **“he [Pilate] handed Jesus over as they [chief priests, Jewish leaders, and the people] wished. As they led him away...”** (23:25-26 NRSV): creates impression that the chief priests, Jewish leaders and the people take Jesus to Calvary
  - Luke 23:36: first mention of soldiers (presumably Roman)

# Luke

- *Unique to Luke*: a group of Jewish people who are not Jesus' disciples follow him, moved by his suffering
  - Jesus addresses them: **“Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For the days are surely coming when they will say ‘Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never nursed’ Then they will say to the mountains ‘Fall on us’, and to the hills, ‘Cover us’”** (Luke 23:28-31 NRSV)

# Luke

- Luke usually shows great reluctance to have Jesus speak harshly; here Jesus' warning:
  - Reflects the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 AD (just before Luke was writing)
  - Uses language borrowed from Isaiah 54:1 and Hosea 10:8
    - Isaiah 54:1 (NRSV): **“Sing, O barren one who did not bear; burst into song and shout, you who have not been in labor!”**
    - Hosea 10:8 (NRSV): **“They shall say to the mountains, Cover us, and to the hills, Fall on us”**

# Luke

- *Unique to Luke:* at Golgotha, hanging on the cross, Jesus says **“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”** (23:34 NRSV)
  - This hints that the chief priests and scribes acted out of ignorance, runs against a more prevalent sense that the Jewish authorities acted out of malevolence
  - Repeated in Act 3:17 (NRSV). Peter, addressing a group of Jews: **“And now, friends (or brothers), I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers.”**

# Luke

- Stephen, the first Christian martyr, will repeat Jesus' prayer. Acts 7:60 NRSV: **“Then he [Stephen] knelt down and cried out in a loud voice, ‘Lord, do not hold this sin against them.’ When he had said this, he died.”**

# Luke

- Three groups mock Jesus on the cross
  - 1. Leaders of the people
  - 2. The soldiers
  - 3. *One* of the two criminals crucified with Jesus
- *Unique to Luke*: one of the criminals confesses the justice of his own sentence and Jesus' innocence, and asks Jesus to remember him in his kingdom
- Jesus' reply gives more than requested: “... **today you will be with me in Paradise**” (23:43 NRSV)
  - Oft-used quip: the “good thief” ultimately stole the Kingdom

# Luke

- Darkness covers the earth from the sixth (noon) to the ninth hour (3 pm)
  - Luke explains this as a “failing” or eclipse of the sun (later however scientifically impossible near Passover)

# Luke

- Jesus' last words are not of *abandonment* (as in Mark / Matthew) or *triumph* (as in John), but of *trust*: **“Father, into your hands I commend my spirit”** (Luke 23:45 NRSV)
  - Psalm 31:4-5 NRSV: **“...take me out of the net that is hidden for me, for you are my refuge. Into your hand I commit my spirit; you have redeemed me, O LORD, faithful God.”**

# Luke

- *Before* Jesus cries out these last words, the curtain of the temple is rend into two
- In Luke, only acts of grace *follow* Jesus' death:
  - Roman centurion confesses "**Certainly this man was innocent**" (23:47 NRSV)
  - Jewish crowds there for the spectacle are moved to repentance; they return home "beating their breasts"
- All of Jesus' acquaintance (female *and male!*) watch these events from a distance

# Luke

- Grace flows also to the Sanhedrin, and member Joseph of Arimathea (who Luke tells us had *not* agreed with the Sanhedrin's actions) asks Pilate for Jesus' body
  - He lays it in a tomb (no mention that it is his own tomb)
  - Women who had followed Jesus see the tomb and how the body is laid, and began to prepare spices and ointments for the body (which will not be needed)

# Luke

“It has often been critically observed that the cross bears for Luke none of the atoning value that it had for Paul. Lucan crucifixion, however, is clearly a moment of God’s forgiveness and of healing grace through and by Jesus. The theological language may be different, but the atoning effects are the same.”

- Brown, p. 56

# John

The Crucifixion, Death and Burial of  
Jesus. John 19:16-42

# John

- Unlike Mark, Matthew, and Luke (the “synoptics”) no Simon of Cyrene carries Jesus’ cross: Jesus carries it himself
  - Sign of John 10:17-18: **“For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have the power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again...”**

# John

- All the Gospels mention the inscription on the cross “Jesus, King of the Jews.” John emphasizes it:
  - It is written with full Roman legal precision in Hebrew, Greek and Latin, for all to read
  - When chief priests object to Pilate, Pilate refuses to change it to: “This man said, I am King of the Jews”
  - John’s understanding of crucifixion is captured in an early Christian interpolation to Psalm 106: **“The Lord reigns from the wood [of the cross]”**

# John

- The implicit allusion to Psalm 22:18 in the other gospels on the division of the Jesus' garments is explicit in John
  - Psalm 22:18 (NRSV): **“they divide my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots”**

# John

- John pays particular attention to the seamless tunic not divided. Interpretations:
  - The seamless tunic of the High Priest (described by Josephus): Jesus hangs on the cross both King and High Priest
  - Symbol of unity

# John

- In Mark / Matthew / Luke, women watch *from afar* (in Luke, with male disciples)
- In John, the Mother of Jesus and the “Beloved Disciple” *are at the foot of the cross* (there they have met for the first time). Seeing them, Jesus says:
  - To Mary: **“Woman, here is your son.”**
  - To the Beloved Disciple: **“Here is your mother.”** (“**And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home**”) (John 19:26-27 NRSV)
  - John’s Christian community, followers of the “Beloved Disciple,” thus began at the cross.

# John

- John's Passion narrative emphasizes the divine aspect of Jesus, a Jesus always in sovereign control of his own destiny
  - Jesus' human cry in John 19:28 **"I am thirsty"** put in the context as said **"to fulfill the scripture"**

# John

- John 19:29, NRSV: **“They put a sponge full of the [sour] wine on a *branch of hyssop* and held it to his mouth.”**
  - Mark and Matthew recount a sponge of wine on a “stick”
  - Hyssop evokes Passover image in Exodus 12:22-23: **“Take a bunch of hyssop, dip it in the blood [of the paschal lamb] ... and touch the lintel and two doorposts with the blood... when he sees the blood on the lintel and the two doorposts, the LORD will pass over that door and will not allow the destroyer to enter your houses to strike you down.”**

# John

- Jesus was sentenced at noon, the exact hour of Passover Eve when the priests began to slaughter the paschal lambs
- Fulfills John the Baptist's mysterious saying at Jesus' first public appearance: **“Here is the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”** (NRSV John 1:29)

# John

- After taking the sour wine on the hyssop, Jesus *says* his last words **“‘It is finished.’ Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit”** (John 19:30 NRSV)
  - Dramatically different from the anguished cry of abandonment in Mark, Matthew, or even the cry of faith and trust found in Luke
  - Note active voice: Jesus *gave up* his spirit

# John

- John's Gospel preserves an ancient Christian understanding that the **Holy Spirit** was:
  - An intimate part of Jesus' death and resurrection
  - A reality for Jesus' disciples only after his death
- First act when Jesus appears to the disciples on Easter evening (20:22): he breathes the Holy Spirit onto them

# John

- Other Gospels mark Jesus' death by describing miraculous events on the earth:
  - Temple curtain rend into two (Mark, Matthew, Luke)
  - Earthquake, rocks splitting, tombs opening and saints rising from the dead (Matthew)
  - Centurion confessing Jesus Son of God (Mark / Matthew) or innocent (Luke)
  - Jewish crowd, there for the spectacle, moved to repentance (Luke)

# John

- John marks the death by describing signs of the salvific power of Jesus' dead body:
  - Blood and water flow forth when a soldier pierces the body
  - John 7:38-39 NRSV: **“As the scripture has said, ‘Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water.’”** Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified.’

# John

- Jesus is now glorified; the water symbolizes the Spirit now given
- Might also represent the two channels by which the Spirit is communicated:
  - Water of Baptism
  - Blood of the Eucharist

# John

- Joseph of Arimathea asks Pilate for the body
- *Unique to John: Nicodemus* comes forth to perform Jewish burial for Jesus. He and Joseph wrap the body with 100 pounds of myrrh and aloe – a burial as befits a king
  - In Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Jesus buried without anointing or aromatic oils

# John

“Thus, from beginning to end the narrative has been consistent: it is the passion of a sovereign king who has overcome the world.”

- Brown, p. 67

# Summary

The Passion Narratives

# Summary

“... while there is one Jesus at the font of the four canonical Gospels, each evangelist knows a different facet of him and presents a different picture.”

- Brown p. 68

# Summary

- Mark and Matthew
  - Stark human abandonment of Jesus
    - Disciples fall asleep 3 times at Gethsemane as Jesus prays
    - Judas betrays him, Peter denies him and curses, and disciples all flee after the arrest
    - Jewish and Roman judges cynical
    - Jesus hangs on cross for 6 hours, 3 hours filled with mockery, 3 hours with darkness
    - Only words on cross: **“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”**
  - Only after the suffering of the cross is it possible for Jesus to be vindicated

# Summary

## ■ Luke

- Disciples portrayed more sympathetically: they fall asleep once at Gethsemane, out of sorrow, and do not flee at his arrest
- Enemies also portrayed in a better light. No false witnesses at the Jewish trial. Pilate acknowledges Jesus' innocence 3 times
- People grieve with Jesus on road to Calvary

# Summary

## ■ Luke

- Jesus seems less anguished by his own fate and more concerned for others:
  - He heals the High Priest slave's ear
  - He forgives those who crucified him
  - He promises paradise to the penitent thief
- Jesus' last words a tranquil expression of trust:  
**“Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.”**

# Summary

## ■ John

- Portrays a supremely sovereign Jesus, a Jesus in full control
- Roman soldiers and Jewish police arresting Jesus fall to ground at the divine phrase “I AM”
- His self-assurance bests and annoys the High Priest
- He bests Pilate in their dialog, making it seem Pilate is the one on trial

# Summary

- John
  - He carries his own cross
  - His kingship is writ in 3 languages on the cross, confirmed by Pilate
  - His final words a solemn “It is finished” when he has decided to hand over his spirit
  - He burial befits a king

# Summary

“..one should not be upset by the contrast or ask which view of Jesus is more correct: The Marcan Jesus who plumbs the depths of abandonment only to be vindicated; the Lucan Jesus who worries about others and gently dispenses forgiveness; or the Johannine Jesus who reigns victoriously from the cross in control of all that happens. All three are given

# Summary

to us by the inspiring Spirit, and no one of them exhausts the meaning of Jesus. It is as if one walks around a large diamond to look at it from three different angles. A true picture of the whole emerges only because the viewpoints are different.”

- Brown, p. 70