

THREE DAYS
LUKE 24:36-47

I. THE BRAVE EXPLORER (PROJECTOR ON--- I. THE BRAVE EXPLORER)

It was October 9, 1492. The Nina, the Pinta, and the Santa Maria had set sail from Spain over two months earlier. They had reprovisioned in the Canary Islands in early September. But now supplies were running low. The crews were restless. None of the sailors had ever been more than 300 miles from land in the Atlantic. Christopher Columbus was intentionally underestimating their distance from Europe in the log book. But even by his understated reckoning, they were over two thousand miles from home. They were getting to the point where they might all starve before they could ever make it back to Europe.

Brothers Martin and Vincente Pinzon, who captained the Nina and the Pinta, delivered an ultimatum. It was time to turn back. Before long they would all have a mutiny on their hands. Christopher was very discouraged. He had dedicated the last several years of his life to this project of reaching Asia by crossing the Atlantic to the east. After considerable discussion he managed to extract an agreement from the two brothers that they would wait three more days. If there was no more sign of land, they would turn around. Three days.

In the next two days the winds picked up, and the three ships covered more distance than they ever had before. But this alarmed the crew of the Santa Maria. For it meant that it was going to take them even longer to get home. For the first time the crew openly challenged Christopher Columbus. According to the historian Las Casas, who knew Columbus personally, **“The Admiral reassured them as best he could, holding out to them bright hopes of the gains which they would make, and adding that it was useless to complain, since he was going to the Indies and must pursue his course until, with the help of the Lord, he found them.”**

On the morning of October 11, the second day, a shout rose up from the Pinta. A reed had been sighted in the water along with a piece of wood, which had clearly been shaped by a human being. Hopes rose. At 10 PM that evening Columbus and one of his sailors simultaneously sighted a tiny light far in the distance. At 2 AM the next morning, less than four hours before the dawn of the third and final day, the cry rang out from the Pinta, “Tierra! Tierra!” The lookout spotted a low white cliff visible in the moonlight.

The ships reached the southern tip of the island just as the sun rose over the horizon. (COLUMBUS MAP) The sailors realized that something significant was being accomplished. Columbus was the first person to set foot on the island. He wore full armor and carried the royal standard of Spain. The Pinzon brothers followed right behind him. They carried a white banner with a green cross and the initials of Ferdinand and Isabella who had funded much of the cost of the trip.

Sailors scooped out a deep hole in the warm sand and planted the eight-foot oak cross which Columbus had brought just for this occasion. The Admiral of the Ocean Sea christened the island San Salvador--- Holy Savior. According to his own records he knelt and prayed, **“O Lord, Almighty and everlasting God, by Thy holy Word Thou hast created the heaven, and the earth, and the sea; blessed and glorified be Thy Name, and praised be Thy Majesty, which hath deigned to use us, Thy humble servants, that Thy holy Name may be proclaimed in this second part of the earth.”**

Three days. Discouragement and the threat of death to great joy and a planted cross and salvation and the proclamation of a new world.

II. THE WAYWARD PROPHET (II. THE WAYWARD PROPHET)

The Book of Jonah is read by religious Jews on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. That was the day, according to Old Testament Law, when an animal sacrifice was to be made and the blood was to be applied to the Ark of the Covenant inside the Holy of Holies by the high priest of Israel. The sins of the nation were regarded as being covered for the ensuing year.

Jonah was a reluctant prophet. He was from a small town in the northern part of the divided kingdom of Israel. He lived during a time when his part of the nation was falling into idol worship. In the Old Testament book named after him we are told (JONAH 1:1-2), **“Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, ‘Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me.’”**

Nineveh was the capital of the country of Assyria to the north of Israel. (NINEVEH MAP) Assyria was the dominant power in this part of the world at that time. Its people had a reputation for extreme brutality. They were known for tearing the skin off of their captives while they were still alive. They had begun to make incursions against Israel. A century later the Assyrians would overrun the northern kingdom of Israel. They would kill many and would disperse others to various parts of their empire.

Jonah apparently didn't like the Assyrians. He didn't like the assignment from God. So he went down to the seaport of Joppa, bought passage in a ship, and headed toward the other end of the Mediterranean. But there was a big storm that came up. The sailors were very afraid. They were a religious and superstitious lot. After they did everything they could think of to do, in terms of lightening the load of the ship, they decided to cast lots to decide if there was someone on board who was responsible for their predicament. The lot fell to Jonah.

Jonah knew that this was a divine coincidence. He fessed up to what and who he was. He described the God whom he worked for. But instead of telling the men to turn around and go back to Israel so he could finish his mission, he told them to throw him overboard. It was a death wish. He wanted to die. The sailors didn't want to be responsible for his death. But the storm got worse, and they finally threw him overboard.

In #1 v. 17 (JONAH 1:17) of Jonah's Old Testament book we are told, **"And the Lord appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights."**

As soon as the sailors threw Jonah overboard the waves calmed down and the storm abated. As for Jonah, in this unusual setting of the stomach of the great fish, he had a heart-to-heart talk with God. He agreed to the mission God had given him. We read in #2 v. 10 (JONAH 2:10) of Jonah, **"And the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land."** Three days. At the end he was brought from certain death to life.

In #3 we are told that Jonah went to the great city of Nineveh. The text describes it as "a three days' walk," perhaps this was how long it took for a person to go from one end of the city to the other. During Jonah's walk through Nineveh he presented a message about the true God of Israel, and His pending judgment upon the city. Amazingly enough there was a great turning among the people of the city from their sinful ways to the true God. (JONAH 3:10) According to v. 10 of #3, **"When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it."**

Three days. In three days Jonah went from certain death to an amazing deliverance. He proceeded to proclaim a message of deliverance. Three days. The city of Nineveh went from a situation of impending judgment to deliverance from doom and the experience of new life.

III. THE UNWITTING QUEEN (III. THE UNWITTING QUEEN)

On Sunday mornings we have been studying the Book of Daniel in the Old Testament. As a young man Daniel had been taken into captivity by the Babylonians. The Jews had fallen away from worship of the true God. So the Lord had the Babylonians overrun their country. Daniel ended up as a high official in the Babylonian government. Later in his life the Persians came to power. A century later the Persians were still the dominant power in the Ancient Near East. (PERSIAN EMPIRE)

That is the setting for the Old Testament Book of Esther. Esther is an interesting book to be included in the Old Testament. God is never mentioned. When the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered in the last century, copies of every Old Testament book except Esther were found among them. Esther is never quoted in the New Testament. The book never mentions the Old Testament law, the covenants, sacrifices, or the temple. Yet God is at work.

A Persian king became dissatisfied with his queen and decided to look for a new queen. Meanwhile there was this beautiful Jewish girl named Esther. Both of her parents had died, and her uncle Mordecai had raised her. A nationwide search was undertaken to find a fitting queen for the Persian king. Esther was chosen, and she became the new queen of Persia.

Uncle Mordecai was some kind of official in the Persian government. Because of his religious convictions, he refused to bow down to another man. When the Persian prime minister passed by one day, Mordecai would not bow down. That ticked off the prime minister, whose name was Haman. Haman found out that Mordecai was Jewish.

So Haman approached the Persian king and said to him (ESTHER 3:8), **“There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom. Their laws are different from those of every other people, and they do not keep the king's laws, so that it is not to the king's profit to tolerate them. (ESTHER 3:9) If it please the king, let it be decreed that they be destroyed...”** The king agreed to Haman's plan. This was set to happen several months later. The date on which the law was passed was Nisan 13, the thirteenth day of the month Nisan.

According to #3 v. 12 of the Book of Esther (ESTHER 3:12), **“Then the king's scribes were summoned on the thirteenth day of the first month, and an edict, according to all that Haman [the prime minister] commanded, was written to the king's satraps and to the governors over all the provinces...”**

Mordecai found out about this and immediately informed his niece Esther, who was now the queen, about what had happened. He urged her to intercede with the king (ESTHER 4:14), saying, **“For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?”**

On the next day Queen Esther began her fast. Death was looming on the horizon for the Jewish people. Fear gripped the descendants of Abraham when they learned about the political situation. It was Nisan 14, the 14th day of the month. (PROJECTOR OFF) In the Jewish calendar that was the day of Passover. Passover was to be celebrated annually to commemorate the flight of the Jews from captivity in Egypt. At that first Passover a lamb was to be sacrificed for each family, and the blood was to be applied to the door posts of the Jewish homes. When the angel of death passed over Egypt killing the firstborn son of every family, the blood of the lamb on the doorposts protected the Jewish families. After this last plague the Egyptian king let the Jews leave Egypt. It was at the time of the Jewish Passover centuries later when Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, would be killed on a Roman cross.

In Queen Esther's day anyone who approached the king's throne without an invitation, even the queen, could be killed unless the king extended his sceptre. Queen Esther humbled herself and appeared before the most powerful king in the world at that time.

We pick up the story in Ester #5 v. 1 (ESTHER 5:1): **“On the third day--- notice--- Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the king's palace, in front of the king's quarters, while the king was sitting on his royal throne inside the throne room opposite the entrance to the palace. (ESTHER 5:2) And when the king saw Queen Esther standing in the court, she won favor in his sight, and he**

held out to Esther the golden scepter that was in his hand. Then Esther approached and touched the tip of the scepter.”

Esther told the Jewish story to her husband the king. Haman fell out of favor. The Persian king called for Haman's execution. He proceeded to pass another law which called for the killing of all of the enemies of the Jews. Thus they were saved from death. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Three days. On the first day a situation of seeming death and despair. It happened to be Passover. On the third day there was deliverance. Salvation was provided for the Jews. The holiday which celebrates that event has come down in Jewish history and tradition to be known as Purim.

IV. THE GLORIOUS SAVIOR (IV. THE GLORIOUS SAVIOR)

The Christian gospel is built around a story of three days. As we heard from our Scripture reading this morning, Jesus wanted His followers to understand the significance of those three days. After Jesus rose from the dead on that Easter morning, he appeared to His disciples in Jerusalem as they were trying to digest the events of the last three days. According to Luke #24 vv. 45-47 (LUKE 24:45-46), **“Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, 46 and said to them, ‘Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, (LUKE 24:47) and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.’”**

Early in His public ministry Jesus sought to prepare His disciples for what would happen on this Easter weekend. The religious leaders were skeptical about Jesus. He didn't follow their rules. He didn't fit the picture which the religious establishment had of the coming Messiah. He did horrible things like healing people on the Sabbath, which was a big no-no in their minds. That was work, and no Messiah would do work on the Sabbath.

In spite of the miracles which Jesus performed the religious leaders kept demanding more. On one occasion some of these religious leaders demanded a “sign” from Him. According to Matthew #12 vv. 39 & 40 (MATTHEW 12:39) He responded, **“A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. (MATTHEW 12:40) For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth...”** Jonah and three days.

Jesus kept reinforcing this lesson. Some time later Jesus brought His disciples to the north of Judea. As they were having a debriefing session, Jesus asked them who they understood Him to be. Peter told Jesus that He was “The Christ of God.” “Christ” was the New Testament Greek word for the Old Testament term “Messiah.” Peter passed the test.

Then Jesus went on to tell His disciples, according to Luke #9 v. 22 (LUKE 9:22), **“The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.”** All of these warnings just went over the heads of the disciples of Jesus. They were looking for a Messiah who was going to bring in the kingdom of God. They were looking for a Messiah, a Christ, who would throw off those lousy Romans, those Gentiles, and establish a Jewish kingdom which would rule the world. They didn't want to hear anything about rejection and dying. (PROJECTOR OFF)

But as that last week of Jesus' earthly life approached, the disciples of Jesus could not help but sense that trouble was brewing. Jesus and the twelve came to Jerusalem on Palm Sunday for the feast of the Passover, which was followed by the seven day Feast of Unleavened Bread. Every good religious Jew was required to show up in Jerusalem for this annual feast.

So when Jesus came to Jerusalem on Palm Sunday He was greeted with crowds of people who were hailing Him as the King of the Jews. But these crowds of well-wishers were largely Galileans from the north. That was Jesus' home territory. He had a lot of friends there. But now He was entering Jerusalem. Jerusalem was the home of the religious establishment. This was the swamp. When the religious leaders heard Jesus being called the King of the Jews, they felt threatened. They did not believe for one minute that He was the Messiah. He was a threat to their popularity and power base. He had to go.

During the week that followed Jesus showed up in the temple each day and spoke to the religious pilgrims who were gathered there. The religious leaders were also there. They kept trying to trap Him with trick questions. They kept trying to get Him to say something blasphemous. They kept trying to embarrass Him in front of the crowds. They kept trying to get Him to say something that would tick off the Romans. It was to no avail. Jesus could not be tricked.

The Romans had given these Jewish leaders considerable power over what happened in this Roman province of Judea. (PROJECTOR ON--- CAESAREA JERUSALEM MAP) There was a Roman governor whose name was Pontius Pilate. He had his headquarters at Caesarea by the Mediterranean Sea. But he would always show up for feast days like this in Jerusalem with a significant force of Roman soldiers to make sure that there was no trouble in this center of Jewish religious life. (PROJECTOR OFF)

The Jewish leaders kept getting frustrated with their inability to publicly embarrass Jesus, to get Him to say something that would get Him into trouble. They realized that Jesus did have considerable support from some of these religious pilgrims. So they were hesitant to arrest Him. They were not sure about what kind of trouble this would lead to.

But then there was this disciple Judas Iscariot. He recognized that trouble was brewing. He was also beginning to sense that Jesus was not the leader He hoped that He was.

He kept talking about a spiritual kingdom. Judas was looking for an earthly kingdom. He signed onto this mission with the hope that Jesus was going to get rid of these Romans, and that He would set up a Jewish kingdom. He would be happy to have a part in that kind of political transformation, but it didn't look like that was going to happen. Judas was concerned about his own hide.

So he met privately with some of these religious leaders. For thirty pieces of silver he promised to lead them to a place where they could nab Jesus without many of His supporters knowing about it. Jesus had the Last Supper with His disciples in an upper room in Jerusalem on Thursday night. (PROJECTOR ON--- GETHSEMANE MAP) After that He led His disciples to a quiet place just to the east of the city walls of Jerusalem called Gethsemane. It was late at night. Judas Iscariot went off to meet with the religious leaders. They gathered together a Jewish police force and went off in the night to Gethsemane. There they arrested Jesus. Jesus would not let His small band of disciples resist this much larger SWAT team.

So the religious leaders and their police force took Jesus away. His disciples fled. They were scared. They didn't know what to make of the situation. The religious leaders took Jesus into Jerusalem to the house of one of the high priests. (PROJECTOR OFF) There the high council of the Jews, called the Sanhedrin, had an impromptu, middle-of-the-night session. The religious leaders accused Jesus of all kinds of misdeeds, but Jesus wouldn't talk. Much of the testimony they arranged was contradictory. But finally they got Jesus to say that He was the Son of God. They recognized that as a claim to deity. According to the Hebrew Scriptures blasphemy was a capital crime. The Old Testament Law said that any Jew guilty of blasphemy had to die.

But there was a problem. With the Romans in ultimate control of their province of Judea, only the Roman governor had the legal authority to impose the death penalty. So they got Pontius Pilate up early in the morning before many people in Jerusalem were even awake. Jesus was hauled before him. The Jewish leaders accused Jesus of stirring up rebellion among the people. Pilate didn't especially like these Jewish leaders. He recognized that they were trying to manipulate him. He resented that. So he was inclined to let Jesus off of the hook.

There was a custom which had been established at this Passover feast whereby the governor would grant a pardon to one of the condemned men that he had in jail. Pilate brought up that custom as a way to get Jesus off of the hook. But he misread the audience. The religious leaders had brought many of their supporters, and they all called for the release of another condemned man. The crowd also proclaimed that any Roman ruler who let off someone who claimed to be the King of the Jews was going to be in trouble with the Roman emperor. That was ironic. These Jewish leaders hated the Roman emperor. But they wanted Jesus dead. Pontius Pilate felt trapped. So he passed the death sentence on Jesus.

Pilate's Roman soldiers started beating on Jesus. They hauled Him away to the place of execution just outside of the entrance to the city. There He was nailed to a cross along

with two other condemned men. It was a horrible way to die. It was humiliating. Condemned men were stripped of their clothes. It was painful and exhausting. Normally the process could last a couple of days. But Jesus had been beat up pretty badly before He was put on the cross.

So Jesus died on that Good Friday. Ironically this one who was called the Lamb of God died at the time that lambs were being killed in the temple for Jewish pilgrims who would celebrate the Passover at sundown. Pilate recognized that Jesus and the other two victims needed to be buried before sundown, so as not to offend Jewish religious sensibilities about the Passover.

So this rich guy who was a secret supporter of Jesus offered to have Him buried in his tomb. Thus Jesus was died and buried. His disciples were frightened and hiding out. John was the only one who was anywhere close to the site of the crucifixion. It was only the mother of Jesus and a few other women who stayed nearby and rendered emotional support to Jesus.

Thus it was a horrible and dark and despairing time for the friends of Jesus on that Friday. None of what happened made any sense to them. Their Messiah was dead. The Jewish leaders had heard something about what Jesus had said about rising from the dead. They knew that was a ridiculous impossibility. But to avoid the remote possibility that the disciples would try to steal the body of the Jesus, they went to Governor Pilate and asked that a Roman guard be placed on the tomb and that it be sealed with a Roman seal.

But then came Easter. It was the female friends of Jesus who were first on the scene. The report of their witness lends authenticity to the story. For ancient writers did not give much credence to female witnesses. Nobody would make up this kind of story. But there it was. They brought a couple of the male disciples of Jesus to see the empty tomb for themselves. The Roman seal had been broken. The Roman guards had fled. The tomb was empty. It was later in the day that Jesus appeared to His gathered disciples, in the report which we read earlier in the Gospel of Luke.

It was a remarkable three days. Now I should point out by our western reckoning, it was closer to two days. But in the Jewish way of reckoning Friday was day one, Saturday was day two, and Sunday was day 3. Jesus died on Friday. His disciples were left in despair. All seemed dark and gloomy. But Jesus rose physically from the dead on Easter. It meant that His claims were true.

What does it all mean? The Apostle Peter explained it in this way (PROJECTOR ON--- 1 PETER 2:24): **“He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; ‘By his wounds you have been healed.’”** The God-man Jesus died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins. He provided us humans with a way to get to heaven by virtue of what He did in dying for us.

The Apostle John explained what our responsibility is in order to benefit from that. (JOHN 3:16) He wrote, **“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”** Our one responsibility is to put our trust in Jesus. We need to believe in Him. There is no other effort or merit required from us. We simply need to welcome Him into our lives.

I was a single man until I was 29. I knew a fair amount about marriage before that. (PROJECTOR OFF) I had married parents. I had friends who were married. I went to a number of weddings. A couple of times I served as a groomsman and a best man. When I went to graduate school, I was taught some things about marriage. I read books about marriage.

Eventually I met a girl who attracted my interest. She agreed to marry me. But none of these things made me married. It was only when I made a commitment to Suzy that I actually became married.

Many of us likewise know a lot about Christianity. We have read about it. Perhaps we have read the Bible. Perhaps we have gone to church. Perhaps we have friends who are Christians. Perhaps we have thought about God, maybe even talked to Him. But we only become Christians when we welcome Jesus into our lives, when we put our trust in Him.

Three days. Are you closer to Friday or to Easter Sunday?. We can know the joy of Easter only when we have put our trust in Jesus.