

The Day Death Died

Daniel 7:13-14

Introduction

The Islamic State, also known as ISIS, is said to have been founded by Abu Musab al Zarqawi in 2004, although it did not go by that name until 2013. At its height, ISIS was able to take control and hold about a third of Syria and nearly half of Iraq. The goal of ISIS was to establish Shari'ah, which is the law of Islam for Muslims. Because Islam believes Jesus was only a prophet and Mohammad their greatest prophet, the worship of Jesus as the Son of God is viewed as blasphemous. So as ISIS spread through Iraq, they spray-painted the Arabic letter ن, or "N," on the homes and businesses of Christians and issued an ultimatum, to convert to Islam, pay a fine, or face death by the sword. The letter ن stands for Nasara or Nazarenes, which is a derogatory Arabic word for Christians.

Many Christians who were identified with the letter ن were shot, beheaded, or even crucified by ISIS. These Christians were promised life if they would only convert to Islam; for some, it was crazy to choose death by refusing to reject Jesus as the Son of God by converting to Islam.

The apostle Paul said of the resurrection of Jesus: **"Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain.... And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.... If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied"** (1 Cor. 15:12-14, 17, 19).

I want to use our time today to reflect on three crazy things associated with the resurrection of Jesus in the form of three questions: What is the craziest thing Jesus did? What is the craziest thing Jesus said? What is craziest thing you can do?

What is the Craziest Thing Jesus Did?

Jesus died on a Friday. What you need to know is that according to the Jewish calendar, the last day of the workweek is Friday. Saturday is the Sabbath (day of rest), and the first day of the week is Sunday. Jesus died on a cross the last day of the workweek, was in the tomb on the Sabbath, and on the first day of the week... he defeated death by walking out of the grave.

While on the cross dying, we are told that He cried out **"It is Finished"** then took one final breath, and died. To make sure He was dead, one of the Roman soldiers thrust a spear into His side and into His heart to make sure he was not faking it or unconscious. Jesus was dead. His body was wrapped and then buried in a tomb where a great stone was rolled in front of the entrance to seal the tomb shut. The religious leaders were paranoid that Jesus' disciples might steal the body and concoct an elaborate scheme that He rose from the grave just like He said He would over and over again during His life.

On the first day of the week (Sunday), Mary Magdalene and two of her friends visited the tomb and found it not only open, but empty. Jesus rose from the grave. Because people do not just rise from the dead, some theories have been offered to explain why the tomb was empty of which none make any sense. Jesus' body could not have been stolen because there were guards standing watch to make sure it wouldn't happen, Jesus was not unconscious and then later revived by the dampness of the tomb, Jesus didn't have a twin brother, and too many people witnessed the resurrection for Him to have been a vision. Besides, do you think that every single one of the disciples would have been willing to die violent deaths or suffer greatly if Jesus' resurrection was made up?

The resurrection of Jesus Christ affirms everything he did and claimed to be. This is why the apostle Paul wrote, **“if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied”** (1 Cor. 15:17-19). Without a resurrected Jesus Christ, all you have is a dead martyr who fooled millions of people into believing him to be something that he was not. Without the resurrection we are left with a liar and a lunatic and nothing more. C.S. Lewis wrote of the notion of Jesus as nothing more than a religious icon:

A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on the level with a man who says he is a poached egg—or he would be the devil of hell. You must make your choice. Either this was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us.”¹

What Was the Craziest Thing Jesus Said?

Jesus said many things about himself before he was crucified. After feeding more than 5,000 people, Jesus said, **“I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst”** (John 6:35). After a woman who was caught in adultery and drug out from her bed and into the street, Jesus told the angry mob: **“Let him without sin among you be the first to throw the first stone”** (John 8:7); then he said, **“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life”** (John 8:12). After the religious leaders got angry that Jesus healed a blind man on the Sabbath, he said, **“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep”** (John 10:11). Before Jesus raised his friend Lazarus from the grave after being dead for four days, he claimed: **“I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die...”** (John 11:25-26).

As crazy as these claims sounded in Jesus' day, the one that resulted with his crucifixion was the claim he made to the religious leaders after they arrested him with the hope of keeping him from talking to anyone ever again. Jesus' answer was the craziest thing he ever said... if he was really what and who he claimed to be. The high priest, Caiaphas asked Jesus if he believed himself to

¹ C. S. Lewis. *Mere Christianity* (New York, NY: HarperSanFrancisco; 2001), p. 52.

be the Son of God and the Savior of the World. Jesus said to Caiaphas: **“You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven”** (Matt. 26:63-64).

What Jesus said to Caiaphas was that he was the Son of Man that the prophet Daniel foretold would come one day to fix what is wrong with our world and set up the kingdom of God that would last forever. Here is what Jesus referred to in Daniel:

I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed. (Daniel 7:13–14)

Jesus said that he is the Son of Man who was presented by the Ancient of Days who will give him dominion and glory and a kingdom that all peoples, nations, and languages will eventually serve him forever. That sounds absolutely absurd! Especially considering what Daniel chapter 7 is about. In Daniel 7, the prophet had a prophetic dream that included four different beasts that Daniel describes as “great” (v. 2). The first great beast represented the Babylonian Empire, the second great beast was a bear that represented the Mede and Persian Empires, the third great beast was like a leopard with four wings that represented the Greek Empire, and the fourth great beast that Daniel described as “terrifying and dreadful” represented the Roman Empire. Daniel’s dream also included what seems to be a future kingdom(s) and an anti-Christ who will rise to power. If you want to know more about Daniel 7, you will need to come back to Meadowbrooke as I am preaching through Daniel on Sundays (we will get to Daniel 7 in about six weeks).

A theme in the book of Daniel is that although the Empire of Babylon no longer exists, the Spirit of Babylon does. The Spirit of Babylon is forever associated with sinful mankind’s desire to dethrone God. This was true of the Babylonian Empire, this was true of the Mede and Persian Empire, it was true of the Greek Empire, it was true of the Roman Empire, and it is certainly true of every nation today. What we learn from Daniel 7 is that God has a plan to put the nations back in their place as seen in verses 9-10,

As I looked, thrones were placed, and the Ancient of Days took his seat; his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames; its wheels were burning fire. A stream of fire issued and came out from before him; a thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him; the court sat in judgment, and the books were opened. (Daniel 7:9–10)

The Ancient of Days in Daniel 7 is God the Father who reigns and rules sovereignly over everything. David Akin, who wrote a commentary on Daniel, said of these verses: “This is God the Father on his eternal and universal throne. As the Ancient of Days he is eternal, not old. He is wise, not senile! He is a big God, bigger than even Daniel realized and bigger than the petty beast kingdoms of this world.”²

² Daniel L. Akin. *Christ-Centered Exposition: Daniel* (Nashville, TN: Holman; 2017) p. 88.

The clothing of the Ancient of days speaks to his holiness, his hair speaks to his eternal purity, His fiery throne speaks to his righteous judgment, its wheels of fire speak to the universal scope of his judgment and his ability to see all things, and the thousand times ten thousands are a reference to his heavenly court. Daniel's dream, the court was sitting in judgment and the books were opened because judgment was coming, and no person or nation would be exempt. His judgment will be fair, equitable, and complete.

Right now God is patiently waiting; his terms of peace have been offered to all who wish to be forgiven of their sins and reconciled to him. Jesus told us what the terms of peace were when he said:

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.” (John 3:16–18)

The cross was God's terms of peace, the empty tomb is his promise that not only is reconciliation and forgiveness guaranteed to all who believe in Jesus, but also that he is coming back to make all things new, and when he does, “...**every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him**” (Rev. 1:7).

For Jesus to identify himself as the Son of Man in Daniel 7 is only crazy if the resurrection never happened. The reason why Daniel 7:13-14 is one of the most quoted Old Testament passages in the New Testament is because Jesus walked out of the tomb. After Jesus was placed in the tomb on Friday, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome decided to go to Jesus' grave to finish anointing his dead carcass with spices to cover up the stench of death out of love and respect for their deceased friend. As they approached the tomb they noticed the stone had been rolled away. When they entered the tomb they were startled by an angel who said to the three women: “**Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you**” (Mark 16:6-7).

What is the Craziest Thing You Can Do? (Conclusion)

The story of the resurrection of Jesus is only crazy if it didn't happen. Jesus' statement to Caiaphas about being the Son of Man is only crazy if he never walked out of the tomb by defeating death. Jesus' disciples witnessed Jesus' resurrection along with scores of others after the tomb was found empty. Countless millions have felt the impact of Jesus' resurrection and the evidence of his resurrection power is seen in the changed lives of those who identify with the Nazarene.

The reason why it was not crazy for so many Christians in Iraq to stand for Christ in the face of the threats of ISIS is the same reason why it was not crazy for every one of Jesus' disciples to face death and persecution because of their faith in him: Jesus rose from the grave and he is coming back to make all that is wrong with the world... right! The craziest thing you could do

today is to leave this building or walk away from whatever device you used to watch our livestream service without repenting of your sins by placing your faith and trust in Jesus the Nazarene who lived the life you could never live, died a death under the wrath of God that you deserved, and rose from the grave to validate everything you heard this morning. God's terms of peace for you today is to believe in Jesus who is coming back to judge the living and the dead.