

Death of Jesus in Each of the Four Gospels

Jesus speaks seven times from the cross, but not seven times in any one Gospel. The Gospels relate three very different stories regarding Jesus’s dying words. In one story, Jesus speaks only once; in a second, he speaks three times; and in a third, he speaks another three times. However, there are no parallels between what is said in any one of these three stories and what is said in the other two stories.

Story A	Story B	Story C
Matthew and Mark	Luke	John
“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matt. 27:46; Mark 15:34)	“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” (Luke 23:34)	“Woman, here is your son . . . Here is your mother.” (John 19:26–27)
	“Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.” (Luke 23:43)	“I am thirsty.” (John 19:28)
	“Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.” (Luke 23:46)	“It is finished.” (John 19:30)

What Happens When Jesus Dies?

In each of our four New Testament Gospels, the events that are narrated immediately after Jesus’s death may indicate a primary concern for that particular book.

The Gospel of Mark

Immediately after Jesus dies, Mark tells us that the curtain in the Jerusalem temple tore from top to bottom (15:38) and that the centurion recognized that Jesus was the Son of God (15:39).

One interpretation: Mark believes that Jesus's death has provided a ransom for sin (10:45), making the sacrificial cult of the Jerusalem temple obsolete. Mark also wants to tell his readers that it is only through the cross that one can come to understand fully who Jesus is.

The Gospel of Matthew

Immediately after Jesus dies, Matthew tells us that the curtain in the Jerusalem temple tore in two and that an earthquake opened tombs in the cemetery such that the bodies of many saints came back to life and came out of their tombs. Then the centurion proclaimed that Jesus was the Son of God (27:51–54).

One interpretation: Matthew, like Mark, believes that Jesus's death has provided a once-for-all-time sacrifice for sin, but Matthew also wants to stress that Jesus's death opens the door to life after death. It is in the context of this eternal dimension that he is to be regarded as the Son of God.

The Gospel of Luke

Immediately after Jesus dies, Luke tells us that the gentile centurion began to praise God, acknowledging Jesus's innocence, and that the

multitudes who were present returned home, beating their breasts in repentance (23:47–48).

One interpretation: Luke is less concerned than Mark and Matthew with reflection on the theological meaning of Jesus's death (i.e., its redemptive or atoning effect); however, Luke is more concerned than the other Gospels with the proper *response* of people to what Jesus has done. Luke believes that the word of the cross should lead people to worship and repentance.

The Gospel of John

Immediately after Jesus dies, John tells us that his side was pierced with a spear causing water and blood to gush forth (19:31–34).

One interpretation: John's Gospel is often heavily symbolic and water and blood are almost universal symbols for life. The flow of water and blood from a person's body is reminiscent of what happens when a woman gives birth. John may be implying that, even as Jesus dies, he gives birth to a new life for all those who believe in him.