

Golgotha

By the end of our homework last week, Pilate had acquiesced to the demands of the Sanhedrin in assigning the death penalty to Jesus. We saw Jesus presented on Pilate's seat, bloodied and beaten, cruelly dressed and mocked for the King he is. The Sanhedrin betrayed the last vestiges of their anointed office by turning their backs on God and sending his Son to death, all to protect their positions of power, wealth and authority. In so doing they condemned themselves to the wrath of God's timely judgment. As we saw with our discussions of the fig tree (Mark 11:12-21) a while back, these Jews had become like Jeremiah's basket of corrupt and decayed figs which symbolized those who had rejected the word of the Lord at the time of the Babylonian Exile. Those religious leaders had met their destruction when God destroyed by famine, sword, and plague all who were left in Israel when the captive remnant was led into exile in Babylon. (Jeremiah 8:8-13 and 24:1-10). Jesus had predicted just as certain a judgment against those in power in Jerusalem (Luke 19:43-44).

Our study this week will focus on the events of Jesus' crucifixion, death, and burial. After the intensity of last week's study of the trials, this week will seem mercifully shorter, but certainly no less difficult to ponder. In studying the details we are exposed to the savage cruelty and evil that mankind becomes when it chooses to cut itself off from the love and mercy of God. The events that we study this week will make our hearts cry out. In our limited understanding of the ways of God, it is hard to conceive that *this* is his means of salvation. By the end of our study we will be asking ourselves, "My God, what have you done?"

Jesus is Handed Over to be Crucified

"For he knew it was out of envy that they had handed Jesus over to him."
(Matthew 27:18)

Herod and Pilate found Jesus not guilty of sedition and insurrection. Upon presenting his verdict to the Sanhedrin, Pilate found himself in a tenuous political situation. Innocence was traded for political expediency, and Truth was traded for power and corruption. Take a few minutes to pray for God's blessings of insight and understanding upon your study today. Pray that he will help you come to terms with how he brings about his salvation plan through the evil machinations of the godless.



Read Matthew 27: 15-26 and answer the following questions.

Of what had Barabbas been convicted?

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What is the irony?

According to verse 20, who did the chief priests and the elders persuade?

When Pilate asks what is to be done with Jesus, what was the reply?

What made Pilate bend to their will?

Why did Pilate wash his hands?



Complete the people's response in verse 25: "*Let his _____ be on _____ and our _____!*"

- What is the significance of their response?

Pilate believed Jesus was innocent of the charges against him. He probably figured that the crowds of people who had so recently adored Jesus would come to Jesus' defense. Pilate thought that applying the custom of releasing a prisoner during the festival days might be his way out. Surely the people of Israel would want Jesus released rather than the notorious Barabbas. Pilate did not take into consideration the persuasive power of the religious leaders. The religious leaders had succeeded in convincing the crowds to support their desire to see Jesus executed, by either persuasion or more likely, intimidation.

The religious leaders probably didn't have too much trouble convincing the crowds. Jesus' own closest followers were nowhere to be found. They had dispersed and hidden themselves in fear of being recognized and arrested as supporters of Jesus. The Jesus standing before the crowd, bloodied, beaten, and in the custody of the Romans, bore little resemblance to the man hailed messiah upon entering Jerusalem five days earlier riding on a colt. The man upon whom they had pinned their hopes of leading them victoriously against Rome was now in the custody of Rome, just like every so-called messiah before him. Their dream of Jesus bringing about a new Israel independent and free of Roman occupation was dashed. He was not the messiah they were expecting.

Either way, the religious leaders got their way and Pilate was cornered into following their wishes. Observing the frenzy of the crowd and concerned over a possible uprising if he persists in resisting the religious leaders, he refuses to have anything more to do with the case against Jesus. He washes his hands in front of the crowd as a symbolic gesture of absolving himself from the responsibility of Jesus' crucifixion. He makes it clear that the Roman judicial system does not support their claim, yet he allows a gross miscarriage of justice in providing the means for the execution.

The crowds' response of "*Let his blood be on us and our children*" relays their murderous, self-righteous zeal to carry out their plan. The religious elite of Jerusalem believed they were justified in having this blasphemer put to death. God was surely on their side, so they believed.

Little did they conceive that his blood was to be poured out in divine atonement for the sins of all, even the sins of those in the crowd and their children if they would only have recognized who Jesus was. Indeed, their blood and their children's blood would come to be poured out in divine judgment when Rome crushed Jerusalem in 70 AD. If they had only known what Jesus' blood could have done for them!

Jesus is Beaten, Mocked and Led Away

They ... put a scarlet robe on him, and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand and knelt in front of him and mocked him. "Hail, king of the Jews!" (Matthew 27:28-29)

In today's lesson we will be studying two passages of scripture that tell us the events that take place before Jesus' crucifixion. Our passages will be difficult to dwell on, but ask that God will give you the eyes to see what Jesus went through because he loves *you*, he went through the agony, anguish and torture of crucifixion so that *you* can be presented to his father, pure and righteous. Jesus obediently went the way of the cross because of his great love for *you*.

In preparation for today's lesson, read the following passage. Describe step by step what had been done to Jesus.



Matthew 27: 26-31

Jesus was flogged. Then was taken into the Roman Praetorium where he was stripped and dressed in a royal robe, the crown of thorns set into his head and given a staff. In mockery the soldiers[†] all gathered around and contemptuously made a show of paying homage to him, then spit on him and struck him repeatedly with the staff. Before leading him outside the city gates to Golgotha, Jesus was flogged. Jesus bound and stripped, was beaten repeatedly with a *flagrum*, a scourge with jagged bits of sheep bone braided into the tips of the leather straps. He was repeatedly whipped across the back of his torso and thighs, the *flagrum* shredding his skin into vivid ribbons of bloody flesh.

The beating alone would be enough to induce shock and bring a man just to the brink of death. This beating was the first step in the cruel process of crucifixion designed by Rome through centuries of practice. Crucifixion brought together four qualities sought after by

[†] The whole "company" (literally *cohort*) would involve six hundred men, one tenth of a legion, if the troops were at complete strength.—New American Commentary

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Romans in an execution: unrelenting anguish, a slow agonizing death, a public spectacle, and unreserved and complete humiliation. Crucifixion was a terrifying spectacle designed to control the populace through fear and was reserved for the punishment of rebels, runaway slaves, deserting soldiers, and the worst criminals.

After the beating, a *titulus* was hung around the victim's neck. It was a crude board stating the victim's name and crime. He wore this as he was forced to carry the horizontal cross bar, the *patibulum*, through the narrow, uneven cobbled streets of the city lined with pilgrims and onlookers watching, jeering, spitting as he made slow tortured progress to the site of execution. The execution site was usually on a main road leading into the city where all who came and went would see the gruesome site of the execution and be warned of how Rome dealt with criminals.



Read Luke 23:26-31 and answer the following questions.

Why was Simon of Cyrene forced to carry the cross behind Jesus?

Describe who followed Jesus.



Why do you think Jesus told the women of Jerusalem not to weep for him, but for themselves and their children?

Jesus' words to the women are not a call to repentance, but a pronouncement of the coming judgment against the people of Jerusalem and Israel for not recognizing their messiah when he was sent to them by God. In Jesus' day it was considered great shame and a disgrace for a woman to be childless. The birth of a baby was a time for great rejoicing. Jesus' words portray the gravity of the judgment to come in that the women who are childless will be considered greatly blessed, they will not know the horror of watching their babies die. The judgment to come will make them long for death as a better alternative to living. Verse 31 is probably the most difficult to understand of Jesus' words. The best interpretation of his words may be: *"If God has not spared his innocent Son from such tribulation [by permitting his crucifixion], how much worse will it be for a sinful nation when God unleashes his righteous wrath upon it [by permitting the Romans to destroy Jerusalem]."*¹

¹ New American Commentary

Jesus is Placed on the Cross and Dies

*Jesus cried out in a loud voice, ... "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"
(Matt 27:46)*

Jesus had made his way out of the city along the Via Dolorosa to Golgotha, the site of execution. He obediently walked the course laid out for him by his Father. He obediently permitted himself to be nailed on a cross. His last moments were focused on forgiveness and obedience when most people's minds would be blinded by fear and terror; their bodies overcome by violence and excruciating pain. Take a few moments to prepare your heart and mind for the verses awaiting us today.



Read Luke 23:32-43 and answer the following questions.



Why does Jesus ask his father to forgive them? Who is "them"?

The crowds taunt Jesus to come down off the cross and save himself. Jesus is fully capable of doing so. Why does he not come down off the cross?

Who was crucified next to Jesus? What does the one acknowledge as true about the two of them? (v. 41)

Why does the second criminal rebuke the first? (40)

What understanding does this man reveal he has regarding Jesus?

When Jesus tells him, "*I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise*", what is significant about "today"?

At the execution site an upright beam, the *stipes*, awaited where the victim and the *patibulum* would be attached and lifted into position. His arms outstretched, nails were driven through the palm of his hands near the wrist into the *patibulum*. The *titulus* proclaiming "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews" was nailed above his head for all to see. His feet were placed flat and nailed into the *stipes*. The cross was then lifted into position, the *stipes* finding its place in

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a hole in the ground and held secure with wedges driven into the hole. Shortly after nine o'clock in the mourning Jesus was suspended upon the cross (Mark 15:25).

As Jesus was lifted up he prayed, *"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."* (v. 34). He is interceding on behalf of the Jews who rejected him and devised his death, the Romans who carried out his crucifixion, the crowds who jeered at him and refused to believe him, the criminals next to him, and each one of us who has chosen self and sin above the will and love of God. God heard and answered Jesus' prayer. That answer was his death. It is through Jesus' death that God can forgive the sins and transgressions of each and every one of us.

The criminal who asked Jesus to remember him when Jesus entered his kingdom recognized that Jesus was still the Messiah. He understood that Jesus, innocent of the crimes for which he was condemned, was going to his kingdom. He confessed his sin and knew he deserved the punishment he was receiving. In mercy Jesus forgave him and promised entrance to paradise that *very* day. The moment of Jesus' death the salvation plan was complete. All that Jesus had striven for during his life and ministry had come to completion upon the moment of his death. That *day* salvation was available to all and that *day* all who sought forgiveness would be saved.

* * * * *

The Romans had learned how to control how quickly or slowly a person died on the cross. To prolong death they wouldn't be flogged as severely, and they would be tied to the cross rather than nailed. Death through traumatic shock from severe beatings and blood loss through nailing would hasten death within hours rather than days. Jesus' arms would have quickly grown numb and his shoulders would have felt as if his arms were being pulled out of their sockets. The nails driven through his hands at the wrist severely damaged the median nerve sending waves of excruciating, unrelenting pain like lightning bolts shooting through the length of the arm. To ease the pain in the arms and shoulders, by reflex he would push up with his feet and legs until they would be overcome with cramps and excruciating pain until it was too difficult to bear and he'd have to release his legs again. Then arching his back he would try and assuage the pain, cramping and numbness in his extremities. When he could no longer hold position, he would again push with his legs or hang from his arms. Breathing would require great effort to lift up with the legs and draw air into the lungs, each breath more and more torturous than the preceding. Near constant writhing would lead to exhaustion. Too fatigued to draw another breath, death would come by suffocation.²



Read Matthew 27: 45-56 and answer the following questions.

Jesus hung on the cross from twelve o'clock to three o'clock. During that time darkness came over the land. What do you think that darkness was in the physical world and what do you think it represented in the spiritual sense?

² Swindoll, Charles R., *Jesus: The Greatest Life of All*, Thomas Nelson, 2008. Pg. 219-222.

What happened when Jesus cried out the final time? (v. 51-53)

Read Exodus 26: 31-34 and Leviticus 16:15-17, 29-34. The curtain is a boundary between the Most Holy place and where the priests would come minister in the temple. The Most Holy Place (or Holy of Holies) behind the curtain was where the Ark of the Covenant was kept and the presence of God came to dwell. Upon the ark was the atonement cover. Once a year the High Priest was to go behind the curtain and sprinkle the sacrificed bull's blood over the atonement cover. *Only* the High Priest could enter this most sacred space *one* day a year for the purpose of atoning for the sins of Israel.



Verse 51 tells us that the curtain in the temple was torn top to bottom. What is the significance of the curtain tearing in the temple?

Jesus death was accompanied by four miraculous events. To what do these events together testify?

What conclusion did the centurion come to when he "*saw the earthquake and all that had happened*"?

According to Matthew 27:55-56 and John 19:25, who was present at Jesus' death? Why were the names of so many women recorded, but the "beloved disciple" was the only man?

While Jesus hung on the cross, darkness covered the land of Israel. Likely a solar eclipse in the physical world, it was an omen of bad tidings in the ancient world. It represented the momentary victory of evil, of death. God withdrew his presence from his Son and his creation in those agonizing hours before Jesus death paid the cost of the world's sin. For the first time in his life Jesus now fully experienced the cost of sin which is separation from the Father. He cried out, "*My God, my God why have you forsaken me?*" Jesus took on the sins of the world in order to be the atonement sacrifice presentable to God. In that moment God turned from sin in the body of Jesus before accepting the only perfect sacrifice, the death of his beloved son. Crying out one last time, Jesus gave up his spirit. Creation groaned with the death of its Creator. The earth shook and rocks split while the followers of Christ and the enemies of God watched in fearful silence. Mankind may have been silent, but nature was not. The natural

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phenomena of an eclipse and an earthquake had divine timing. The death of Christ was a powerful, earth shaking event that carried repercussions through creation.³ The very rocks cried out in anguish. The centurion and the guards had stood watch over many crucifixions, but none had ever ended with such a fearsome heavenly display. They came to the conclusion that indeed this man must be the Son of God.

With the earthquake the curtain in the temple shielding the sacred Most Holy Place from the rest of the world was torn from top to bottom. The fact that it tore from top to bottom signifies that God himself ripped the thick curtain allowing access between man and God for the first time. His presence was accessible to all, not just the high priest one day a year. God's dwelling place would be with men.

As the earth shook, the tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy and righteous people came back to life. Matthew tells us that upon Jesus' resurrection they departed the places of the dead outside the city gates. They came into the holy city and appeared to many people. The opening of the tombs heralded Jesus victory over death and sin.

Jesus is Laid in the Tomb

Then he took it down, wrapped it in linen cloth and placed it in a tomb cut in the rock, one in which no one had yet been laid. (Luke 23:53)

We have reached our last section of homework for this week. Our previous section was filled with anguish and horror as we saw our beloved savior crucified as he relinquished himself to death. His death was accompanied by frightening and divine works of nature at the command of the One who created nature. Like the centurion, all who witnessed must have quaked with fear and come to the realization that Jesus was the Son of God, whether or not they chose to accept what that title meant. Our homework today will focus on one event following the death of Jesus. Before we begin, come before the Lord and ask him to bless you in your studies today.



Read Luke 23:50-56 and answer the following questions.

How does the Bible describe Joseph of Arimathea? (See also Matthew 27:57)

What did he ask of Pilate?

Where did he lay Jesus?

³ Bible Knowledge Commentary

According to Mark 15:47 and John 19:39 who helped and accompanied Joseph in his work?

According to John 19:41, describe where Jesus was buried.

According to the gospel accounts Joseph of Arimathea was a righteous man and a member of the Sanhedrin. He did not consent to the actions of the Sanhedrin. He was disciple of Jesus who was waiting for the kingdom of God. He went to Pilate and asked for Jesus to be removed for burial. He and Nicodemus had little time. It was after three o'clock when Jesus died. We are told that it was the Preparation Day, the day when all work had to be completed before the Sabbath began at night fall. They quickly and lovingly prepared Jesus' body for burial; they wrapped him in linen cloth with myrrh and aloë and laid him in a tomb in the garden near Golgotha (which today is believed to be the site of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher). Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses (who is likely also Mary the wife of Cleopas, an aunt to Jesus according to John 19:25) watched as the men placed Jesus in the tomb and rolled the stone across the tomb's entrance. The women went home and prepared the spices and perfumes to further anoint the body of Jesus the day after the Sabbath.

Personal Reflection:

David wrote Psalm 22 during a period of rejection and despair. David's prophetic psalm was written over one thousand years before Jesus came to die on the cross. This psalm gives an amazingly accurate description of the suffering of the Messiah. Read Psalm 22 and reflect upon David's words.