

“The Death of Jesus”

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Tonight, I’m going to do something very simple, yet also something very ambitious. I’m going to read through Luke’s account of the death of Jesus, and I’m going to make some comments along the way. I want God’s word to speak for itself. My hope is that as we read the Scripture, we will be reminded of the power of Jesus’ death. I want us to know how he died, why he died, and what it means for us.

So, without further ado, let’s begin. We’ll be reading through Luke 22 and 23. Let’s first read Luke 22:1–2:

¹ Now the Feast of Unleavened Bread drew near, which is called the Passover.

² And the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to put him to death, for they feared the people.¹

The setting is the beginning of Passover in Jerusalem. It’s a Thursday, and the feast of Passover begins at sundown. Passover recalled God’s great saving act in the Old Testament, when he rescued the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt. God did that by sending judgments, or plagues, on Egypt. The final one was the Passover: God destroyed all the firstborn—animals and humans—in Egypt. The only people spared this judgment were the ones who killed lambs and put some of their blood on their doors. The Israelites were instructed to eat the meat of the lambs along with unleavened bread. The bread was unleavened because there was no time to wait for dough to rise. They were about to leave Egypt. The point is simple: everyone is a sinner. Everyone deserves God’s wrath for turning away from God, disobeying him, and ignoring him. The only way to be spared God’s wrath is to have something—or someone—die in your place.

So, that is the backdrop to what we see in Luke 22. Luke also tells us that the chief priests and the scribes—the Jewish religious leaders—wanted to put Jesus to death. They didn’t believe that Jesus was the Messiah, the promised King who would fulfill God’s promises to David, the one who would usher in an era of righteousness and peace. They thought he was blaspheming God because he made himself equal to God. So, they wanted to kill him (John 5:17–18; 8:58–59; 10:30–31). But they needed to find a way to have Jesus arrested away from the crowds. If they didn’t, they would have a riot on their hands, because Jesus was attracting a large following

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV).

(Mark 14:1–2). The city of Jerusalem, which might normally have had about 30,000 citizens, would swell to about 100,000 people during the feast. With so many people, both the Jewish and Roman leaders wanted to make sure that order was maintained.

That leads us to verses 3–6:

³ Then Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot, who was of the number of the twelve. ⁴ He went away and conferred with the chief priests and officers how he might betray him to them. ⁵ And they were glad, and agreed to give him money. ⁶ So he consented and sought an opportunity to betray him to them in the absence of a crowd.

Satan, the devil, took control of Judas, one of the twelve disciples, causing him to conspire with the Jewish religious leaders against Jesus. They paid him to betray Jesus.

Now let's look at verses 7–13. Jesus tells the disciples where they will eat the Passover meal.

⁷ Then came the day of Unleavened Bread, on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. ⁸ So Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and prepare the Passover for us, that we may eat it." ⁹ They said to him, "Where will you have us prepare it?" ¹⁰ He said to them, "Behold, when you have entered the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him into the house that he enters ¹¹ and tell the master of the house, 'The Teacher says to you, Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?' ¹² And he will show you a large upper room furnished; prepare it there." ¹³ And they went and found it just as he had told them, and they prepared the Passover.

It's possible that Jesus had prearranged a place for the disciples to eat the Passover meal. But it's also possible that what Jesus says here is due to his omniscience. Jesus is God in the flesh, and he was able to exercise all the powers of God when he wanted. At any rate, the disciples gather in an upper room in Jerusalem. The next verses show us what happened at the meal.

¹⁴ And when the hour came, he reclined at table, and the apostles with him. ¹⁵ And he said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. ¹⁶ For I tell you I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." ¹⁷ And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said, "Take this, and divide it among yourselves. ¹⁸ For I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." ¹⁹ And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." ²⁰ And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood."

At this meal, Jesus tells his disciples he is about to suffer. (He had already predicted his death three times: 9:21–22, 44–45; 18:31–34.) He says this is the last time he will have such a feast with his followers. At the Passover, Jews ate roast lamb and unleavened bread. They also drank four cups of diluted wine, which were supposed to represent four promises that God made to the Israelites: that he would rescue them out of Egypt, that they would be his people, that he would be their God, and that they would know him (Exod. 6:6–7).

Jesus gives the elements of this meal new meaning. He says the bread is his body. His body would soon be broken on the cross. And it is his broken body that, like bread, gives his people sustenance. He said the wine represents his blood. It would soon be poured out for his people. In the Bible, blood represents the life of a living being (Lev. 17:11). Jesus would soon give his life on the cross. Like the lambs of the Passover, he would be killed so his people would not have to be. The sins of his people would be transferred onto Jesus, so that when he died, it was their sins that would be nailed to the cross.

Jesus makes this clearer by saying that the contents of the cup symbolize his blood, which inaugurates the new covenant. The “old covenant” is the covenant that God made with the Israelites at Mount Sinai, after they were brought out of Egypt. This covenant demanded obedience, an obedience that the Israelites clearly didn’t achieve. If they broke this covenant, they would be cut off from being God’s people. So, God promised that there would be a new covenant (Jer. 31:31–34; cf. Ezek. 36–37). God promised that he would forgive their sins, write his law upon their hearts, give them new hearts by means of the Holy Spirit, and that every member of this covenant would truly know him. Here, Jesus is saying his death begins the new covenant. In the Old Testament, we see that covenants are often initiated with the death of an animal. The idea is that whoever breaks the covenant will die, just like the animal. But Jesus died when the new covenant was made. God never breaks his covenant, though his people do. But God takes on the punishment for covenant breaking. Since the punishment has been paid in advance, everyone in the new covenant will never be punished for their sins.

After explaining the significance of his upcoming death, Jesus issues a warning:

²¹ But behold, the hand of him who betrays me is with me on the table. ²² For the Son of Man goes as it has been determined, but woe to that man by whom he is betrayed!” ²³ And they began to question one another, which of them it could be who was going to do this.

Jesus knew he would be betrayed. He knew what was going to happen to him. He says that his death is necessary—it has been determined. This is all God’s plan. But that doesn’t mean that Judas isn’t guilty for his betrayal of Jesus. Human beings are responsible for their wrongdoing.

In the next several verses, Jesus says that his disciples must follow his example. He is serving humanity by giving up his life. His disciples must therefore be servants. There will come a day when they reign with him. They, like Jesus, must pour out their lives now, and later, like Jesus, they will be exalted.

²⁴ A dispute also arose among them, as to which of them was to be regarded as the greatest. ²⁵ And he said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors. ²⁶ But not so with you. Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves. ²⁷ For who is the greater, one who reclines at table or one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at table? But I am among you as the one who serves.

²⁸ “You are those who have stayed with me in my trials, ²⁹ and I assign to you, as my Father assigned to me, a kingdom, ³⁰ that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

Jesus also tells the disciples that Satan wanted to “sift them like wheat.” But Jesus prayed that they wouldn’t fail. In particular, he prayed for Peter, otherwise known as Simon. Peter would deny knowing Jesus, but later he would be restored and would be the leader of the apostles. Jesus tells Peter of his denial in verses 31–34:

³¹ “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, ³² but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.” ³³ Peter said to him, “Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death.” ³⁴ Jesus said, “I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow this day, until you deny three times that you know me.”

When Jesus tells Peter that Satan demanded to have “you,” he uses the plural form of you. In Greek, as in many other languages, “you” can be singular or plural. In verse 31, Jesus uses the plural form. Satan demanded to have all the disciples. Jesus tells Peter in verse 32, using the singular form of “you,” that he prayed for Peter not to fail. In fact, Jesus prays for all his people. He is interceding for us now in heaven (Rom. 8:34). Jesus tells Peter that he will deny Jesus, but afterward, he will “turn again” and will “strengthen [his] brothers.”

Then Jesus warns them of what is to come:

³⁵ And he said to them, “When I sent you out with no moneybag or knapsack or sandals, did you lack anything?” They said, “Nothing.” ³⁶ He said to them, “But now let the one who has a moneybag take it, and likewise a knapsack. And let the one who has no sword sell his cloak and buy one. ³⁷ For I tell you that this Scripture must be fulfilled in me: ‘And he was numbered with the transgressors.’ For what is written about me has its fulfillment.” ³⁸ And they said, “Look, Lord, here are two swords.” And he said to them, “It is enough.”

I don't want to take too much time to explain this, but it seems that Jesus is telling his disciples that he will be considered a transgressor—a criminal and a rebel. He's quoting Isaiah 53:12, saying that he fulfills that passage about a righteous suffering servant who dies for the sins of his people. He seems to be telling his disciples that they will be treated like him, so they should be armed. But, apparently, Jesus didn't literally mean that they should have swords, so when he sees them produce swords, he says, “It is enough.” This is a way of dismissing them. Shortly, we're going to see the disciples use those swords, and Jesus rebukes them. It's also possible that Peter's use of the sword is evidence of the disciples resisting arrest. They are regarded as criminals, and Jesus is numbered among them, thus fulfilling prophecy.

The disciples then move east of Jerusalem to the Mount of Olives, where Jesus prays:

³⁹ And he came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives, and the disciples followed him. ⁴⁰ And when he came to the place, he said to them, “Pray that you may not enter into temptation.” ⁴¹ And he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and knelt down and prayed, ⁴² saying, “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.” ⁴³ And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him. ⁴⁴ And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground. ⁴⁵ And when he rose from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping for sorrow, ⁴⁶ and he said to them, “Why are you sleeping? Rise and pray that you may not enter into temptation.”

Here, Jesus, in his humanity, desires to avoid the “cup of wrath” that he will experience in his death.² But he realizes that there is no other way. He must die for his people to live. The first human being, Adam, was tempted in a garden, and he failed. Jesus is the last Adam, who is tempted in the garden of Gethsemane, but does not give in to temptation. Jesus knew that facing God's wrath on the cross would be like experiencing hell on earth. It's not wrong to not want to

² Old Testament passages that explain the cup of wrath include Isa. 51:17–23; Jer. 25:15–29; 49:12–13; Ezek. 23:28–35; Hab. 2:15–17.

experience such a thing. But it was necessary that he die, and he knew that was his Father's will, so he says, "Not my will, but yours, be done."

After Jesus prayed, he is arrested. Judas and a crowd that includes the chief priests, officers of the temple, and elders, approach Jesus.

⁴⁷ While he was still speaking, there came a crowd, and the man called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them. He drew near to Jesus to kiss him, ⁴⁸ but Jesus said to him, "Judas, would you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?" ⁴⁹ And when those who were around him saw what would follow, they said, "Lord, shall we strike with the sword?" ⁵⁰ And one of them struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his right ear. ⁵¹ But Jesus said, "No more of this!" And he touched his ear and healed him. ⁵² Then Jesus said to the chief priests and officers of the temple and elders, who had come out against him, "Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs? ⁵³ When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness."

The disciples don't quite understand that Jesus had to die. So, they try to defend Jesus. John 18:10 tells us that it was Peter who cut off the servant's right ear. But it's clear that Jesus didn't approve of the action, and he even heals the man. This shows a bit of Jesus' character: he blesses those who come to do him harm. We'll see more of this later. Jesus is clear that what these men are doing is wrong. They could have arrested him when he was teaching in the temple. But they didn't arrest him there because they were afraid of the crowds. Jesus says this is the work of evil, the "power of darkness."

⁵⁴ Then they seized him and led him away, bringing him into the high priest's house, and Peter was following at a distance. ⁵⁵ And when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat down among them. ⁵⁶ Then a servant girl, seeing him as he sat in the light and looking closely at him, said, "This man also was with him." ⁵⁷ But he denied it, saying, "Woman, I do not know him." ⁵⁸ And a little later someone else saw him and said, "You also are one of them." But Peter said, "Man, I am not." ⁵⁹ And after an interval of about an hour still another insisted, saying, "Certainly this man also was with him, for he too is a Galilean." ⁶⁰ But Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are talking about." And immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. ⁶¹ And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the saying of the Lord, how he had said to him, "Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times." ⁶² And he went out and wept bitterly.

Here, we see that Jesus' prediction about Peter comes true. Peter must have been afraid that he would be arrested, too, if people knew he was an associate of Jesus. So, he denies knowing Jesus three times.

Luke then turns his attention back to Jesus. His captors mock him and beat him.

⁶³ Now the men who were holding Jesus in custody were mocking him as they beat him. ⁶⁴ They also blindfolded him and kept asking him, "Prophecy! Who is it that struck you?" ⁶⁵ And they said many other things against him, blaspheming him.

The other day I was talking to someone about suffering and evil. I said that God had made a good world, and that people turned away from God. And that's the reason why we do evil things—because we have unplugged ourselves from the source of goodness and life. There's a separation between God and us, and that accounts for bad things that happen. I said that we don't know all the reasons why there is evil in the world, or why specific events happen. But we do know this: God is not indifferent to our suffering. God became a man and entered into a world of suffering. He subjected himself to betrayal and mockery and beatings and even death.

Let's continue the story with verses 66–71:

⁶⁶ When day came, the assembly of the elders of the people gathered together, both chief priests and scribes. And they led him away to their council, and they said, ⁶⁷ "If you are the Christ, tell us." But he said to them, "If I tell you, you will not believe, ⁶⁸ and if I ask you, you will not answer. ⁶⁹ But from now on the Son of Man shall be seated at the right hand of the power of God." ⁷⁰ So they all said, "Are you the Son of God, then?" And he said to them, "You say that I am." ⁷¹ Then they said, "What further testimony do we need? We have heard it ourselves from his own lips."

Early in the morning, Jesus is put on trial. Jesus is brought before the Sanhedrin, the council of Jewish leaders. They didn't have the power to kill Jesus,³ but they needed to present him as guilty in order to have the Roman Empire kill him. Without going into the details now, it seems that this trial was held in the wee hours of the morning so that no one could object. It also appears that the Sanhedrin bypassed their usual rules of judging cases in order to have Jesus killed.⁴

³ John 18:31.

⁴ Darrell L. Bock (*Luke 9:51–24:53*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1996], 1792) states that later Jewish law, which may have been in effect in Jesus' day, seems not have been followed. Among other irregularities, the proceedings should have taken place at the temple, Jesus should have had a defense, and the verdict should have taken two days and not one.

Jesus tells the Jewish leaders that they will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of God. That is a reference to Daniel 7:13–14, which refers to “one like a son of man” who goes to the “Ancient of Days,” God, and is 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.” Jesus is claiming that he is this King. The Jewish leaders understand what Jesus is claiming, so they ask, “Are you the Son of God, then?” Jesus essentially says yes. He says, “You say that I am,” forcing his opponents to realize their own question. They are standing before the Son of God, asking his identity, and they still don’t believe him. They think he is convicting himself, but their own words convict them. They are guilty for not knowing God when they see him.

Since the Jews didn’t have the power to put someone to death, they had to bring Jesus to the prefect, or governor of Judea, the region where Jerusalem was. Pontius Pilate was the Roman official who was responsible for Judea. The Roman Empire had conquered the land of Palestine approximately ninety years earlier, in 63 B.C. The Romans generally didn’t involve themselves in Jewish religious disputes, so the Jews try to say that Jesus was forbidding them to pay tribute to Caesar, the Emperor. We see this in Luke 23:1–5:

¹ Then the whole company of them arose and brought him before Pilate. ² And they began to accuse him, saying, “We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that he himself is Christ, a king.” ³ And Pilate asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” And he answered him, “You have said so.” ⁴ Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, “I find no guilt in this man.” ⁵ But they were urgent, saying, “He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee even to this place.”

They accuse Jesus of misleading the nation. They claim that he is disturbing the peace. They also falsely claim that Jesus forbid them from paying taxes to Rome. Jesus had said to “render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” (20:25; cf. Rom. 13:7). He certainly didn’t mean not to pay taxes at all. Finally, they accuse Jesus of claiming to be king. That’s what “Christ” really means. It’s the Greek version of Messiah. Either term means “anointed.” In the Old Testament, kings were anointed, and there was a promise that King David would have a descendent who ruled on the throne forever (2 Sam. 7:12–13; cf. Isa. 9:1–7; 11:1–11). But Jesus didn’t come to be a political king. He didn’t overthrow the Roman Empire. In John’s Gospel, Jesus tells Pilate, “My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this

world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world” (John 18:36).

Pilate was able to see, somehow, that Jesus wasn't a threat to the Roman Empire. He says that Jesus is innocent. But the Jewish leaders pressed: they said he was stirring up people in Judea and Galilee. So, Pilate sends Jesus to Herod Antipas, the ruler over Galilee, the region where Jesus lived and performed much of his ministry.

⁶ When Pilate heard this, he asked whether the man was a Galilean. ⁷ And when he learned that he belonged to Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him over to Herod, who was himself in Jerusalem at that time. ⁸ When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had long desired to see him, because he had heard about him, and he was hoping to see some sign done by him. ⁹ So he questioned him at some length, but he made no answer. ¹⁰ The chief priests and the scribes stood by, vehemently accusing him. ¹¹ And Herod with his soldiers treated him with contempt and mocked him. Then, arraying him in splendid clothing, he sent him back to Pilate. ¹² And Herod and Pilate became friends with each other that very day, for before this they had been at enmity with each other.

Herod wanted to see Jesus perform some miracles. But Jesus never performed miracles on command. He wouldn't even answer Herod. The Jewish leaders heaped up accusations against Jesus, and Herod and his soldiers mocked Jesus. They dressed him the way a king would be dressed, in “splendid clothing.” What's interesting is how Herod and Pilate had once been enemies, but now came together as friends. Jesus' opponents have a way of teaming up together. The writer Jonathan Swift (1667–1745) once remarked, “When a true genius appears in the world you may know him by this sign; that the dunces are all in confederacy against him.”⁵

However, neither Pilate nor Herod were willing to condemn Jesus. They just wanted to be free of this hassle. But the crowd was insistent. We see this in the next passage, verses 13–25:

¹³ Pilate then called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people, ¹⁴ and said to them, “You brought me this man as one who was misleading the people. And after examining him before you, behold, I did not find this man guilty of any of your charges against him. ¹⁵ Neither did Herod, for he sent him back to us. Look, nothing deserving death has been done by him. ¹⁶ I will therefore punish and release him.”

¹⁸ But they all cried out together, “Away with this man, and release to us Barabbas”— ¹⁹ a man who had been thrown into prison for an insurrection started in the city and for murder. ²⁰ Pilate addressed them once more, desiring to release Jesus, ²¹ but they kept shouting, “Crucify, crucify him!” ²² A third time he said to

⁵ This quote comes from his essay, “Thoughts on Various Subjects, Moral and Diverting.”

them, “Why, what evil has he done? I have found in him no guilt deserving death. I will therefore punish and release him.”²³ But they were urgent, demanding with loud cries that he should be crucified. And their voices prevailed.²⁴ So Pilate decided that their demand should be granted.²⁵ He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, for whom they asked, but he delivered Jesus over to their will.

Pilate wanted to release Jesus, but the crowd would have none of it. They knew that Pilate had a tradition of releasing a prisoner during a festival (Mark 15:6–8), and they ask for the release of Barabbas instead of Jesus. Barabbas was a man who had tried to start an uprising against the Roman Empire. The crowd would rather this man be released instead of Jesus, which shows how strongly they were rejecting Jesus. This is also a picture of the gospel: Jesus dies so a criminal—a murderer!—can go free. Pilate states for a third time that Jesus is innocent. Clearly, Luke wants us to see that Jesus didn’t die for any crimes that he committed. He was innocent, the only truly innocent person who has ever lived. Though Pilate knew Jesus was innocent, he was more interested in pleasing the crowd so that they wouldn’t riot. So, he let Barabbas go free and he agreed to crucify Jesus.

²⁶ And as they led him away, they seized one Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, and laid on him the cross, to carry it behind Jesus.
²⁷ And there followed him a great multitude of the people and of women who were mourning and lamenting for him.²⁸ But turning to them Jesus said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.²⁹ For behold, the days are coming when they will say, ‘Blessed are the barren and the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!’³⁰ Then they will begin to say to the mountains, ‘Fall on us,’ and to the hills, ‘Cover us.’³¹ For if they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?”

After all his beatings, Jesus wasn’t strong enough to carry the cross, so it was laid on a man named Simon. On the way to the place where he would be crucified, some people mourned for Jesus. Jesus tells them they should mourn for their children. He already taught, in Luke 21, that judgment would later fall on Jerusalem. This happened about forty years later, when the Jewish people revolted against Rome and the Romans then destroyed Jerusalem and the temple.

Thus, Jesus was led to the cross. Luke hardly says anything specific about the act of crucifixion. But we know that crucifixion was one of the most brutal ways to kill a person that has ever been devised. Generally, this method of killing people was reserved for people who were criminals, slaves, and people of lower classes. Roman citizens could not be crucified. These

people were usually beaten, made to carry a cross beam to the point of crucifixion, and then impaled on a cross until they died. Often it took a long time for people to die in that position, though sometimes people would die just from the flogging they received.

Crucifixion was atrocious. Consider how it was described by Seneca (c. 4 B.C. – A.D. 65), a Roman philosopher and statesman: “I see crosses there, not just of one kind but made in many different ways: some have their victims with head down to the ground; some impale their private parts; others stretch out their arms on the gibbet.”⁶ People wouldn’t even mention the word “cross” in polite society, because it was so shocking. And that’s how Jesus died.

³² Two others, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. ³³ And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. ³⁴ And Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” And they cast lots to divide his garments. ³⁵ And the people stood by, watching, but the rulers scoffed at him, saying, “He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!” ³⁶ The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine ³⁷ and saying, “If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!” ³⁸ There was also an inscription over him, “This is the King of the Jews.”

Jesus was crucified at a place called Golgotha (Mark 15:22; Matt 27:33; John 19:17), which means “the Skull.” In Latin, it’s *Calvariae*, or Calvary. Jesus was treated like a criminal, placed between two men who were likely insurrectionists.

Jesus is still mocked, but what does he do? He says, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” On the one hand, those who crucified Jesus were guilty. But on the other hand, they were ignorant. They really didn’t know what they were doing (Acts 3:17; 1 Cor. 2:8). When we are under stress, when life squeezes us, what’s inside of us, our real character, comes out. When we’re under stress, we may yell at others and get angry. But when Jesus is put under the most intense pressure a human could face, when life is squeezing him, what comes out? A plea for forgiveness. Out of Jesus comes grace. And we see a recipient of that grace in the next few verses:

³⁹ One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, “Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!” ⁴⁰ But the other rebuked him, saying, “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?” ⁴¹ And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.” ⁴² And he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into

⁶ Seneca, *Dialogue 6 (De consolatione ad Marciam)* 20.3, quoted in Martin Hengel, *Crucifixion: In the Ancient World and the Folly of the Message of the Cross*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 25.

your kingdom.”⁴³ And he said to him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”

One of the criminals taunts Jesus, but the other rebukes him. This second criminal says that Jesus did nothing wrong. Once again, we’re told that Jesus is innocent. And this man somehow knew enough about Jesus to say, “remember me when you come into your kingdom.” Jesus sees this man’s faith and says that he will join Jesus in Paradise. This criminal found salvation because he acknowledged who Jesus is. This shows God’s grace. People who are guilty can find forgiveness in Jesus. We should be careful not to make this man’s case the norm. In most situations, people who come to faith in Jesus will display that faith in their lives. Their faith will result in good works. But this dying man could only do what he did here: recognize who Jesus is and plead with him.

We need to move on to the conclusion of this story. Let us look at verses 44–49:

⁴⁴ It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, ⁴⁵ while the sun’s light failed. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. ⁴⁶ Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!” And having said this he breathed his last. ⁴⁷ Now when the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God, saying, “Certainly this man was innocent!” ⁴⁸ And all the crowds that had assembled for this spectacle, when they saw what had taken place, returned home beating their breasts. ⁴⁹ And all his acquaintances and the women who had followed him from Galilee stood at a distance watching these things.

From about noon to 3 p.m., darkness fell on the land. At the beginning of Luke’s Gospel, when Jesus is born, an angel tells some shepherds of Jesus’ birth, and the night sky shines with the glory of the Lord (2:8–14). Now, in the middle of the day, darkness covers the earth. Darkness represents God’s judgment, which is poured out on Jesus. When Jesus dies, the curtain of the temple is torn. In the Old Testament, only priests could go into the temple, and only the high priest could go into the inner sanctum, the Most Holy Place, and he could only do that one day a year. But when Jesus died, he paid for all our sins. His death was the once-and-for-all sacrifice. He opened up the way to God’s presence. All who believe in Jesus have the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, dwelling in them. There is no need to go to a special building to worship. We can and should worship God at all times.

After Jesus died, a man named Joseph, who was wealthy and a member of the Sanhedrin, asked for Jesus’ body, and he buried in his own tomb. This fulfilled Isaiah 53:9, which says,

“And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth.”

⁵⁰ Now there was a man named Joseph, from the Jewish town of Arimathea. He was a member of the council, a good and righteous man, ⁵¹ who had not consented to their decision and action; and he was looking for the kingdom of God. ⁵² This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. ⁵³ Then he took it down and wrapped it in a linen shroud and laid him in a tomb cut in stone, where no one had ever yet been laid. ⁵⁴ It was the day of Preparation, and the Sabbath was beginning. ⁵⁵ The women who had come with him from Galilee followed and saw the tomb and how his body was laid. ⁵⁶ Then they returned and prepared spices and ointments.

On the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment.

Jesus died on the sixth day of the week, a Friday. And he was buried before the seventh day, the Sabbath. According to the fourth commandment, part of the Old Covenant, Jews were supposed to work for six days and rest on the seventh. When Jesus died on the cross, he did all the work that was necessary to forgive sins. In order to be forgiven by God, we don't have to add to Jesus' sacrifice. No amount of good works, no amount of church attendance, and no amount of giving to the church and the poor will reconcile us to God. Only Jesus' death pays for our sins. That's why, in John's Gospel, Jesus says, "It is finished" right before he dies (John 19:30). Jesus finished his work on the cross on the sixth day and rested in the grave on the Sabbath.⁷

Tonight, let us be amazed by the fact that the only man who was ever truly innocent would die for us. Let us wonder how the God-man, Jesus of Nazareth, could be mocked and beaten and killed and still say, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Let us remember what Jesus has done, and let us worship him.

⁷ His resurrection occurred on a Sunday, on the eighth day, or the first day of a new week. This shows that Jesus' resurrection is the first installment of a new order, a new creation.