

Sunday, February 6, 2024 | Holy Week

Week 19 | Luke 23:26-38 | “The Crucifixion, Pt. 1”

Last week, though Jesus was exonerated by Pilate, he was exchanged for Barabbas, a murdering insurrectionist. Ironically, this convict was clearly guilty of the very things that the Lord was clearly innocent of. But through that passage, we learned two important lessons: first, wrong is wrong even when everyone says it's right, and two, a sinless Savior was the substitute for a sinless mankind.

READ: Luke 23:26-38 (ESV)

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?”

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.”

Though all four gospels discuss the crucifixion, each writer chooses not to describe the process. Of course, this is not to say the cross is ignored; it casts such a ghastly shadow over the entire scene that its weight can be felt. However, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John want to focus our attention on key moments happening *around* the cross rather than on the mechanics of the crucifixion.

So, while we'll discuss what Christ experienced, we mustn't fixate on the carnage. The gospel writers are keen for us to see something *more* than just pain and suffering, namely, that the Lord was no *martyr*, succumbing to the forces of evil, but the *Messiah*, directing events per his Father's will (cf. Lu. 22:42; Jn. 10:17-18).

Given the importance of this moment, this passage will be divided into two parts. We must take our time so we do not miss any details. After all, this is the day the Son of God died for the sins of the world. Rushing through this event would be a disservice to the Lord's sacrifice.

I want you to notice **two** things:

i. **Vs. 26-31 – Jesus' Prophecy**

Though Luke doesn't mention it, both history and the other gospels confirm that before the crucifixion, Jesus was **scourged with a "flagrum"** (cf. Matt. 27:27-31). A "*flagrum*" is a whip with multiple cords embedded with bone, lead, or some other material.¹ This type of scourging could leave skeletal structures exposed, and entrails ripped out.² And **though it is commonly believed that Jesus was whipped forty times save one per the OT law, the Romans had no such restriction.** Soldiers would stop when they were told to. Consequently, people were known to die just from being scourged.

Vs. 26 – So, when Luke tells us that as Jesus was led to the cross, the soldiers "**seized one Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, and laid on him the cross, to carry it behind Jesus,**" this was done out of necessity not charity. **Despite how he's popularly portrayed, carrying the entire wooden structure of the cross, Jesus had only the crossbeam.**³ Though Jesus had initially carried the cross by himself (cf. Jn. 19:17), he could only make it so far. The scourging had left him extremely exhausted, hemorrhaging blood as he went. Mark states that Simon of Cyrene was the father of Rufus and Alexander (cf. Mar. 15:21). Mention of this connection implies that Mark's audience would've been familiar with such individuals, likely due to the fact they were a part of the Christian community at this time (cf. Rom. 16:13).⁴

Vs. 27 – Crucifixion drew a crowd, and this one was no different.⁵ And this crowd was a mix of friends and foes. It stands to reason that the "**great multitude of the people**" who were

¹ This is distinct from the "cat o' nine tails," a whip seemingly based on the Roman *flagrum*. However, the 17th-century scourge had knotted ends rather than having some embedded material.

² Carson (1991), p. 597; Morris (1995), p. 699.

³ Köstenberger (2008), p. 542, explains how the vertical beam was already embedded into the ground. Klink (2016), p. 791, says the crossbeam of the cross was called "*the patibulum*."

⁴ Bock (1996), p. 1842.

⁵ Edwards (2015), p. 685, "At the defeat of the slave rebellion under Spartacus in 71BC, Crassus crucified more than 6,000 slaves along the Via Appia between Capua and Rome. To enhance the deterrent effect of

following Jesus was at least partly comprised of those who had just chanted, “Crucify, crucify him” (cf. vs. 18-25)! But not all were there to satisfy their bloodlust. Luke also says there was also a lot “of women who were mourning and lamenting for him.” The Greek terms translated as “mourning and lamenting” refer to wailing of the most severe kind—i.e., beating the breast with grief.⁶ In fact, the last time Luke used these two words was in 8:52 when he was describing the funeral of Jairus’ daughter. To cry like this, these weeping women must’ve been fond of Jesus. Female disciples feature prominently during the crucifixion. Thus, it is more than likely that this group of ladies included women such as Jesus’ mother, the mother of James and John, Mary Magdalene, and so on (cf. Matt. 27:56; Mar. 15:40-41; Jn. 19:25).

Vs. 28-31 – These women wept for Jesus, but, in a surprising turn of events, the Lord looks at them and says, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.”

Jesus’ words aren’t the ravings of a madman; they’re prophetic. And given his use of the phrase “Daughters of Jerusalem,” this is a *sympathetic* word. There was sympathy in the Lord’s prophecy because he was foretelling Jerusalem’s destruction. Coincidentally, Jesus did this very thing as he entered the city, and now he’s doing it again as he leaves the city.

Jesus’ word was fulfilled in A.D. 70 when Rome sacked Jerusalem. Throughout a five-month siege, the Roman general Titus leveled the city. Titus waited until the city had ballooned due to Passover and then began what would eventually become a five-month-long siege of Jerusalem. He cut off supplies to the town, and the inhabitants resorted to cannibalism.

Understandably, this is why Jesus says, “Blessed are the barren and the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed.” Infertility was always considered a curse (cf. Lu. 1:25; 11:27; Gen. 12:52; 16:1-6; 1 Sam. 1:2-11), but Jerusalem’s destruction will turn a blessing into something that compounds suffering (e.g., “The Soviet Gulag was known as a place where the living envied the dead.”⁷) So much so that people will wish for a quick death. They will beg the mountains and hills, saying, “Fall on us [and] cover us!”

Jewish historian Josephus describes the destruction of the temple:

“As the legions charged in, neither persuasion nor threat could check their impetuosity [i.e., brutality]: passion alone was in command. Crowded together around the

crucifixion, victims were executed as public spectacles. “Whenever we crucify the guilty, the most crowded roads are chosen, where the most people can see and be moved by this fear,” wrote Quintillian (*Decl.* 174).”

⁶ Bock (1996), p. 1844.

⁷ Edwards (2015), p. 683.

entrances, many were trampled by their friends; many fell among the still-hot and smoking ruins of the colonnades and died as miserably as the defeated. As they neared the Sanctuary, they pretended not even to hear Caesar's commands and urged the men in front to throw in more firebrands. The partisans were no longer in a position to help; everywhere was slaughter and flight. Most of the victims were peaceful citizens, weak and unarmed, butchered wherever they were caught. Round the Altar, the heaps of corpses grew higher and higher, while down the Sanctuary steps poured a river of blood, and the bodies of those killed at the top slithered to the bottom."

In total, somewhere between 600k to 1 million were killed, and over 90k were enslaved. About 40K survived. **Because they rejected Jesus Christ, the Jews incurred God's judgment. God the Father used the Romans to severely punish his people.**

Jesus makes a lesser-to-greater argument when he says, "For if they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?" If the Lord suffered in this way, how much more will the Jews suffer? If Jesus, an innocent man, was treated so contemptuously, how much worse will Israel, the nation guilty of killing its own king, suffer?

There are dire consequences for rejecting God's Son. In the parable of the wicked tenants (cf. Lu. 20:9-18), Jesus told about how an owner of a vineyard sent multiple messengers to those he had entrusted to take care of his property—i.e., the tenants. But each messenger the owner sent was either ignored or, worse, abused. Finally, the owner decides to send his son. But the tenants kill the owner's son, thinking they'll inherit the vineyard. At this point, Jesus asks his audience,

READ: Luke 20:15-18 (ESV)

^{15b} What, then, will the owner of the vineyard do to them? ¹⁶ He will come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others." When they heard this, they said, "Surely not!" ¹⁷ But he looked directly at them and said, "What then is this that is written: "'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone'? ¹⁸ Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him."

So, what's the takeaway? Those who **reject** God's Son **invite** God's wrath.

John the Baptist warned Israel not to say, "'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire" (Lu. 3:8-9). Just as Israel would be felled like a fruitless tree, Israel will be "broken to pieces" and "crush[ed]." They've rejected the cornerstone that is Jesus Christ. The same stone

they stumble over today will break them later and ultimately smash all who reject him on that last day. The Jew's unique designation as God's chosen people does not make them immune to punishment. This is why Jesus said, "Do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children." By rejecting God's Son, they've invited his wrath.

ii. Vs. 32-38 – Jesus' Prayer

Vs. 32 – "Two others, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him."

Matthew and Mark refer to these two men as **ληστίς** (*lēistés*) (cf. Matt. 27:38, 44; Mar. 15:27), the same Greek term used by John to describe Barabbas (cf. 18:40). And as we discussed when addressing Barabbas, *lēistés* doesn't refer to a typical "thief" or "robber," but an "insurrectionist," a "guerrilla fighter," or a "rebel." The use of the same Greek word suggests strongly that the two men crucified alongside Jesus were associates of Barabbas; in other words, they were "fellow freedom fighters."⁸ That Jesus was crucified with two others fulfills prophecy. As Isaiah 53:12 predicted, the Messiah was, in fact, "numbered with the transgressors" (cf. Lu. 22:37).

Interestingly, influenced by second-century gnostics (e.g., Basilides, Gospel of Peter, etc.), Muslims deny Jesus' crucifixion, calling it a "monstrous falsehood."⁹ However, five historical sources, not including the Bible, confirm the historicity of Jesus' death: Mara bar Serapion, Josephus, Agapius, Tacitus, and Sanhedrin 43a of the Babylonian Talmud.¹⁰

Vs. 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."

We need to pause and consider what actually took place during a crucifixion.

First implemented by the Persians, refined by the Carthaginians, and adopted by the Romans, crucifixion was the perfect blend of torture, humiliation, and propaganda.¹¹ As Edwards puts it, "Every totalitarian regime needs a terror apparatus, and crucifixion was Rome's terror apparatus *ad horrendum* [aka nightmare], infamous alike for its infliction of pain and shame."¹² After being scourged with the flagrum (cf. Matt. 27:27-31), criminals would be marched to a spot alongside a major highway outside a city (cf. Matt.

⁸ Beasley-Murray (1999), p. 346.

⁹ Edwards (2015), p. 686.

¹⁰ Bock (1996), p. 1843.

¹¹ Fowler, R.D., "The Practice of Roman Crucifixion," *Holy Land Illustrated Bible*, Christian Standard Bible, (Nashville, TN; Holman Bible Publishers, 2020), p. 1389.

¹² Edwards (2015), p. 685.

27:39), stripped naked, and then fastened to the cross. There were two ways of securing a convict to the crossbeam of the cross: nails or rope; often, both methods were used. The nails were five to seven inches long and driven in either the wrists or forearms and not, as is commonly believed, into the hands since they could not sustain the weight (cf. 20:20, 25, 27).¹³

Once affixed to the crossbeam, a person would be hoisted up and attached to the vertical portion of the cross, which had already been embedded into the ground. As their wrists had been, their heels would be pierced by nails and/or tied with a rope. Though often depicted as being high off the ground, most crucified individuals were close to the ground.¹⁴ So close that animals were known to attack the feet of the crucified.¹⁵ Finally, a piece of wood called a *sedecula* would be attached to the cross, acting like a seat.¹⁶ Though, to be sure, this “seat” wasn’t intended as mercy, but a way of prolonging the process, delaying death, and thereby increasing the suffering. In fact, most individuals hung on the cross, exposed to the elements, for hours, even *days*.¹⁷

Luke summed up the horrors of the cross in a handful of words.¹⁸ He could do this because his audience was well-acquainted with the practice. Living within the confines of the Roman Empire, crucifixions were not only widespread, but they were an almost daily occurrence. But, to a modern mind, it is difficult to wrap our heads around how genuinely awful this practice was. **Albert Réville described crucifixions like this:**

"It represented that acme [i.e., pinnacle] of the torturer's art: atrocious physical sufferings, length of torment, ignominy, the effect on the crowd gathered to witness the long agony of the crucified. Nothing could be more horrible than the sight of this living body, breathing, seeing, hearing, still able to feel, and yet reduced to the state of a corpse by forced immobility and absolute helplessness. We cannot even say that the crucified person writhed in agony, for it was impossible for him to move. Stripped of his clothing, unable even to brush away the flies that fell upon his wounded flesh, already lacerated by the preliminary

¹³ Keener (2003), 2:1136; Carson (1991), p. 656, “Both the Hebrew word for hand (*yād*) and the Greek word (*cheir*) can include the wrist and forearm.”

¹⁴ Köstenberger (2008), p. 542

¹⁵ Keener (2003), 2:1136.

¹⁶ Carson (1991), p. 608.

¹⁷ Köstenberger (2008), p. 543.

¹⁸ Beasley-Murray (1999), p. 344, commenting on John 19:18, says, “One element in John’s account, shared incidentally by the three synoptic Gospels, is the *brevity* [emphasis added] of his description of the actual crucifixion: it is contained in a sub-clause consisting of three words (v 18: ὅπου αὐτὸν ἐσταύρωσαν, “where they crucified him”).”

scrouging, exposed to the insults and curses of people who can always find some sickening pleasure in the sight of the tortures of others, a feeling that is increased and not diminished by the sight of pain—the cross represented miserable humanity reduced to the last degree of impotence, suffering, and degradation. The penalty of crucifixion combined all that the most ardent torturer could desire: torture, the pillory, degradation, and certain death, distilled slowly drop by drop. It was an ideal form of torture.”¹⁹

Vs. 34a – Though the Lord had been brutalized and wrongfully condemned, he does not curse his torturers. Instead, he prays, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (cf. Ac. 7:60).

As is commonly known, Jesus said *seven* things while hanging on the cross, but the specific sequence of these sayings is unclear. What follows is a *possible* arrangement of those seven comments, but it is *impossible* to be dogmatic about such things: shortly *after* the soldiers cast lots for his clothing (cf. Matt. 27:35), but *before* the three-hour-long darkness (cf. Matt. 27:45), Jesus said (1), “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Lu. 23:34); towards the end of that darkness, Jesus quoted from Psa. 22:1 when he said (2), “Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me” (Matt. 27:46); Jesus said to one of the two criminals crucified alongside him (3), “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise” (Lu. 23:43); (4) “Woman, behold thy son...Behold thy mother” (Jn. 19:27); (5) “I thirst” (Jn. 19:28); (6) “It is finished” (Jn. 19:30); and finally, “loud” enough so that *all* could hear, Jesus said (7), “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit” (Lu. 23:46; cf. Matt. 27:50; Mar. 15:37).

It is significant that of all the things Jesus said on the cross, the first words out of his mouth were about forgiveness. This does not contradict the prophecy that Jerusalem would be destroyed. But it holds out a way for Israelites to avoid utter destruction in the afterlife. Judgement day would fall on the Jews in 70AD, but it need not fall on them for all eternity.

READ: Luke 6:27-31 (ESV)

²⁷ “But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸ bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. ²⁹ To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either. ³⁰ Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who

¹⁹ Morris (1995), p. 712, quoting from *The Life of Jesus* [London, 1958], p. 535-536.

takes away your goods do not demand them back.³¹ And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them.

Vs. 34b – Luke says that while Jesus was praying for his torturers, they were busy casting “lots to divide his garments.” John explains that there were four soldiers and that the Lord's robe was “seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom” (Jn. 19:23). This doesn't necessarily mean the coat was expensive. Joining two pieces of fabric together was forbidden by Mosaic law (cf. Lev. 19:19; Deut. 22:11), so most Jewish clothing was made this way. John mentions the structure of Jesus' clothing to show that it would be difficult to divide *evenly*. This is why, instead of cutting the coat into pieces, the soldiers “cast lots for it.” Better that one man gets a full coat rather than four men only getting a piece of a coat.²⁰

Furthermore, according to John, this gambling fulfilled prophecy (cf. Jn. 19:24). After mentioning the gambling, the Beloved Apostle quotes Psalm 22:18: “They divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.” Psalm 22 is a messianic passage written by David, and it is quoted or alluded to many times in the Gospels (cf. Matt. 27:46, Mar. 15:29; Lu. 23:35, etc.).²¹ On the one hand, it discusses David's experience with suffering; on the other hand, it has a prophetic tone, describing a pitiful experience that transcends David's own. John sees Psalm 22 fulfilled in Jesus. David's torment prefigured Jesus' travail. **In other words, what was a metaphorical expression of his tribulations for David was, for Jesus, a literal description of the crucifixion.**

Thus, rather than focus on the Lord's state—i.e., crucified, naked, with soldiers gambling for his garments—the Beloved Apostles wants to show his readers that even this sorry situation was foreseen by the Lord. Such a fact would be a compelling evangelistic tool, particularly to a Jewish audience who would be skeptical about a crucified Messiah but confident about God's sovereignty.²² Whatever was done on this day was known by God long ago. **From a temporal perspective, pragmaticism drove the soldiers to cast lots; from an eternal perspective, even something as trivial as gambling for someone's clothes was a key point in redemptive history that revealed Jesus Christ as the Messiah.**

²⁰ Symbolic interpretations of Jesus' seamless cloak are abundant. Some claim that seamlessness represents the unity of believers or the church. Others say that being disrobed exemplifies Jesus' humility, his virgin birth, or how his cloak was like the priestly vestments of the OT (cf. Lev. 21:10). But no suggestion is perfect, and none is explicit in the text. The fact that Jesus' cloak was seamless is simply a consequence of eyewitness testimony. Sometimes, an observation is just that, an observation. Not every detail must have theological significance. For more, see Keener (2003), 2:1140; Morris (1995), p. 715.

²¹ Klink (2016), p. 797.

²² Carson (1991), p. 612.

Vs. 35-37 – Luke says that 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!” The Sanhedrin was not content with just crucifying Jesus, they also had to mock him while he was on the cross. But more than that, their sarcasm is ironic since, in reality, he was still saving “others.” Jesus’ work on the cross was history’s single greatest redemptive act. They wrongfully assumed that if the Lord was the Messiah, then he wouldn’t have allowed himself to be crucified. But, ironically, it was precisely because Jesus was the Messiah that he allowed himself to be crucified. Furthermore, their comments demonstrate that they did not understand what “the Christ of God, his Chosen One,” was actually sent to do.

But the religious leaders were the only ones making fun of Jesus; Luke says “the soldiers,” likely the very ones who crucified Jesus and gambled away his clothing, ridiculed Jesus in three ways: first, they offered him “sour wine.” And second, they taunted him, saying, “If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!” And third, they placed an “inscription” over his head that read, “This is the King of the Jews.”

The Greek term translated as “sour wine” is ὄξος (óxos). It was made from the fermented remains of wine-making and was more bitter than sweet. The BDAG explains that óxos “relieved thirst more effectively than water and, being cheaper than regular wine, it was a favorite beverage of the lower ranks of society and of those in moderate circumstances, especially of soldiers.”²³ So, óxos was *the* drink of the blue-collar worker; it was intended to *quench* one’s thirst after a long day’s work (cf. Ruth 2:14).²⁴ While offering “sour wine” might seem like a mercy, it was more of a *cruel* joke played on him by *brutal* torturers. The alcohol would’ve exacerbated *dehydration*, worsening his affliction.²⁵

Interestingly, “sour wine” appears three times during the crucifixion: at the beginning, middle, and end. The first time Jesus was offered “sour wine,” it was mixed with “myrrh” (cf. Mar. 15:23), making it so bitter that the Lord refused to drink it once he tasted it (cf. Mat. 27:34).²⁶ The second time (likely the one Luke refers to here) was also refused by Jesus since we’re not told if he accepted it. The third and final time comes at the end

²³ BDAG, p. 715.

²⁴ The Greek term John uses to describe the “wine” in 2:3, 9-10 is οἶνος (oínos).

²⁵ One might argue that the alcohol would’ve minimized the pain. However, the alcohol percentage in “sour wine” would’ve likely been low, and given that it was offered to Jesus on a sponge, it is unlikely he would’ve gotten enough of it to dull the senses.

²⁶ Carson, DA, *Matthew*, The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Revised Edition, Volume 9, (Grand Rapids, MI; Zondervan Academic, 2010), p. 643; However, Morris (1995), p. 720, rejects this interpretation of the first wine offered to Jesus citing *Sanh. 43a*, “When one is led out to execution, he is given a goblet of wine containing a grain of frankincense, in order to benumb his senses, for it is written, *Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto the bitter in soul.*”

when the Lord himself says, "I thirst," and the soldier gives Jesus a sour-wine-soaked hyssop branch (cf. Jn. 19:29).

The soldiers mocked Jesus using the phrase "King of the Jews" like a slur. The specific verbiage is accredited to Pilate, who composed the placard that hung above Jesus' head, insisting that it said: "King of Jews" (cf. Jn. 19:19-22). The Romans thought this whole ordeal was a big joke, and they monopolized this moment for their own amusement.

So, what's the takeaway? The King of the Jews was self-sacrificing, not self-serving; he came to save, not be saved.

READ: Philippians 2:1-8 (ESV)

¹ So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, ² complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. ³ Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. ⁴ Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. ⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Video Description:

Holy Week | Week 19 | “The Crucifixion, Pt. 1” (Luke 23:26-38)

SPEAKER: Ben Hyrne, Pastor

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Given the importance of this moment, this passage will be divided into two parts. We must take our time so we do not miss any details. After all, this is the day the Son of God died for the sins of the world. Rushing through this event would be a disservice to the Lord's sacrifice.

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