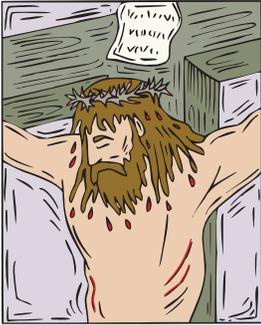




Jesus' Crucifixion

FAMILIES IN TRUTH

Luke 22:63 - 23:34



This week we will look at the most important part of the Christian story. It is what the entire Bible is all about. The Old Testament sets the stage and points forward to the time when God would meet His own requirement of holiness. At the perfect time, the promised Savior would take the place of sinners on the cross. This heart-breaking story should remind us of how serious our sin is, and how deep the Father's love for us is.

Day #1: Mock Trial

We have all seen courtroom scenes in movies. The purpose of a trial is to find out the truth. Witnesses are brought in to testify, or tell the truth, about the person who is on trial. After all the people have spoken, and all the details are laid out, a jury or a judge will decide if the person who is on trial is guilty or innocent. Today we will look a trial that took place almost two thousand years ago. This trial was the most important trial that has ever taken place. For, the outcome would affect many more than just the One on trial. It would impact the entire world for all time.

Immediately after Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, He was brought before the high priest and other important Jewish officials. This group of leaders was called the Sanhedrin. Sadly, this trial was not held in order to find out truth. Ever since Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, the Pharisees and chief priests had been looking for a way to get rid of Jesus (John 11:53). At that time, the high priest, Caiaphas, said it would be best if Jesus were killed (John 11:49-50). This trial was held just to find an excuse to kill Jesus.

+ *The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for something to use against Jesus. They wanted to put Him to death. But they did not find any proof. Many witnesses lied about Him. But their stories did not agree.*

Then some stood up. They gave false witness about Him. "We heard Him say, 'I will destroy this temple made by human hands. In three days I will build another temple, not made by human hands.'" - Mark 14:55-58

This statement was not true. The witnesses had twisted Jesus' actual words. What Jesus had said was, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days." (John 2:19) But Jesus was actually talking about His own body - when the religious leaders would destroy His body, He would come back to life three days later (John 21). At the trial, the leaders demanded an answer from Jesus. But Jesus remained quiet. Finally, the high priest, Caiaphas, asked Jesus if He was the Christ, the Son of God (Mark 14:61).

"I am," said Jesus. - Mark 14:62a

Notice the wording of Jesus' answer. Where have we heard these words before? "I AM" is the name God proclaimed for Himself when He spoke to Moses through the burning bush. Upon hearing these words, Caiaphas tore his clothes in anger. Caiaphas said Jesus was guilty of blasphemy and He should be put to death. Blasphemy is telling lies about someone, especially God. Caiaphas called Jesus a blasphemer. But, in fact, it was Caiaphas and the chief priests who had encouraged people to blaspheme against Jesus - God in human form. Then they spit in Jesus' face. They hit Him and slapped Him.

***** This is a difficult story to study. Pray for God to help you understand all that He wants you to know.

Day #2: Call Me Barabbas

The Jews had a very strict rule that trials were to be held during the day. Bringing Jesus to trial at night broke their own rule. Also, no one was allowed to be tried and found guilty on the same day. The Sanhedrin broke this rule too.

At their unlawful trial, many people lied, but Jesus spoke only the truth. Yet, the Sanhedrin wrongly found Jesus guilty of blasphemy. In the book of Leviticus, the Jewish law says that a blasphemer must be put to death - by being stoned (Leviticus 24:13:16). While the Jewish people were under the rule of Rome, the Jewish leaders did not have the power to kill someone for a punishment (John 18:31). So the Sanhedrin took Jesus to the Roman governor, Pilate.

Pilate asked Jesus if He was the king of the Jews. Jesus said that He was. Pilate was amazed that Jesus refused to defend Himself against the charges that were made against Him (Matthew 27:11-14). While the chief priests were pressuring Pilate to execute Jesus, Pilate's wife sent him a message. She said she had a dream about Jesus and that He was not guilty. She told Pilate not to harm Him (Matthew 27:19).

Pilate could not find Jesus guilty of any wrongdoing (Luke 23:4). Pilate knew that the chief priests brought Jesus to them because they were jealous of Him (Mark 15:10). Every year, at the time of the Passover, it was the custom for the governor to release one prisoner of the people's choosing. Pilate offered to release Jesus. But, the chief priests and the leaders persuaded the people to call for a prisoner named Barabbas to be released instead (Matthew 27:20). Barabbas was in jail for rebellion and murder (Mark 15:7).

+ *With one voice the crowd cried out, "Kill this Man! Give Barabbas to us!"...Pilate wanted to let Jesus go. So he made an appeal to the crowd again. But they kept shouting, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!"*

Pilate spoke to them for the third time. "Why?" he asked. "What wrong has this Man done? I have found no reason to have Him put to death. So I will just have Him whipped and let him go." - Luke 23:18-22

But the angry crowd would not back down. They continued to shout for Barabbas to be set free, and for Jesus to be hung on the cross.

***** We will learn that on that day, the crowd saw with their own eyes that Jesus took the place of a murderer on the cross. In truth, when Jesus died on the cross, He took the place of every murderer, liar, and thief. He took the place of every man, woman, and child (2 Corinthians 5:21). Think about this the next time you hear the crucifixion story being read or see a movie about this scene. When you hear the crowd yelling out for Barabbas, place your own name there. You were the one who deserved punishment (Romans 6:23). Picture the crowd yelling out for YOU to be set free, because Jesus willingly took your place (Isaiah 53:4).

Day #3: Crown Him

Pilate was very uncomfortable handing Jesus over to be crucified. Pilate pleaded with the crowd. He stated that Jesus had done nothing wrong. After questioning Him, Pilate had Jesus whipped. Perhaps Pilate thought this would satisfy the crowd.

+ *The soldiers twisted thorns together to make a crown. They put it on Jesus' head. Then they put a purple robe on Him. They went up to Him again and again. They kept saying, "We honor You, King of the Jews!" And they hit Him in the face. - John 19:2-3*

Day #3 continued:

This is a very disturbing scene. In addition to whipping and beating Jesus in the face, the soldiers made fun of Jesus. Sarcastically, they pretended to bow down to Him, treating Him like a king. The things the soldiers did held more meaning than they knew. They made a crown out of thorny vines and placed it on His head. What was the significance of the thorns? In the beginning, thorns were the consequence of Adam's sin. Once they sinned, Adam and Eve would no longer live in a perfect garden. God told Adam, "I will produce thorns and thistles for you." (Genesis 3:18) Thorns are a symbol for sin (Ezekiel 28:24), and Jesus had come to wear our sin (Isaiah 53:6).

The soldiers also clothed Jesus in a purple robe. If we look back at the Tabernacle, we see that the curtain that covered the Holy of Holies (or Most Holy Place) was woven with blue, purple, and scarlet yarn. God said that curtain would separate the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place (Exodus 26:33). When God's presence entered the Most Holy Place, this curtain stood between a perfect God and sinful men. Hebrews tells us that Jesus' body became like the curtain for us (Hebrews 10:20). Only Jesus could stand between us and God who is holy.

Again, Pilate brought Jesus before the people. Jesus was dressed as the soldiers dressed Him, and He was bleeding. Pilate said Jesus was innocent, and he did not want to kill Him.

The Jews replied, "We have a law. That law says he must die. He claimed to be the Son of God." When Pilate heard that, he was even more afraid. - John 19:7-8

Pilate was in a very bad spot. He knew there was something different about Jesus. He knew the men who wanted Jesus killed were wrong, but there was a great crowd of them. He feared that Jesus might really be the Son of God. He wanted to please God *and* man. Pilate did not know what to do. We will see that Pilate did not do the right thing.

 We each have had times when those around us pressure us to do the wrong thing. In our heart, we may seek to follow God, but in our body, we want to follow the crowd. Each of us must determine that we will follow God, long before the crowd is pressing us to do the wrong thing (Daniel 1:8). Today, will you determine in your heart to follow God? Every morning ask God to keep you from temptation and give you the strength you need.

Day #4: Who is Guilty

We saw that Pilate felt completely torn between doing the right thing and doing what other people wanted him to do. Pilate asked Jesus more questions, but Jesus refused to answer.

 *"Do you refuse to speak to me?" Pilate said. "Don't you understand? I have the power to set you free or to nail you to a cross."* - John 19:10

Pilate did not understand what he was saying! Who had the power? Jesus did! Pilate had power over Jesus for this short time, only because Jesus **allowed** him to have it.

Jesus answered, "You were given power from heaven. If you weren't, you would have no power over Me. So the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin." - John 19:11a

Over and over, Pilate tried to set Jesus free, but the crowd would not stop shouting for Jesus to be killed.

Pilate saw that he wasn't getting anywhere. Instead, the crowd was starting to get angry. So he took water and washed his hands in front of them. "I am not guilty of this man's death," he said. "You are accountable for that!"

All the people answered, "We and our children will accept the guilt for His death!"

Pilate let Barabbas go free. But he had Jesus whipped. Then he handed Him over to be nailed to a cross. - Matthew 27:24-26

Day #4 continued:

The words of the people must have stung the ears of Jesus. How must it have felt to be hated and despised by the ones He had come to save? Reread the crowd's response to Pilate. How right they were! They and their children were guilty for Jesus' death, but not in the way they thought. They were guilty because they were sinners. They were separated from God because of their sin (Isaiah 59:2), and Jesus **chose** to die to pay the punishment for their sin, to bring them back to God (1 Peter 2:24).

Let us keep looking to Jesus. He is the author of faith. He also makes it perfect. He paid no attention to the shame of the cross. He suffered there because of the joy he was looking forward to. Then he sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. - Hebrews 12:2

 Discuss the verse above. What joy was Jesus was looking forward to that could possibly be worth all of the suffering He went through? (Bringing lost people back into a relationship with God!)

Day #5: The Crucifixion

So, Jesus was sentenced to death. This sentence was no surprise to Jesus. Read the words He had spoken to His disciples before they entered Jerusalem several days earlier:

 *"We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn Him to death and will turn Him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day He will be raised to life!"* - Matthew 20:18-19 (NIV)

Dying on a cross was a horrible and shameful way to die. Crucifixion was saved for the worst types of criminals. History tells us, the person who was going to be crucified was forced to carry his own cross to the place of execution. Then the large wooden cross was laid on the ground. The person was forced to lay on top of the cross with his arms outstretched. The soldiers would nail the person's hands and feet to the cross. Then several soldiers hoisted the cross upright and jolted the bottom of it into a hole that had been dug in the ground. Most people died of suffocation, because they could not catch their breath while hanging with their arms out. Sometimes it took several days for the person to die.

After all of His beatings, Jesus was probably too weak to carry the heavy beams. The Roman soldiers forced a man who was passing by to carry Jesus' cross. His name was Simon (Mark 15:21). They came to a place called Golgotha, which means the Place of the Skull (Matthew 27:33). There, they nailed Jesus' hands and feet to the cross (John 20:25). The soldiers offered Jesus wine mixed with myrrh. This mixture was used to help relieve some of the pain. But Jesus did not take it (Mark 15:22). Pilate ordered that a sign be placed on the cross above Jesus. It read, "Jesus of Nazareth, The King of the Jews." (John 19:19) As the soldiers hung Jesus on the cross, Jesus prayed these amazing words:

Jesus said, "Father, forgive them. They don't know what they are doing." The soldiers divided up His clothes by casting lots. - Luke 23:34

The first sentence Jesus spoke from the cross was a prayer for the men who had beaten Him and nailed Him to this cross. Even while the soldiers were gambling for His clothing, Jesus prayed for their forgiveness. By saying they didn't know what they were doing, Jesus was referring to the fact that the soldiers did not understand the full impact of what they were doing. They thought they were just doing the same job they did day after day - hanging criminals. They did not know that they were crucifying the very Son of God. They did not realize who Jesus was until after His death (Matthew 27:54). In our human mind, it is almost impossible to imagine Jesus praying for the people who tortured Him. But we must remember, forgiveness was the very reason Jesus came and the reason that He willingly died on the cross (John 12:47).

 As believers, we are called to follow Jesus' incredible example. We see that Jesus forgave those who physically tortured Him, while His wounds were still stinging. If He has forgiven you, how can you withhold forgiveness from anyone in your life?