

The Cross Of Christ

Luke 22:63-23:46

Pastor John Miller

Jesus had already established the Lord's Supper, He participated in the Passover and had been arrested in the garden of Gethsemane. Peter had denied Him, and Judas had betrayed Him when we come to our text.

We pick up the narrative in Luke 22:63. The first section, in verses 63-65, is Jesus being mocked and beaten by the temple guards. "Now the men..." referring to the temple guards "... who held Jesus mocked Him and beat Him." They were the same ones who had gone into the garden and arrested Jesus and brought Him to the court of Annas and Caiaphas. "And having blindfolded Him, they struck Him on the face and asked Him, saying, 'Prophesy! Who is the one who struck You?' And many other things they blasphemously spoke against Him."

This is the beginning of the physical abuse that was heaped upon Jesus. And what these people were doing was highly illegal. All aspects of His trial before Pilate, Herod and the Sanhedrin were illegal. Jesus was an innocent man and should have been released. I will point these out as we go. Jesus actually went to the Cross as the sinless Son of God to pay the penalty for our sins.

The temple guards played a game with prisoners to be executed called "hot hand." A group of soldiers got together, the prisoner would be blindfolded, and all but one of the soldiers would strike the prisoner in the face. The Bible says in Isaiah 52:14, "His visage was marred more than any man." I believe after the agony in the garden that His face was just beat to a pulp. What a tragic thing that was! Then they would take the blindfold off and asked the prisoner, "Who among us did not strike you?"

Jesus had just prophesied that Peter would deny Him three times before the rooster crowed. So Jesus could have prophesied in answering the guard's question. If I was the Lord, I would have named the ones who struck Him while the blindfold was still on. Jesus was omniscient; He could have done that easily. It would have blown their minds. But Jesus just stood there. "He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter" (Isaiah 53:7).

Everything about these verses leading up to and including His Crucifixion on the Cross shows us that Jesus is in control. He said, "No one takes [my life] from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again" (John 10:18). All those who abused Him, who were trying Him—Jesus is the judge; they were the ones who were on trial.

The second section, verses 66-71, is Jesus before the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin was the Jewish high court or the Supreme Court of the Jews. It was made up of the elders, chief priests and scribes. "As soon as it was day, the elders of the people, both chief priests and scribes, came together and led Him into their council..." early Friday morning as soon as it was day. By 9:00 a.m. Jesus would be put on the Cross and would be there for six hours, until 3:00 p.m.

And not only was it illegal to try Jesus at night; it was illegal for them to sentence Him to death and to carry out the execution on the same day. They were supposed to wait 24 hours between the sentencing and execution. So this was a total “kangaroo court.”

So they were “...saying, ‘If You are the Christ, tell us.’ But He said to them, ‘If I tell you, you will by no means believe. And if I also ask you, you will by no means answer Me or let Me go. Hereafter the Son of Man...” a Messianic title for Jesus taken from Daniel 7:13 “...will sit on the right hand of the power of God.”” Jesus quoted here Psalm 110:1. Jesus will be exalted in His Resurrection, Ascension and exaltation and will return to judge the world.

Verse 70, “Then they all said, ‘Are You then the Son of God?’” Only Luke records this specific question. “So He said to them, ‘You rightly say that I am.’ And they said, ‘What further testimony do we need? For we have heard it ourselves from His own mouth.” Jesus is the Son of God.

I want to make this clear. Some people say, “Well, if He is the Son of God, then He’s not really God.” No, that’s not what is implied in the words “the Son of God.” The term “the Son of God,” which Jesus claimed, is a clear affirmation of His deity. He didn’t say “a Son of God”; He said, “the Son of God.” The Jews understood that He was claiming to be God. So very clearly, in verse 70, Jesus is claiming to be God. He was God in human form.

C.S. Lewis said that Jesus was either “a liar, a lunatic or Lord” found in mere Christianity. Jesus claimed to be God. Some say, “No; Jesus never claimed to be God.” He did claim to be God. Then His claim is either true or false. Let’s just say it’s false. If it is false, then either He knew it was false and was lying, or He was deluded, was a lunatic and didn’t know He wasn’t the Son of God. Anybody who stands up and says, “I am God,” is either lying, a lunatic or He really is God, is Lord. So the option of saying that Jesus was simply a good, moral teacher, a religious leader, is not true; we believe Jesus Christ is Lord.

So they had already decided that Jesus should die. But they didn’t have the right to execute anyone. The Roman government had taken away their right of execution. So they had to bring Jesus to Pilate to make that determination.

The third section is Luke 23:1-5, which is Jesus before Pilate, the Roman governor. If you added them all up, Jesus was put on trial six times before His Crucifixion. “Then the whole multitude of them...” that is, the Sanhedrin “...arose and led Him to Pilate. And they began to accuse Him, saying, ‘We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, saying that He Himself is Christ, a King.’ Then Pilate asked Him, saying, ‘Are You the King of the Jews?’ He answered him and said, ‘It is as you say.’ So Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowd, ‘I find no fault in this Man.” This is the first reference to Jesus’ innocence. So Pilate should have released Jesus. “But they were the more fierce, saying, ‘He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee to this place.”

Notice the lies that were given in their accusation of Jesus. They claimed Jesus was

“perverting the nation” or “subverting the nation,” which was not true. They claimed Jesus was “forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar,” which was not true. When Jesus was asked about paying taxes, He said, “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” (Mark 12:17). He wasn’t telling them not to pay taxes. A lot of us wish He had said that! Especially when April rolls around. They also said that Jesus claimed Himself to be Christ, a King. “Christ” is “Messiah,” which is Greek of the Hebrew Old Testament Mashiach, the Anointed of God.

In the fourth section, from verse 6-12, Jesus will be sent to Herod. He was known as Herod Antipas, who was the son of Herod the Great who slew all the infant baby boys when Jesus was born. Herod Antipas was a wicked ruler, who had John the Baptist’s head severed from his body and brought to him on a platter.

“When Pilate heard of Galilee, he asked if the Man were a Galilean. And as soon as he knew that He belonged to Herod’s jurisdiction, he sent Him to Herod, who was also in Jerusalem at that time.” That was the time of the Passover. “Now when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceedingly glad; for he had desired for a long time to see Him, because he had heard many things about Him, and he hoped to see some miracle done by Him.” Herod had no sense of repentance, no need of God in his life, no fear of God before His eyes; he just wanted to see a miracle Jesus might perform.

Verse 9, “Then he questioned Him with many words, but He answered him nothing.” That was sad for Herod. When God’s voice is silent, you know you have sinned away your day of grace; there is no hope for you. Herod’s heart had become so hardened. “And the chief priests and scribes stood and vehemently accused Him. Then Herod, with his men of war, treated Him with contempt and mocked Him, arrayed Him in a gorgeous robe, and sent Him back to Pilate. That very day Pilate and Herod became friends with each other, for previously they had been at enmity with each other.”

So Pilate and Herod were enemies, but now they’re friends. It’s interesting that two, wicked men would find common ground in their hatred of Jesus Christ. Many people today find common ground in their hatred of Jesus.

In the fifth section, verses 13-25, we see Jesus is sentenced to death by Pilate. “Then Pilate, when he had called together the chief priests, the rulers...” calling the Sanhedrin together “... and the people, said to them, ‘You have brought this Man to me, as one who misleads the people. And indeed, having examined Him in your presence, I have found no fault in this Man...” the second time Jesus was found faultless. All through this narrative, Luke makes it clear that Jesus Christ was faultless “...concerning those things of which you accuse Him; no, neither did Herod, for I sent you back to him; and indeed nothing deserving of death has been done by Him.” This is the third reference to Jesus being innocent. “‘I will therefore chastise Him and release Him’ (for it was necessary for him to release one to them at the feast).” He would have Jesus whipped and beaten almost to death, which is a great injustice.

So Pilate said Jesus probably would be one of the prisoners who could be released at Passover. It was a tradition at Passover that a prisoner would be released from custody.

Verse 16, “‘I will therefore chastise Him and release Him’ (for it was necessary for him to release one to them at the feast). And they all cried out at once, saying, ‘Away with this Man, and release to us Barabbas’—who had been thrown into prison for a certain rebellion made in the city, and for murder. Pilate, therefore, wishing to release Jesus, again called out to them. But they shouted, saying, ‘Crucify Him, crucify Him!’ Then he said to them the third time, ‘Why, what evil has He done? I have found no reason for death in Him. I will therefore chastise Him and let Him go.’” This was the fourth statement of Jesus’ innocence.

Verse 23, “But they were insistent, demanding with loud voices that He be crucified. And the voices of these men and of the chief priests prevailed.” Sadly Pilate followed the crowd. He did not fear God; he feared man. Clearly this is an injustice.

Not fearing God but fearing people will get you into big trouble. When you have no fear of God before your eyes but you have fear of people and what they may think about you, you’re in big trouble. What we need in America today is men and women who fear God. And when we fear God, we don’t have to fear the face of any man. If you put your trust in the Lord, you’ll be made safe.

It doesn’t record it here in Luke, but Pilate’s wife came to him and said, “Have nothing to do with that just Man, for I have suffered many things today in a dream because of Him” (Matthew 27:19). Now Pilate really was in a pickle. Pilate “took water and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, ‘I am innocent of the blood of this just Person’” (Matthew 27:24). Pilate saw Jesus was innocent, yet he would not release Him. It was his responsibility to release Jesus. What will you do with Jesus called the Christ? His conscience wasn’t convicting him. He wasn’t really seeking to get right with God.

Verse 24, “So Pilate gave sentence that it should be as they requested. And he released to them the one they requested, who for rebellion and murder had been thrown into prison; but he delivered Jesus to their will.” Notice the idea that Barabbas would go free, and Jesus would be crucified. Pilate resisted his conscience, violated it, followed the crowd and did something he knew was a wicked thing to do; he released a criminal and took an innocent Man and had Him executed.

Verse 25 is a picture of substitution. And it is a picture of substitution at the Cross in which Jesus substituted Himself for us guilty sinners. We go free but He died the death we should have died.

Verses 26-46 is the sixth and final section of our text. We now have Jesus crucified. “Now as they led Him away, they laid hold of a certain man, Simon a Cyrenian...” it is believed he was from what is Libya today “...who was coming from the country, and on him they laid the cross that he might bear it after Jesus.” What an amazing thing that must have been! He bore the

Cross for Jesus. Jesus fell under its weight and load from the loss of blood and from the whipping, beating and scourging. He had been up all night praying to His Father. He collapsed under the Cross, so Simon of Cyrene bore the Cross for Jesus. Under Roman law, someone could be compelled to do that.

Verse 27, "And a great multitude of the people followed Him..." while He was on the Via Delarosa on His way to Calvary and Golgotha "...and women..." Luke's Gospel mentions women more than any other Gospel "...who also mourned and lamented Him. But Jesus, turning to them, said, 'Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for Me.'" He had been scourged, and He was going to be crucified, but He told them not to weep for Him but for themselves. "But weep for yourselves and for your children. For indeed the days are coming in which they will say, 'Blessed are the barren, wombs that never bore, and breasts which never nursed!' Then they will begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall on us!' and to the hills, 'Cover us!' For if they do these things in the green wood, what will be done in the dry?"

Jesus was predicting judgment on the nation of Israel. Either He prophesied of 70AD when Titus would come and destroy Jerusalem, or maybe a combination of that and future judgment in the tribulation. They would say "to the mountains and rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!'" (Revelation 6:16).

"For if they do these things in the green wood, what will be done in the dry?" was probably a proverbial saying that was understood and common in their day. Jesus was speaking prophetically. He probably was saying, "While I'm here and doing My ministry as Messiah, they treat Me like this. What will it be like when I'm gone?" There would be judgments and difficulties they would face.

In verses 32-38, we see the Crucifixion. "There were also two others, criminals, led with Him to be put to death." There are a lot of Old Testament Scriptures being fulfilled here. Isaiah 53:12 says, "He was numbered with the transgressors." Jesus actually died between two thieves, and it is thought they were also murderers.

Verse 33, "And when they had come to the place called Calvary..." which is Latin meaning "skull," and in Aramaic it is "Golgotha" or "place of the skull" "...there they crucified Him, and the criminals, one on the right hand and the other on the left." Jesus was on the Cross from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. He had a total of seven utterances on the Cross. From 9:00 a.m. to noon, He would utter three statements.

Verse 34, "Then Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.' And they divided His garments and cast lots." I'm convinced that the thief on the cross who would repent heard Jesus say this. Maybe it stirred his heart and he thought, Maybe He can forgive me as well. He heard Jesus pray to His Father for them to be forgiven.

The second utterance of Jesus was recorded in Luke 23:43: "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise." And the third one was when Jesus spoke to His mother and said,

“Woman, behold your son!” and to John He said, “Behold your mother!” (John 19:26-27).

Verse 35, “And the people stood looking on. But even the rulers with them sneered, saying, ‘He saved others; let Him save Himself if He is the Christ, the chosen of God.’” The rulers of the Jews in the crowd were the ones who were taunting Jesus. The populace wasn’t taunting Him. The rulers were saying this among themselves.

Verse 36, “The soldiers also mocked Him, coming and offering Him sour wine, and saying, ‘If You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself.’ And an inscription also was written over Him in letters of Greek, Latin, and Hebrew: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.”

J. Vernon McGee’s statements about this were interesting. He said, “Greek speaks of the language of the intelligent, of education, literature and science. Latin speaks of the language of law and order, of military and of government. Hebrew conveys the idea of the language of religion. And Jesus is Lord over all these areas.”

Some see a contradiction in the Bible. When you read these statements in all four of the Gospels what was posted on the placard over the Cross they all are somewhat different statements. They aren’t contradictions; they are complements. If you put them all together, this is what was written: “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews,” written in Greek and Hebrew and Latin. It was actually done by Pilate in derision of the Jews to force him to crucify an innocent Man. How sad.

Beginning in verse 39, we have one of the most beautiful stories of the Crucifixion of the penitent thief on the cross. “Then one of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed Him, saying, ‘If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us.’” Another Gospel says that both of them were reviling Christ. But here it says it is only one of them. “But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, ‘Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong.’” Notice again that this is not Pilate or Herod declaring Jesus innocent; it is actually the penitent thief. It is so prominent in Luke’s Gospel that he is protecting the innocence of our Lord.

Verse 42, “Then he said to Jesus, ‘Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.’ And Jesus said to him, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.’” Paradise means heaven. Some people like to debate over what “Paradise” means. It actually means “a walled garden.” It’s better than hangin’ on a cross!

And notice that Jesus didn’t say to him, “Sorry, you’re a bad person. You can’t go to heaven!” Those who preach and teach that you have to be a “good person” to go to heaven—first of all, how good is “good” enough? Based on your standards? How would you ever have any assurance that you’re good enough to go to heaven? And Jesus didn’t say, “Oh, dude! You’re not a member of my church!” or “Oh, what a bummer! You haven’t been baptized! You haven’t been confirmed! You can’t go to heaven!” This man was dying for his sin.

I think this is one of the greatest examples in Scripture of God's grace and mercy and love to a guilty sinner. Jesus is dying on the Cross for the sins of the world, and He prays for their forgiveness and says to the thief, "Today you will be with Me in Paradise." What a marvelous assurance the thief was given of his salvation. He was a wicked man who was saved.

I believe in deathbed conversions. I don't recommend that; I'm not encouraging you to go out and live a wicked life and then get saved five minutes before you die. But you don't have to live a good life in order to go to heaven; you have to trust the Savior. And many people, even in the last, few moments of their life, can be saved. The Bible says that "Whoever calls on the name of the Lord, shall be saved" (Romans 10:13).

This guy had a knowledge of who Jesus was; he called Him "Lord," and he knew He had a kingdom. And he said, "Remember me," and Jesus said, "Today." There was no mention of purgatory; He didn't say, "Today you'll be in purgatory." There was no mention of soul sleep; He didn't say, "Today when you die, you won't exist." No; He said, "Today you will be with Me in Paradise." The moment a Christian dies he is in the presence of the Lord in Paradise. "To be absent from the body [is] to be present with the Lord" (2 Corinthians 5:8). What a blessing!

So this thief had no water baptism, no good life, wasn't religious and was a wicked man. "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1 Timothy 1:15). Luke makes that so clear in his Gospel.

Now we see that Jesus dies, in verses 44-46. "Now it was about the sixth hour..." or 12:00 noon "...and there was darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour" or until 3:00 p.m. What was this darkness? A darkness of secrecy. For three years, Jesus had publicly, openly ministered. Now the Father shrouded this substitutionary, atoning, reconciling work on the Cross by shrouding it in darkness. Then there was the darkness of the wickedness of men's sin and the darkness of God's judgment laid upon the Son of God.

"Then the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was torn in two." This huge curtain was ripped from top to bottom signifying that the way into the presence of God was now made available and open to all. And Luke doesn't mention the earthquake, and that "the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised...and went into the holy city and appeared to many" (Matthew 27:51-53). So there were all these mysterious happenings.

Toward the end of this time of darkness, about 3:00 p.m. when the lambs were being sacrificed for the Passover feast, Jesus—literally our Passover Lamb—was shedding His blood and dying on the Cross.

During this time, Jesus gave four utterances from the Cross. He said, "Eli, Eli, lama Sabachthani?" or "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46). The answer to that is because He became sin for us; in one of the greatest mysteries in all the Bible, God the Father had to turn His back on God the Son. Jesus was forsaken of God so we would

never have to be forsaken. Then Jesus said, "I thirst" (John 19:28). And He said, "Tetelestai" or "It is finished" (John 19:30). It was paid for or complete. "And when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said, 'Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit.' Having said this, He breathed His last," which is our text. So Jesus laid His life down. It wasn't taken from Him; He laid it down. So Jesus trusted Himself to God the Father. When Jesus said, "Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit," that was a quote from Psalm 31:5.

Can you imagine hearing the voice of the Son of God in the darkness say, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" That was a direct quote from Psalm 22:1. That whole psalm is a Messianic prophecy of the Crucifixion. In the background of that psalm you find all of Jesus' utterances while on the Cross.

That is the historical narrative. What is its significance? What does it mean? Jesus died on the Cross—we all know that. It's a historical fact. Let me give you four, Biblical, theological truths that the Cross accomplished. Number one, it was a substitution for sin. Isaiah 53:5 says, "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities....And by His stripes we are healed." And 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."

In Genesis 22:2, God came to Abraham and said, "Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you." I'm convinced that the same mountain on which Abraham attempted to sacrifice his son Isaac is the same mountain, Mount Moriah, on which Jesus was crucified.

In Genesis 22, there are three words that had not appeared in the Bible before first appearing in this chapter. The first word is "love." It appears in the context of a father giving his son as a sacrifice. John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." The second word is the word "worship." Abraham said, "The lad and I will go yonder and worship" (Genesis 22:5). That is the first time you see the word "worship." God loved giving His Son, and we worship God. The third, first-time mentioned word is the word "obey" (Genesis 22:18).

You put the three words together of love, worship and obey, and you get the imagery of a father's love for his son, offering him on a mountain. And what happened? Abraham lifted up the knife to plunge it into his son, but God stopped him and showed him in a bush a ram that was caught by its horns. Abraham was instructed to take Isaac off the altar, replace him with the ram and he then slew the ram. That is a picture of the substitutionary death of Christ for us. That is the central thought of the Cross; He took our place and paid for our sins.

Number two, the Cross provided redemption for us from sin. 1 Peter 1:18-19 says, "...knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." To be redeemed means to be bought or to be

purchased. It means to be taken out of the marketplace of slavery to sin and set free.

All these facets are important. Bought with a price, taken out of the marketplace of slavery to sin and set free. We've been redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ. Jesus is our Redeemer.

Number three, the Cross provided reconciliation. The death of Jesus Christ on the Cross effected reconciliation for sinners. We who were enemies of God, estranged from God—now that enmity that existed has been dealt with by God on the Cross, and we can have a relationship once again with God. So Jesus reconciles guilty sinners.

Number four, the death of Jesus Christ provides a propitiation for our sin. What does that mean? It means that Jesus' death on the Cross satisfied the demands of God's holy, righteous law. The Bible says, "The soul who sins shall die" (Ezekiel 18:20). But Jesus substituted Himself, paid the penalty for my sin to reconcile me. God was propitiated or God was satisfied, because the penalty was paid.

That is why Jesus Christ said, "Tetelestai" or "Paid in full." There is nothing we need to do; He paid the price for my sin. So we sing,

"Jesus paid it all,

All to Him I owe;

Sin had left a crimson stain,

He washed it white as snow."