

Cultivate Gospel of Luke Study
Lesson Thirty-Eight

Read and meditate on Luke Chapter 23 this week
and prayerfully answer the following questions before Tuesday's class.

Luke Chapter 23 was a difficult chapter to read. Knowing what our Lord and Savior went through for each of us is sometimes overwhelming. Realizing that God gave his only son (**John 3:16**) for us because of His deep desire for us to share in his Kingdom to be called his children should touch us to our very core. The beauty of this chapter is that we have the privilege of knowing the ending, so while we are reading Chapter 23 – we have hope in our hearts and joy in our souls.

The ancient prophets promised the people of Israel that one day God would walk among them. (**Daniel 2:44, Psalms 2:6**) God would rescue His people and rule the world (**Zechariah 9:9**). The hope of the Jews was that Jesus was the coming King who would usher in justice and peace (**Psalms 45:6-7**). However, the religious leaders thought that Jesus was a threat to their power and influence. Finally, the leaders thought, they would carry out the plan that they had concocted from the beginning.

Luke 23:1-5

Jesus Before Pilate

The Sanhedrin knew that they could not carry out their plot to kill Jesus because Roman law forbid such actions. Instead, they presented Jesus to Pilate and began to falsely accuse him of a multitude of crimes. They specifically accused him of the crime of perverting the nation. This was very strategic on the part of the Sanhedrin. They hoped that it would give them leverage in their case against Jesus.

The Sanhedrin also mentioned Galilee, which ultimately served two purposes – 1) Galilee was the place where all the rebellions against Rome started. So, by placing Jesus in Galilee, they were seeking to place Him at the heart of rebellion against Rome thus strengthening their case, and 2) When Pilate heard “Galilee”, (verse 5) he realized that Galilee was Herod's jurisdiction and he could send Jesus in that direction and avoid the possibility of having to decide Jesus' fate.

1. Pilate's initial response was, “I find no guilt in this man.” (**Luke 23:4**) That should have been the end of the discussion, right? Pilate allowed the Sanhedrin to continue the discussion.

Where else in scripture was Jesus falsely accused?

Luke 23: 6-17

Jesus Before Herod

Herod may have viewed Pilate's actions of sending Jesus to him as somewhat of a compliment. Pilate would have been justified by passing judgement on the case against Jesus, but instead, he sent him to Herod. Had Pilate been a man of integrity he would have released Jesus on the spot.

Herod had hoped to see Jesus perform a miracle, but Jesus refused to engage. Herod questioned Him while the chief priests hurled accusations. All the while, Jesus was silent.

Herod was curious about Jesus. He had heard about the miracles that Jesus had performed. This is the same Herod who had John the Baptist beheaded. Herod believed that Jesus could have been the resurrected John the Baptist. John had criticized Herod, perhaps, Herod was looking for a way to settle the score once and for all.

Eventually, after a great deal of questioning, Herod and his soldiers mocked Jesus and sent him back to Pilate. *"The contempt and mockery showed what Herod really thought of Jesus. When Jesus refused to entertain him, Herod entertained himself by mistreating Jesus."* **(Guzik)**

Robert L. Thomas (author and theologian) writes, *"Because much of Jesus' public ministry had been in Galilee, Pilate thought he had found a way to avoid condemning an innocent person, but Herod did not pronounce Jesus guilty or innocent. Luke had contacts within Herod's household that enabled him to describe a phase of the trial not found in the other gospels..."*

"The mockery made it plain that Herod did not take the charge seriously. That is the really frightening thing about the incident. With the Son of God before him Herod could only jest." **(Leon Morris)**

Pilate attempted to reason with Jesus's accusers. He pointed out that neither he nor Herod found any fault with Jesus. Pilate agreed to have Jesus beaten and then released.

- 2. Once again Pilate made his ruling and Herod also came to the same conclusion. Jesus should have been free to leave. Right? Would it be fair to say that Pilate and Herod gave into peer pressure? Or is there more to their lack of decision making?**

Once again, Pilate had the opportunity to do the right thing, but he caved to the pressures of others. When we have difficult decisions to make – take into consideration the pressures exerted upon us by other. **(1Corinthians 15:33-34)** Prepare your mind and prepare your heart for just such occasions. **(Ephesians 6:13-17)**

- 3. How can you adjust you decision making processes to reflect “right” actions and thinking? What have you done with the opportunities and responsibilities that have crossed your path?**

Luke 23:17 in the KJV lets us know what other option was available to Pilate and what the chief priests were hoping for. Luke 23:17 (NKJ) (For of necessity he must release one unto them at the feast.)

Luke 23:18-25

Pilate Delivers Jesus to Be Crucified

Pilate believed he had a way for Jesus to escape death. He planned to release Him according to the custom of releasing a prisoner every Passover season. However, his announcement was met with outrage and anger from the religious leaders. They demanded that Pilate release Barabbas, who really was an insurrectionist. Barabbas was also a murderer. They wanted Jesus crucified.

- 4. What groups or individuals hated or had contempt for Jesus and why?**

Pilate may have thought that the crowd would want Jesus released, yet when he made his announcement, they condemned Jesus. Pilate, who history has documented as a cruel and ruthless leader, was trying to change the fate of an innocent man. The shouts of the crowd, fueled by the encouragement of the religious leaders must have given Pilate reason to pause. Was there going to be a riot? How much longer before this crowd was out of control?

Does this scene resemble scenes in current world events? Riots that have escalated to the point that appeasing the crowd is the highest priority? Does it echo events that have occurred in history where criminals are released to satisfy a demand?

Read John 18:39-40; John 19:14-16

Even though Pilate knew that Jesus was innocent and did not deserve the punishment of death, he handed him over to the will of the people.

Luke 23: 26-43

The Crucifixion

Before Jesus took the cross, He was whipped – scourged – as Pilate had earlier promised (*I will therefore chastise Him, **Luke 23:16***). “Scourging was a legal preliminary to every Roman execution, and only women and Roman senators or soldiers (except in cases of desertion) were exempt.” (Johnathan Edwards)

The goal of the scourging was to weaken the victim to a state just short of collapse and death. “As the Roman soldiers repeatedly struck the victim’s back with full force, the iron balls would cause deep contusions, and the leather thongs and sheep bones would cut into the skin and subcutaneous tissues. Then, as the flogging continued, the lacerations would tear into the underlying skeletal muscles and produce quivering ribbons of bleeding flesh. Pain and blood loss generally set the stage for circulatory shock. The extent of blood loss may well have determined how long the victim would survive the cross. Therefore, even before the actual crucifixion, Jesus’ physical condition was at least serious and possibly critical.” (Edwards)

The religious leaders scoffed, the crowd mocked, and the soldiers joined in the public humiliation of Jesus.

Luke is the only Gospel writer to include the account of the women who followed Jesus. They were weeping and wailing for him in his distress. Some theologians suggest that these women were professional mourners – ones who provide medication to lessen the pain for those who are being executed. Regardless of their position or reason for being there, Jesus demonstrated great compassion towards them (**Luke 28-29**). He knew that there would be great suffering ahead when God fulfilled His prophecy by destroying Jerusalem in AD 70.

5. **Luke 23:31** “For if these things are done when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?” **What did Jesus mean when he spoke these words to the crowd?**

There was a specific place outside the city walls of Jerusalem that was still close, where people were crucified. At this place called Calvary, Jesus died for our sins and our salvation was accomplished. **Calvary** means, “place of a skull,” and it was the place where criminals were crucified.

“The most significant thing about Jesus’ suffering was that He was not, in any sense, the victim of circumstances. He was in control. Jesus said of His life in ***John 10:18***, *no one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself*. It is terrible to be forced to endure such torture, but to freely choose it out of love is remarkable.” (Guzik)

6. **What do you know about the capital punishment of crucifixion?**

Read Matthew 5:44

Jesus prayed for his executioners, he asked the Father to forgive them (verse 34). Jesus demonstrated his unfailing love.

“If ignorance does not excuse a crime, it at least diminishes the atrocity of it. However, these persons well knew that they were crucifying an *innocent* man; but they did not know that, by this act of theirs, they were bringing down on themselves and on their country the heaviest judgments of God. In the prayer, *Father, forgive them!* that word of prophecy was fulfilled, *He made intercession for the transgressors, ***Isaiah 53:12****.” (Adam Clarke)

Once again, the soldiers mocked and the crowds and the leaders scoffed. Taunting Jesus – save yourself, they said. If you are truly God’s Son, then do something about your situation.

7. **Where else in the Bible have we heard Jesus taunted like this, and what was his reaction?**

Read Matthew 27:44; Mark 15:32 and Ephesians 2:8-9.

Matthew and Mark indicated that *both* criminals mocked Jesus. At first they both mocked Jesus, but in the hours spent on the cross, one of the criminals came to see things differently, and placed his trust in Jesus. This man, this criminal, was able to see beyond the present shameful situation to the coming glory of Jesus.

The parable of the workers in the vineyard in *Matthew 20:1-16* tells the story of a landowner who pays all his workers the same, regardless of how long they worked.

8. What, if any, similarities exist between “The Parable of the vineyard workers” and the criminal who accepted Jesus?

Luke 23:44-49

The Death of Jesus

The crucifixion took place during Passover season, and Passover is always held at a full moon. A *natural* eclipse of the sun is impossible during a full moon. A lunar eclipse can occur during a full moon, but these are two very different events. (<https://www.weather.gov/fsd/suneclipse>)

A Roman historian named Phlegon wrote: “In the fourth year of the 202nd Olympiad, there was an extraordinary eclipse of the sun: at the sixth hour, the day turned into dark night, so that the stars in heaven were seen; and there was an earthquake.”

Read John 19:30

When His work on the cross was accomplished, with prayer, Jesus yielded his living spirit to God the Father as he yielded his body to death on the cross. When he breathed his last breath and the day turned to darkness, and the earth quaked – it was difficult for onlookers to deny that there was something extraordinary about the man named Jesus.

Isaiah 53:3-5 puts it powerfully: “*He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him*

stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed."

"The words of v. 46, 'Jesus expired' ('breathed out His life'), can be seen to echo **Genesis 2:7**. There it is said that God breathed into Adam the breath of life, and he became a living soul. The one God breathed into the breath of life – Adam; the other breathed out the breath of life – Jesus. The latter paid the consequences for the sin of the former in order to inaugurate a new creation." (Marvin Pate)

9. Why do you think the crowd returned home in "deep sorrow"?

Luke 23:45 refers to the curtain that was torn in two. That curtain closed off the Most Holy Place and when it was torn it exposed the area that was meant to be kept hidden.

10. What was significant about this? What did this action symbolize?

(Once again, as only Luke does, he makes a special note of the women who followed Jesus.)

Luke 23:50-56

Jesus Is Buried

Customarily, the bodies of crucified criminals were left on their crosses to rot or be eaten by wild animals. But the Jews wanted no such horror displayed during the Passover season, and Romans were known to grant the corpses to friends or relatives for proper burial.

They were unable to properly prepare the body of Jesus for burial because of the coming Sabbath. So, in hurried preparation, Jesus' body was placed in the private family tomb that belonged to Joseph of Arimathea. Joseph of Arimathea was a wealthy member of the Sanhedrin.

Luke makes mention that Joseph did not vote to condemn Jesus. Luke also mentions the women who followed Joseph to the tomb.

Read Matthew 27:57-61; Mark 15:42-47; and John 19:38-42.

All four Gospel writers record details about Jesus' death. They made it clear that Jesus did indeed die.

11. Where were Jesus' disciples at the time of Jesus' death?

12. What does Jesus' death on the cross mean to you? (This is very personal, share only if you choose)

Think about these verses as we continue our study.

Roman 5:8 "But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners."

1Jn 4:9 "God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him."

1Jn 4:10 "This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins."

Act 2:21 "But everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved."

Joh 3:16 "For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life."

Joh 3:17 "God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him."

Joh 3:18 "There is no judgment against anyone who believes in him. But anyone who does not believe in him has already been judged for not believing in God's one and only Son."