

Resurrection Day 2026 – Exposition of Luke 23

The Crucifixion of Jesus

Introduction: The Paradox of the Cross

History's greatest paradox is found in the events of Luke 23. The death of Jesus stands as the most evil act ever committed by human hands, orchestrated through a conspiracy of religious leaders, a compromised governor, and an impressionable crowd. Yet, from this very darkness, God brought forth the brightest display of divine love: full and free salvation for every guilty sinner who simply believes the truth about Jesus. As we walk through this chapter, we must observe how every historical detail declares a singular, objective reality: the Innocent Substitute died in the place of the guilty to provide eternal life as a gift.

The Legal Examination and the Verdict of Innocence

Luke 23:1-7

When the Jewish leaders rush Jesus to Pilate at daybreak, they present charges of political sedition designed to trigger a Roman death sentence. They claim He misleads the nation, forbids taxes to Caesar, and claims to be a king; yet these are calculated falsehoods intended to manipulate the governor.

Pilate examines Jesus himself and declares, "I find no guilt in this man." The Greek word behind *guilt* is **αἴτιος** *aitios* – and means no cause, no basis, no legal ground for any charge at all. Pilate repeats that verdict three times in this chapter (14, 22). The Roman governor, this pagan outsider, keeps saying out loud what the religious leaders refuse to admit, Jesus is innocent of these charges.

This verdict is not a theological statement on sinlessness but a legal confirmation that, according to Roman Law, Jesus is innocent of rebellion.

They press harder and Pilate finds out that Jesus is "from" Galilee, Pilate sends Jesus to Herod. This would either deflect the political pressure because Herod Antipas held jurisdiction over Galilee (releasing Pilate's culpability) or get insight about the charges because Herod fancies himself a Jew and an expert in the Law.

The Silence of the King and the Friendship of Rejection

Luke 23:8-12

Herod views Jesus not as the Messiah, but as a curiosity, hoping to see a miracle performed for his entertainment. Jesus met this frivolous demand with total silence, maintaining complete control over the scene and ensuring His path remained directed toward the cross rather than a localized Jewish judgment.

Frustrated by this silence, Herod and his soldiers mock Jesus by dressing Him in a royal robe before sending Him back to Pilate. In a tragic irony, these two rulers (previously bitter enemies) find a common bond in their shared rejection of the Truth. Their unity serves as a testimony against them, proving that Pilate's eventual surrender was not the result of ignorance, but a failure to

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stand by the evidence he had personally examined. Pilate is responsible for the death of Jesus, operating out of fear not conviction.

The Swap: Choosing the Son of the Father

Luke 23:13-25

Pilate reconvenes the crowd, reiterating that neither he nor Herod found any evidence of sedition. However, the crowd, manipulated by religious authorities, demands the release of Barabbas, a man justly imprisoned for actual insurrection and murder.

The name Barabbas literally means “son of the father” (*Bar-Abba*), creating a sharp irony where humanity chooses a violent, guilty rebel over the actual, righteous Son of the Father.

As Pilate attempts to release Jesus, the crowd’s demands escalate into a deafening roar (Imperfect Tense – A perpetual action) in verse 23 describes a continuous, unstoppable shouting that eventually overwhelms Pilate’s sense of justice.

In this moment, Jesus is delivered to the will of the people, becoming the literal substitute for Barabbas, a physical picture of the spiritual reality where the Righteous One takes the death penalty for the unrighteous.

The Way to the Skull and the Warning of Judgment

Luke 23:26-32

As the procession moves toward the place of execution, the soldiers compel Simon of Cyrene to carry the cross of Jesus. Even in His state of physical exhaustion and impending death, Jesus remains focused on the spiritual reality of those around Him, warning the “daughters of Jerusalem” to weep for themselves. He quotes Hosea 10:8 to point toward a coming judgment, demonstrating that the innocent One is not a victim of circumstance, but a willing Substitute who understands the gravity of the divine plan unfolding.

Mockery as an Unintended Confession of Truth

Luke 23:33-38

At the place called “The Skull,” Jesus is crucified between two criminals, yet Luke directs our attention away from the physical gore and toward the verbal mockery. The religious rulers and Roman soldiers taunt Him, sneering that if He is truly the Christ, He should “save Himself”. Even the inscription above His head, “This is the King of the Jews,” was intended as a final insult.

However, every taunt functions as an unintended confession; by constantly referencing His claim to save and His identity as King, they are publicly recording the very proposition of truth that Jesus came to fulfill. They inadvertently proclaim that if He were to save Himself, He could not save others. They cannot stop talking about His claim to save and to reign.

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The Persuasion of the Thief: Salvation by Belief Alone

Luke 23:39-43

The two criminals hanging beside Jesus respond to the evidence of His identity in starkly different ways. The first joins the mockery, demanding a physical escape that would "prove" Jesus' power, but the second criminal rebukes him, acknowledging their own guilt and Jesus' absolute righteousness.

This second thief is persuaded of a specific proposition: that Jesus is indeed the King who will have a kingdom beyond the cross. He turns to Jesus with the simplest of requests, "Remember me," and receives an immediate, absolute assurance of paradise. There were no works, no baptism, and no religious rituals; the thief simply believed the truth about Jesus, demonstrating that salvation is a gift received through belief alone in Christ alone.

The Divine Direction: The Torn Veil and Open Access

Luke 23:44-46

In the final hours, darkness covers the land as the sun is obscured, signaling a momentous shift in the justice of God. At the moment Jesus commits His spirit (using the word παραδίδωμι (paradidomi) to show His life was willingly given, not taken) the temple veil is torn in two.

This was a "Divine Direction" from top to bottom, proving that God Himself initiated the removal of the barrier between humanity and His presence. Access to the Father is no longer a matter of the Law, physical cleansing, or priestly ritual; it is a positional reality granted to those in Christ. We can now approach the throne with boldness, knowing that the "True Sacrifice" has satisfied the debt once and for all (Hebrews 1:2-3, 4:14-16, 10:10).

The Centurion's Verdict

Luke 23:47-49

The events at the cross were so compelling that even a pagan Roman centurion, observing the way Jesus died, was moved to declare, "Certainly this man was *innocent*." He uses the word δίκαιος (dikaios), meaning righteous, a term that aligns with the biblical evaluation of Jesus as the only one fit to be a substitute.

The Burial

Luke 23:50-56

Following the death, Joseph of Arimathea (a member of the Sanhedrin who had not consented to the execution) courageously asks for the body and places it in a new tomb. The women who followed Jesus observe the burial and then return home to rest on the Sabbath according to the

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commandment. The chapter ends on a cliffhanger: the body is in the tomb, the world is silent, and the "Innocent Substitute" has finished the work of atonement.

Conclusion: The Evangelistic Proposition

The account of Luke 23 is a call to examine the evidence and reach a conclusion. We see the legal innocence confirmed by Pilate, the moral righteousness confirmed by the Centurion, and the kingly identity believed by the thief.

We live in a world that demands we "work" for everything, yet the Gospel is a proposition that stands in total opposition to human effort. Jesus took the place of Barabbas and He took the place of every sinner who has ever lived.

We call this day Resurrection Sunday because the tomb could not hold the Innocent Substitute. But before we celebrate the empty tomb, we must stand at the foot of the cross and ask the only question that matters: Do I believe in the One who died in my place?

Romans 5:6-8 - Salvation is found not in religious mechanics, but in being persuaded of the truth: that the Righteous One died for the unrighteous. If you believe this truth today, you possess the same immediate assurance as the thief on the cross, a promise of eternal life secured forever by the Innocent Substitute.