

Luke 23:1-49 Deadly Ambitions

Last week we saw people pursuing their own agendas around Jesus, this week we see the trend continues – everyone involved in this thing is pursuing their own agenda or seeking to protect their position – including Jesus. But motive affects outcome and as we will clearly see, though many people got what they were looking for in Christ’s death, they weren’t all looking for the same thing.

[1](#)Then the whole company of them arose and brought him before Pilate.[2](#)And they began to accuse him, saying, “We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that he himself is Christ, a king.”[3](#)And Pilate asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” And he answered him, “You have said so.”[4](#)Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, “I find no guilt in this man.”[5](#)But they were urgent, saying, “He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee even to this place.”

[6](#)When Pilate heard this, he asked whether the man was a Galilean.[7](#)And when he learned that he belonged to Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him over to Herod, who was himself in Jerusalem at that time.[8](#)When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had long desired to see him, because he had heard about him, and he was hoping to see some sign done by him.[9](#)So he questioned him at some length, but he made no answer.[10](#)The chief priests and the scribes stood by, vehemently accusing him.[11](#)And Herod with his soldiers treated him with contempt and mocked him. Then, arraying him in splendid clothing, he sent him back to Pilate.[12](#)And Herod and Pilate became friends with each other that very day, for before this they had been at enmity with each other.[13](#)Pilate then called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people,[14](#)and said to them, “You brought me this man as one who was misleading the people. And after examining him before you, behold, I did not find this man guilty of any of your charges against him.[15](#)Neither did Herod, for he sent him back to us. Look, nothing deserving death has been done by him.[16](#)I will therefore punish and release him.” [\[fn1\]](#)

[18](#)But they all cried out together, “Away with this man, and release to us Barabbas”—[19](#)a man who had been thrown into prison for an insurrection started in the city and for murder.[20](#)Pilate addressed them once more, desiring to release Jesus,[21](#)but they kept shouting, “Crucify, crucify him!”[22](#)A third time he said to them, “Why, what evil has he done? I have found in him no guilt deserving death. I will therefore punish and release him.”[23](#)But they were urgent, demanding with loud cries that he should be crucified. And their voices prevailed.[24](#)So Pilate decided that their demand should be granted.[25](#)He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, for whom they asked, but he delivered Jesus over to their will.

[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." [\[fn2\]](#) 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, [\[fn3\]](#) "This is the King of the Jews."

[39](#)One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, [\[fn4\]](#) saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!"[40](#)But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?[41](#)And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong."[42](#)And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."[43](#)And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

[44](#)It was now about the sixth hour, [\[fn5\]](#) and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, [\[fn6\]](#) [45](#)while the sun's light failed. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two.[46](#)Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" And having said this he breathed his last.[47](#)Now when the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God, saying, "Certainly this man was innocent!"[48](#)And all the crowds that had assembled for this spectacle, when they saw what had taken place, returned home beating their breasts.[49](#)And all his acquaintances and the women who had followed him from Galilee stood at a distance watching these things.

Roman historian wrote this: "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."

Why was Jesus put to death this day if He was so obviously innocent? BECAUSE the other people involved were all caught up in pursuing their own ambitions – deadly ambitions. And so, these leaders, Jewish **religious leaders and Roman politicians** so that all of mankind would be guilty - this small group of men with access to power, made choices that shaped the world.

The Jewish leaders wanted to keep their power and position so they ignored the obvious miracles that Jesus was doing and rejected the possibility that He could have been sent from God.

Pilate wanted to keep his position and that meant keeping the peace, so he compromised on justice.

Jesus used His position to change the position of those who followed Him and that meant walking the hard road and suffering for the sake of others.

The apostle Paul says there are only two ways to live – according to the flesh or according to the Spirit and whichever you follow reveals the nature of your own ambitions.

Rom8: [5](#) For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit.[6](#)To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.[7](#)For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot.[8](#)Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

Because the Jewish leaders and Pilate were living according to the flesh, they set their minds on the things of the flesh and although they achieved their short terms goals, they lost everything in the long run because God was against them.

Shortly after these events Pilate went into exile on the island of Sicily and committed suicide.

And as for the Jewish leaders, as we all know they continued to struggle with the Romans for control of the city and nation and eventually lost it all as Rome smashed their final rebellion in AD 70.

Those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh – and sometimes they achieve them, though usually only for a short period...death and deterioration eventually come.

Scripture contains numerous warnings against pursuing your own ambitions when those ambitions are not ordained by God.

Phl 2:3 NIV

Do nothing out of **selfish ambition** or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.

1Cr 13:5 NIV

[Love] is not rude, **it is not self-seeking**, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.

Gal 5:19-20 NIV

The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, **selfish ambition**, dissensions, factions

Rom 2:8 NIV

But for **those who are self-seeking** and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger.

Jam 3:14-16 NIV - But if you harbor bitter envy and **selfish ambition** in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. For where you have envy and **selfish ambition**, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

The Jewish leaders and most of the others involved in the trials and execution of Jesus were seeking their own ambitions and as a result, they all completely ignored or rejected the presence of God and the pursuit of justice or righteousness.

They thought they knew what was best and they pursued it even when that meant putting Jesus to death. How could that happen when the Jews were so committed to God? It's simple – they were guilty of the same sin as many people today – they had made God into Who they wanted Him to be and had not listened as He declared who He really was.

Jesus told His disciples that anyone who had seen Him had seen the Father – that by knowing and understanding Jesus you could know God. And after He was murdered He rose from the dead and promised to send us His Holy Spirit to be our Comforter so that now, although Jesus Himself is no longer physically walking the earth, we still have relationship with Him through the Spirit. Paul goes on to talk about that:

[9](#)You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.[10](#)But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness.[11](#)If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

So there are these two paths – life lived according to the flesh and its desires, blindly pursuing your own ambitions – and those who live that life CANNOT please God and will one day be separated from Him and all that belongs to Him.

And then there is the life lived according to the Spirit – a life lived in submission to God – a life that regrets past and present mistakes and which is filled with repentance from selfish ambitions. Those who live this life have found forgiveness in Jesus and are seeking to live life with God at the center and not ourselves.

Those who live for the flesh, who put their own desires at the center of their lives will inevitably run other people over because you eventually come to a point where other people get in the way of your ambition and it's either them or you. This is why the world is full of crime, of divorce, of abortion – it's a world full of people seeking their own ambitions and doing whatever it takes to get there.

But that's not the way we were created to live – instead, our lives should be like that of our Lord – given away for the benefit of others, *even when it hurts*.

Which of these paths are you on? Are you living for the flesh or the spirit? The Jews and the Romans put Jesus on trial, but every one of us joins them – we all have to decide – are the claims of Jesus true or false, and what should we do about them? It's an interesting trial and examination, because what you determine about Jesus doesn't determine His fate – it determines yours.

Pray – God please put each of us on trial and help us to know – what are our true ambitions and they leading us to hurt others or to serve them? Are we following in the paths of those who crucified Jesus, or are we picking up our own crosses and daily dying to ourselves as we let His life shine through us?

Thank you for forgiving us and changing us.

On this day people were walking down two separate paths that happened to run parallel for a few hours but which would ultimately take them in vastly different directions. Most were pursuing their own ambitions:

The thief who wanted to reject Him did.

Pilate kept the peace and didn't have to deal with any uprisings or protests

The religious leaders get rid of Jesus and His followers are dispersed and seem dejected.

People even tried to get Jesus to do the same things

Once again, it seems like everyone got what they wanted. But it didn't last for long because Jesus also got what He wanted. The Father's will was accomplished and a way had been made for men and women to be restored to their right relationship with God because sin had been punished, justice had been done.

The Great Exchange had been conducted – He took on our sin, and we took on His righteousness.

As a result the thief who wanted to be remembered was delivered and in a matter of days Jesus would rise from the dead and appear to the disciples and shortly after that He would ascend into Heaven where He would sit down at the right hand of God having accomplished the work He was given. And then, He would send the Holy Spirit to comfort those who believe in Him and to convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgment.