

A Study of Luke's Gospel
Week Thirty-Two
Luke 23:1-34

Day One

23:1 Then the whole assembly rose and led him off to Pilate. 2 And they began to accuse him, saying, "We have found this man subverting our nation. He opposes payment of taxes to Caesar and claims to be Christ, a king." 3 So Pilate asked Jesus, "Are you the king of the Jews?" "Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied.

v. 1 – While the “whole assembly” led Jesus to Pilate, this by no means represented the people in general. This assembly was made up of the leaders and those whom they paid, influenced and controlled. I have stated on more than one occasion that the people recognized Jesus and knew more than their leaders did. Position and authority are no guarantee of spiritual correctness. Every leader must keep in mind that he or she is also a disciple and that anyone can receive something from the Holy Spirit to build up the body or do God's will.

It is of note that the Jews hated Rome, yet now they needed Rome to do their dirty work. What hypocrisy! On one hand, they wanted Jesus to deliver them from Rome. Now they were asking Rome to deliver them from Jesus! They were using an unclean agency to do their unclean work. It was actually against their Jewish law to do what they were doing, so they had to go to the provision of the Gentile's law. That is how legalism is. It doesn't create holiness; rather it creates creative ways to circumvent the law so that one doesn't become “unclean.” As I wrote: What hypocrisy!

v. 2 – How could not paying taxes subvert the nation? If taxes were so critical to the survival of the Jewish nation, why did these same leaders hate their own tax collectors? This meant that the leaders saw Rome as their protector and not God, their supposed King. They weren't truly putting their trust in God, as they pretended, but rather in Caesar. They were really no different than their forefathers, who rejected God and chose a King.

But when they said, "Give us a king to lead us," this displeased Samuel; so he prayed to the LORD. And the LORD told him: "Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king. As they have done from the day I brought them up out of Egypt until this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are doing to you. Now listen to them; but warn them solemnly and let them know what the king who will reign over them will do" (1 Samuel 8:6-9).

It was a form of idolatry to reject God as King in favor of a human one. The leaders in Jesus' day were idolaters, yet they maintained that they had the best interest of the nation at heart. They did not. They were simply forsaking their God to serve other gods.

v. 3 – I am surprised that Jesus answered Pilate so quickly and directly. Jesus would not answer Herod and He was evasive with the Jews. But He answered Pilate's question without hesitation. Why? God is merciful and He was giving Pilate a chance to hear the truth. Herod and the Jews had rejected the truth, but now Pilate was being given a chance to respond. Remember, we are told in Matthew's gospel that Pilate's wife had a dream about Jesus and sent her husband a message not to have anything to do with what the Jews were plotting. He rejected that wisdom and instead is forever identified as the man who condemned Jesus to death (see Matthew 27:19).

Don't ever underestimate God's mercy (speaking to Pilate), but don't ever think He won't reach the limits of His patience (silence before Herod in the verses following).

Day Two

4 Then Pilate announced to the chief priests and the crowd, "I find no basis for a charge against this man." 5 But they insisted, "He stirs up the people all over Judea by his teaching. He started in Galilee and has come all the way here." 6 On hearing this, Pilate asked if the man was a Galilean. 7 When he learned that Jesus was under Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who was also in Jerusalem at that time.

v. 4 – It seems that Pilate was an astute judge of character but also a consummate politician. He didn't get to where he was in the Roman system by being a fool. He quickly recognized that Jesus was not a criminal; deluded perhaps, but not a criminal. So Pilate recommended that all charges be dropped against Jesus. But Pilate found that it isn't so easy to dismiss Jesus. Many still try that today. They come up with some simplistic label or definition that will hopefully make Jesus non-threatening to their way of life.

But once Jesus comes into anyone's life, that life is changed forever. Pilate hoped to dismiss Jesus and move on with Rome's business. That wasn't possible. No one is ever the same when Jesus comes into their life. They must make a decision about who He is, but He can never be ignored or dismissed.

Even governments must make a decision about Jesus. Here Rome had its first chance among many to bow down to the King of kings.

vs. 5&6 – Then Pilate received a new piece of information. Jesus was from Galilee. That meant that Pilate could send Jesus to Herod for questioning; in that way, he was hoping to get Jesus out of his world. First Pilate labeled Jesus a misguided spiritual leader. Now he categorized Him a Galilean, which placed Him under Herod's jurisdiction.

The Jews found that the charge of sedition did not move Pilate, so they changed the charge to "disturbing the peace." And that accusation was quite correct. Jesus always disrupts the status quo when He arrives. He said so Himself:

"Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. 35 For I have come to turn "a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—a man's enemies will be the members of his own household"" (Matthew 10:34-36).

v. 7 – Pilate sent Jesus to Herod, who was also in Jerusalem for the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Pilate was just being a good politician, hoping that this would be the last he would see of this Galilean. And we once again see Herod, son of Herod the Great, who tried to have Jesus killed while still a baby. This particular Herod was Herod Antipas, who had John the Baptist beheaded.

Day Tbree

8 When Herod saw Jesus, he was greatly pleased, because for a long time he had been wanting to see him. From what he had heard about him, he hoped to see him perform some miracle. 9 He plied him with many questions, but Jesus gave him no answer. 10 The chief priests and the teachers of the law were standing there, vehemently accusing him. 11 Then Herod and his soldiers ridiculed and mocked him. Dressing him in an elegant robe, they sent him back to Pilate. 12 That day Herod and Pilate became friends—before this they had been enemies.

v. 8 – There was something about the spiritual that intrigued Herod. Remember, the Herod family was part Jewish, so there was some cultural awareness of the Law and Jewish customs. Mark wrote about Herod's fascination with John the Baptist:

For Herod himself had given orders to have John arrested, and he had him bound and put in prison. He did this because of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, whom he had married. For John had been saying to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." So Herodias nursed a grudge against John and wanted to kill him. But she was not able to, because Herod feared John and protected him, knowing him to be a righteous and holy man. When Herod heard John, he was greatly puzzled; yet he liked to listen to him (Mark 6:17-20).

Now Herod got his wish of seeing Jesus. But his fascination with Jesus was focused on the supernatural, and Herod hoped to see Jesus perform some miracle—like some circus animal on performance.

v. 9 – Jesus had nothing to say to Herod. It is interesting that John the Baptist had much to say to him, but that was the last time that God would reach out to Herod. When Herod allowed himself to be manipulated into killing John, God was finished with Herod's house. God had sent His greatest Old Testament prophet—John—and Herod had him killed. Now there was nothing left to say. Even though Herod peppered Jesus with questions, Jesus had nothing to say in reply.

There are some who enjoy listening to spiritual things. They are puzzled, but it somehow makes them feel better. So it was with Herod. Perhaps it was part of his Jewish heritage or maybe it was superstitious.

v. 10 – The Jewish leaders stood close by while Jesus stood before Herod. Instead of confronting Herod for crimes he actually committed, these leaders sought to accuse Jesus of things that He never committed. This is how blind and deluded these leaders were. They were standing before a corrupt human institution and said nothing about it. They were in the company of the Son of God and accused Him of all manner of evil. That is the nature of spiritual delusion. One cannot distinguish between the real and unreal, between personal opinion and thoughts of God.

v. 11 – Herod's true colors finally came through. He and his men mocked Jesus. Since Jesus would not perform for them, they treated Him with contempt. That is how many treat God. When He won't do what they want in the way they want, they mock and ridicule God. God is not here to serve man, but man is here to serve God.

I have been guilty of doing what Herod did. There were times I wanted God to do what I wanted Him to do and when He did not, I got angry with Him. Have you ever done that? Doing that now?

v. 12 – It is interesting how some causes can bring people together who had not gotten along previously. I suppose there are two choices that men have—either unite with God or against God. Herod and Pilate united against God, and Jesus was the source of their union. Even though Pilate and Herod were from different worlds, they became friends because of their treatment of Jesus. Herod completed his mocking by dressing Jesus in an elegant robe and sent Him back to Pilate. Herod had little authority and was a figurehead the Romans used to help keep peace in Palestine. Now Jesus was back in Pilate's hands.

Day Four

13 Pilate called together the chief priests, the rulers and the people, 14 and said to them, "You brought me this man as one who was inciting the people to rebellion. I have examined him in your presence and have found no basis for your charges against him. 15 Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us; as you can see, he has done nothing to deserve death. 16 Therefore, I will punish him and then release him."

vs. 13&14 – Pilate thought he could reason with the chief priests and rulers so he sent for them. Pilate pronounced Jesus innocent. Jesus wasn't just faultless in the sight of God. Even the Roman government examined and found Jesus innocent! Yet the Jewish law condemned Jesus as a dangerous man deserving death. Do you see what the Law had become? It was no longer a means to God but a code of conduct given by God that was now judging the very God who had instituted it. And that code found God, its source, guilty and deserving of death!

v. 15 – Pilate assumed that reason would show the crowd the folly of their way. It did not. Religious things seldom follow logic. Logical people will do otherwise illogical things when it comes to their “religious beliefs.” I have prayed often, “Lord, don’t let me be Your protector. You can protect Yourself. Lord, keep me from deception and weirdness. And finally Lord, don’t let me assume I am doing things for you when I am really following the deception of my own heart.” Will you join me in that prayer?

v. 16 – Pilate hoped that he could punish Jesus, thus satisfying the crowd’s desire for something bad to happen to Jesus. But the non-religious mind doesn’t understand the religious mind or motivations. Pilate was trying to be reasonable, yet make some concession to the cry of the crowd. So Pilate was willing to punish an innocent man, which was a frivolous and cowardly use of power. Rome wanted Pilate to keep peace in Palestine and Pilate was willing to treat Jesus unfairly in order to keep that peace. He was about to find out that you cannot compromise what you know to be true in the interests of pleasing a crowd.

It is also of note that Jesus had no rights in this case. When Paul was mistreated by Roman authorities (see Acts 22:25-30), Paul could appeal to them because Paul was a Roman citizen. Jesus had no rights before Rome and therefore had to entrust Himself to the Father, who was the source of all justice. There may be a time when we have to do the same thing—trust the Lord while we are being mistreated by human institutions, whether secular or religious. How should we act when this happens?

But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly (1 Peter 2:20-24).

Remember, if you are being treated unfairly, you still must follow Jesus and His example. Perhaps you are suffering now at the hands of some authority on the job or in society who is mistreating you. If so, then study Jesus and do what He did.

Day Five

18 With one voice they cried out, "Away with this man! Release Barabbas to us!"
19 (Barabbas had been thrown into prison for an insurrection in the city, and for murder.)
20 Wanting to release Jesus, Pilate appealed to them again.
21 But they kept shouting, "Crucify him! Crucify him!"
22 For the third time he spoke to them: "Why? What crime has this man committed? I have found in him no grounds for the death penalty. Therefore I will have him punished and then release him."
23 But with loud shouts they insistently demanded that he be crucified, and their shouts prevailed.
24 So Pilate decided to grant their demand.

25 He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, the one they asked for, and surrendered Jesus to their will.

vs. 18&19 – The Jews preferred a rebel and murderer to Jesus. What a statement this made. Those who kept and perfected the Law chose a lawless one instead of the King of the Law. The Jews were not interested in justice or they would have released the Just One. What an insult to God! What an affront to His holiness! But unrighteous men always do unrighteous things. You can never expect holy behavior from an unholy person, even if that person is in leadership.

v. 20 – You must give Pilate credit; he tried hard to release Jesus. But the Jews would have nothing to do with that.

v. 21 – The Jews' request was direct and to the point. They wanted Pilate to kill Jesus by crucifying Him.

v. 22 – Pilate tried to reason with the Jews but he could not overcome their hatred and jealousy. They wanted Jesus dead, even though there were no grounds for such treatment.

v. 23 – Their shouts prevailed. Pilate had to keep the peace or answer for a disturbance in the city. It is a sad state of affairs when leaders cannot lead because they are afraid of the people. It is interesting that Caesar was a dictator, yet the voice of the people prevailed. Yet it wasn't really the voice of the people, but rather of a small band of leaders and their mob.

vs. 24&25 – Pilate surrendered Jesus to their will, which meant that Jesus received the death sentence. An innocent man was about to be killed, but it was all in the plan of God.

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21).

What happened to Jesus was for our benefit. Jesus' focus wasn't on us, Pilate or the Jews at this point. His focus was on the Father. What He did, He did for the Father and we were the beneficiaries. Oh thank you, Jesus! Thank you that you willingly died on the cross, becoming sin so that I could be righteous before God.

Day Six

26 As they led him away, they seized Simon from Cyrene, who was on his way in from the country, and put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus. 27 A large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wailed for him. 28 Jesus turned and said to them, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. 29 For the time will come when you will say, 'Blessed are the barren women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!' 30 Then "they will say to the mountains,

"Fall on us!" and to the hills, "Cover us!" ' 31 For if men do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?"

v. 26 – No one can be seized to carry their cross. It must be a voluntary decision. When Jesus talked about bearing your cross daily, this is what He was referring to.

Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels" (Mark 8:34-38).

My "cross" is working with the Church. I would much prefer to work with corporations, but Jesus has always wanted me to pick up my cross and work where He wants me to work. But my cross is never denying my purpose, nor would my cross involve doing something that isn't according to who God made me to be. I have chosen to fulfill my purpose in the sphere that Jesus has chosen and I will do it daily and follow Him. What is your cross, do you know?

v. 27 – Word must have spread when it became light and a number of sympathizers now identified with Jesus on His road of suffering. When you decide to follow Jesus, it is for times of suffering as well as blessing. Are you suffering for Him? I'm not talking about suffering for your stupid decisions, but for following Him? Are you following Jesus as He leads you on the road to personal crucifixion? If you are, don't be ashamed or discouraged! You are doing the will of God.

v. 28 – Jesus never attracted attention to Himself, nor did He require that He was the center of attention. Jesus is suffering an agonizing death, and many are wailing for Him, identifying with His pain and suffering. Yet He deflects their attention and sympathy and focuses them on what is yet to come as a result of what they were doing to Him. Leaders must constantly work to keep themselves from being the center of attention, even when their ministry requires that they be in the spotlight.

vs. 29&30 – Jesus was referring to the fall of Jerusalem that would take place about 35 years later. And the fall of Jerusalem was a terrible time for everyone who didn't know or follow Jesus. Rome would come and surround Jerusalem and starve its inhabitants. It would be so bad that the people would wish for death, but it would not come soon enough.

v. 31 – The Jews were treating Jesus as they were, and times were relatively good. But He asked what they would do when things were bad. Desperate times would bring out the worst in anyone, but Jesus brought out the worst in some. That is how wicked they were.

Day Seven

32 Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. 33 When they came to the place called the Skull, there they crucified him, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left. 34 Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.

v. 32 – I had a friend who spent some time in prison. He said that the worst thing about prison wasn't the living conditions, but who you were living with! Jesus wasn't just humiliated and crucified, He was crucified with other criminals. Not only did the Jews choose Barabbas instead of Jesus, they identified Him as a criminal who was worthy to die with His fellow criminals. Good grief! Jesus' death was totally and completely humiliating. He was absolutely dishonored and debased. As Isaiah wrote:

He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away. And who can speak of his descendants? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was stricken. He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth. Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand. After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light [of life] and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities. Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors (Isaiah 53:7-12).

v. 33 – Take some time today to reflect and meditate on what Jesus death means to you. Do you realize how much God loves you? What He did for you? What you are doing with the life that His death provided for you? Are you making the most of this life for Him? Are you fulfilling your purpose?

v. 34 – The soldiers set up a gambling ring around Jesus cross to see who would get His garments. How callous! Yet while everyone was doing their business, Jesus was doing His. One group was yelling at Him to prove He was the Son of God. Another was mocking Him. Still another was gambling for His clothes. But Jesus was doing the Father's business and expressed His forgiveness toward those who were murdering Him. What compassion! What grace!

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Is there anyone you need to forgive today? Perhaps they are doing something in your life that God will use for His glory; therefore they don't really see or understand what they are doing. But it is important that you understand that God is in control and using their ignorance to produce His will in your life.

If Jesus can forgive His torturers and mockers, then you can forgive yours as well. Follow Jesus today and forgive. Pick up your cross and carry it to the place that He has assigned for you. What does it mean for you to follow Jesus at this point in your life? How can you do this, with God's help, in such a way that will bring glory to Him and His purpose in your life?