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Theme: Jesus didn't die as a guilty man but as an innocent lamb and he saves those who turn to him.

“For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God...For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles” (1 Cor. 1:18, 22-23).

**I. The Trial of Christ (22:63 – 23:25).**

Jesus faced six examinations between his evening arrest and morning sentence:

- An inquiry before Annas (John 18:13) - “high priest emeritus”
- An evening meeting with Caiaphas, the high priest, presiding (Mark 14:55-64; Matt. 26:59-66).
- A morning confirmation before an official Jewish body, probably the Sanhedrin (Mark 15:1a; Matt. 27:1; Luke 22:66-71).
- An initial meeting with Pilate (Mark 15:1b-5; Matt. 27:2, 11-14; Luke 23:1-5; John 18:29-38).
- A meeting with Herod (Luke 23:6-12).
- A second, more public meeting before Pilate and the people (Luke 22:13-23; Matt. 27:15-23; Mark 15:6-14; John 18:39-40).

**Jesus is Mocked (22:63-65).**

- He gets no respect and it won't be the last time (23:11, 36).
- Their mocking recalls Jesus' prediction (18:32-33) and OT texts (Isa. 50:6; 53:3).

**Jesus before the Jewish Leadership (22:66-71).**

- Are you the Christ? To call Jesus the Messiah is to confess his rule.
  - Jesus' reply: it's useless to answer because they've already made up their minds.
- Are you the Son of Man at the Father's side?
  - This reminds us of the promises that one will sit on David's throne (2 Sam. 7).
  - “Though Jesus is before the council as an arrested man, it is he who will sit at God's side. He—not the council—will be the judge” (Bock, 1797).
  - The charge of blasphemy: a human seated by God diminishes his stature. But, if Jesus is able to sit at God's side, then this raises implications about his nature as a person.
  - Jesus replies with a mild affirmation. He goes to the cross by his own words. These words bring death because they are not properly perceived (Bock, 1803).
- Resolution: The leaders can now go to Rome with adequate grounds to have him killed while at the same time denying ultimate responsibility for the death (Bock, 1803).

**Jesus before Pilate (Luke 23:1-5).**

- Pilate is the major Roman administrator of the region. Rome must get involved if Jesus is going to die.
- Are you the King of the Jews?
  - Misleading the nation: Jesus disturbs the peace as a religious agitator.
  - Forbids taxes to Caesar: this is false (Luke 20:25). This charge means that Jesus brings financial risk to Rome and Pilate. It directly threatens Pilate.
  - Jesus claims to be an Anointed One, a King. This potentially paints Jesus as a revolutionary. Jesus accepted the title but not in the revolutionary sense that the Jews suggest.

- Pilate declares Jesus' innocence (23:4, 14-15, 20, 22). All the proceedings are unjust. The trial is a sham. Jewish laws for trials were even violated:
  - The proceedings were supposed to take place in the temple, not the high priest's home.
  - He was tried without a defense.
  - The verdict came in the space of one day, when two days were required for a capital offense.
  - He was tried on a feast day.
  - Contradictory testimony nullifies evidence.
- Pilate ultimately passes the buck on to someone else, especially since this is an internal Jewish matter. Justice should mean release but Jesus continues to be tried and mocked.

### **Jesus before Herod (Luke 23:6-12).**

- Jesus' silence demonstrates exceptional self-control. He is treated like a criminal but doesn't act like one.
- Herod with the soldiers mock Jesus and cloth him with splendid clothing: this shames Jesus' claim to be a king.
- Later, Pilate notes that Herod found Jesus innocent.

### **Jesus before Pilate again and the People (Luke 22:13-23).**

- Pilate reveals his and Herod's judgments: Jesus is innocent. The point of this passage is to reveal how Jesus, though innocent, was convicted.
- All the evidence suggests that Jesus should be released (23:16).
- Both Rome and Jerusalem could have stopped the march to death yet they fail to do so. "Other forces are at work, and justice is suspended" (Bock, 1815).
- Pilate offers a compromise: he will whip Jesus before releasing him.
  - "Now at the feast the governor was accustomed to release for the crowd any one prisoner whom they wanted" (Matt. 27:15; minimal evidence for inclusion of Luke 23:17).
  - The irony in this passage is that Barabbas ("son of the father") is released while the Son goes to death. The Jews freed the wrong son.
  - "Barabbas is the equivalent of a modern-day insurrectionist and terrorist, yet the crowd would rather free this sinner than the Jewish teacher" (Bock, 1829).
  - Matt. 27:16 calls him a "notorious prisoner."
  - "Jesus suffers on behalf of Barabbas and thus pictures how he sets sinful captives free" (Bock, 1829).
- Pilate offers a compromise again (23:22).
- In the end, politics and public relations with the masses wins over justice. He decided that one death was better than mass violence. He washes his hands clean and the people accept responsibility (Matt. 27:24-26). The crowd demands crucifixion:
 

Cicero condemned crucifixion as "a most cruel and disgusting punishment" saying "To bind a Roman citizen is a crime, to flog him is an abomination, to kill him is almost an act of murder: to crucify him is - What? There is no fitting word that can possibly describe so horrible a deed" (Stott, quoting Cicero in *The Cross of Christ*, 24).

  - It involved four steps:
    - The criminal had to carry the crossbeam (the main stake was already in the ground at the crucifixion site).
    - The criminal would be bound to the crossbeam on the ground by rope or nails (at least his hands were nailed, but his feet may have been tied: John 20:25; Col. 2:14).

- The beam would be raised and fastened to the upright pole or it was dropped into a slot at the top of the beam.
- A tablet describing the crime was hung around the accused to publicly declare the crime.
- Death came by suffocation through exhaustion or by loss of blood and fluids.

### **Who killed Jesus?**

#### **1. The Roman Soldiers and Pilate**

- Pilate wanted to avoid sentencing Jesus and at the same time avoid exonerating him. In the end, he made a cowardly decision of great injustice.
- “It is easy to condemn Pilate and overlook our own equally devious behavior. Anxious to avoid the pain of a whole-hearted commitment to Christ, we too search for convenient subterfuges. We either leave the decision to somebody else, or opt for a half-hearted compromise, or seek to honour Jesus for the wrong reason, or even make a public affirmation of loyalty while at the same time denying him in our hearts” (Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 51).

#### **2. The Jewish People and their Priests**

“Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know—<sup>23</sup> this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. <sup>24</sup> God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. (Acts 2:22-24, ESV; also 3:12-16)

- It was envy that led them to hand over Jesus to Pilate to be destroyed. They felt threatened by Jesus and his authority.
- “The same evil passion influences our own contemporary attitudes to Jesus... We resent his intrusions into our privacy, his demand for our homage, his expectation of our obedience... So we too perceive him as a threatening rival, who disturbs our peace, upsets our *status quo*, undermines our authority and diminishes our self-respect. We want to get rid of him” (Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 54).

#### **3. Their sin and Ours**

“And we must answer, ‘Yes, we were there.’ Not as spectators only but as participants, guilty participants, plotting, scheming, betraying, bargaining, and handing him over to be crucified. We may try to wash our hands of responsibility like Pilate. But our attempt will be as futile as his. For there is blood on our hands... Indeed, ‘only the man who is prepared to own his share in the guilt of the cross’, wrote Canon Peter Green, ‘may claim his share in its grace’” (Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 59-60).

### **II. The Death of Christ (23:26-49).**

#### **Simon of Cyrene (26).**

- Simon carrying the cross draws humanity into Jesus’ death.

#### **Conversation with the Women (27-31).**

- The women lament for the wrong person.
- Jesus is suggesting that the nation is headed for difficult times.

- Creation will be turned upside down...Barrenness used to be a curse but now it is a blessing. The suffering will be so great that it will be better to have no family. It will be so great that people will desire to end their life. He then mentions a lesser-to-greater argument: “if this is what happens to a living tree, what might happen to a dead one?” (Bock, 1847). It is easier to burn dry wood than lush, moisture-filled wood. If God doesn’t spare Jesus, how much more will Israel not be spared.

### **Details of the Crucifixion (32:38)**

- This fulfills the prediction of Luke 22:37 (Isa. 53:12). Jesus is killed with criminals at his side.
- The location: Golgotha - the place of the skull.
- The soldiers gamble for Jesus’ garments (Ps. 22:18). He dies in shame and unclothed. It is a humiliating death.
- They offer him wine to prolong his suffering.

### **Jesus’ death serves as an example for Christlikeness:**

- **Love**

“But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either. (Luke 6:27-29).

“This is my commandment that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:12-13).

“Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her” (Eph. 5:25).

- **Suffering**

“For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed” (1 Pet. 2:21-24).

- **Service**

“For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45).

- **Humility**

“Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Phil. 2:3-8).

- **Endurance**

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb. 12:1-3).

### **The Two Criminals (39-43)**

- Apparent contradiction (Matt. 27:44/Mark 15:32)? No.
- Both revile Jesus at the beginning but the second is later impressed.
- How can this criminal be in paradise today?
  - Creation: God dwells with man in the Garden.
  - Fall: Man is separated from God. Yet, there is hope...

- Gen. 3:15 - a promised offspring
- Gen. 3:21 - God covers them with animal skin (a sacrifice).
- Abraham offers Isaac (Gen. 22:8, 14: God will provide a lamb...)
- The Exodus: the 10<sup>th</sup> plague, the death of the firstborn son
  - Cover the doorpost with the blood from an unblemished lamb.
- The Law: the tabernacle and sacrifices
  - Sin offering and the Scapegoat (Lev. 16).
- Jesus brings us to God by removing our sin by his blood.

### **Why did Jesus Die?**

- Forgiven
  - “In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace” (Eph. 1:7).
- Justified
  - “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith” (Rom. 3:23-25).
  - For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:21).
- Saved from Judgment
  - “Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God” (Rom. 5:9).
- Redeemed and Freed from Slavery to Sin
  - “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal. 2:20).
  - “We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin” (Rom. 6:6-7).
- Reconciliation
  - “For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation” (Rom. 5:10-11).
  - “And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death” (Col. 1:21-22).
  - “For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God” (1 Pet. 3:18).
- Access to the Father
  - “Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water” (Heb. 10:19-22).

**Details of his Death (44-49).**

- It began at 9am (Mark 15:25). Darkness fell and lasted from noon to 3pm.
- “The heavenly testimony combines with the ripping of the temple curtain to give a twofold sign from creation that Jesus’ death is important in God’s plan” (Bock, 1859).
- The veil: “It is slightly more likely that the outer curtain is meant, since the other signs associated with Jesus’ death are so public” (Bock, 1860).
  - Jesus’ death represents the ultimate opening up of the way of God. God is accessible to people.

**Respond:**

- The different reactions to his death (watching, sneering, mocking, confessing, mourning, blaspheming). Pilate, Herod, the Jews, Simon, the women, the criminals, the centurion. The reader cannot be neutral. Where do you stand?
- Jesus didn’t die as a guilty man but as an innocent lamb and he saves those who turn to him.
- A call to Jesus yields immediate results.