

The Crucifixion of Jesus

by John F. Walvoord

The sermon explores the profound events surrounding the crucifixion of Jesus, emphasizing His innocence, the fulfillment of prophecy, and the significance of His sacrificial death for humanity's redemption.

Scripture: Psalm 22:18, Isaiah 52:14, Matthew 27:11-66, John 19:30, Hebrews 10:19

Topics: "The Cross", "Gods Will"

Description

John F. Walvoord preaches on the trials of Jesus before Pilate, highlighting the illegal trials conducted by the chief priests and elders, the remorse of Judas Iscariot, and the intense pressure Pilate faced in making a judgment on Jesus. The sermon delves into the mockery and abuse Jesus endured, His crucifixion, death on the cross, and burial, emphasizing His submission to God's will and the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies through these events.

Transcript

Jesus Delivered to Pilate, 27:1-2

No doubt realizing that the trials before Annas and Caiaphas in the night were illegal both in the way they were conducted and in their outcome, the chief priests and elders reviewed their case against Jesus at a meeting held the next morning. Mention of this is made in the other gospels (Mk 15:1; Lk 23:1; Jn 18:28). The problem was not only the illegality of the trial, but the fact that the Jews did not have the authority to put Jesus to death. This could only be done by an order from a Roman ruler. Accordingly, at the close of this third trial before a Jewish authority, Jesus was bound and led away to be delivered to Pontius Pilate, the governor, for the first of the three trials before Roman rulers. Before proceeding with the account of the trial of Christ, Matthew records the remorse of Judas.

Judas Repents Too Late, 27:3-10

The sad end of Judas Iscariot, recorded only in Matthew in the gospels, is mentioned by Luke in Acts 1:16-19 in connection with the election of Matthias as his successor. According to Matthew's account, when Judas found that Jesus had been condemned to die, he repented of his act and attempted to return the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders. Apparently, Judas had not believed that the arrest of Jesus would lead to His condemnation, or perhaps he was confronted now with his wicked betrayal of Jesus. In his conversations with the chief priests he said, "I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood" (27:4). While his feelings concerning the claim of Jesus to be the Messiah may still

have been mixed with unbelief, he knew that Jesus was not worthy of death. The priests, however, were quite unconcerned and threw the problem back at him. This encounter with the chief priests and elders may have been before Caiaphas' palace, as Lenski suggests.¹⁵⁶

Upon being spurned by them, however, Judas went to the temple and hurled the silver into the sanctuary (Gr. naos), meaning the entrance to the holy place. He then went out and hanged himself. Acts 1:18-19 describes the horrible deed in detail. The chief priests, confronted with what to do with this blood money, decided it could not be put in the treasury but could be used to buy a potter's field in which to bury strangers. This they did; and according to Matthew, the field became known as "The field of blood," or, as Acts 1:19 calls it, "Aceldama." The whole transaction reflected on the one hand the casuistry of the Pharisees and their indifference to their crime, and on the other hand, the despair of Judas, for whom there seems to have been no road to forgiveness, even though he had remorse.

Matthew notes that this was a fulfillment of "that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him that was valued, whom they of the children of Israel did value; And gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord appointed me" (27:9-10). The reference to this as a quotation from Jeremiah has caused difficulty to expositors, as it is actually a quotation of Zechariah 11:12-13. How can this apparent discrepancy be explained?

Probably the best explanation is that the third section of the Old Testament began with the book of Jeremiah and included all that followed. Just as the first section was called the law, after the first five books, and the second section was called the psalms, although other books were included, so the third part began with Jeremiah, and the reference is related to this section of the Old Testament rather than to the book of Jeremiah. The references sometimes cited in Jeremiah, such as 18:2-12 and 19:1-15, do not correspond sufficiently to justify the quotation.¹⁵⁷

In Zechariah 11:12-13, the thirty pieces of silver are paid to dispose of Israel's shepherd. In Matthew, the actual fulfillment is found in that the price was paid to dispose of Jesus, the true Shepherd of Israel. Obviously, Matthew is referring to the idea in Zechariah rather than to the precise wording.

Trial Before Pilate, 27:11-26

The other gospels, in their description of the trial before Pilate, include some details not given by Matthew (cf. Mk 15:2-15; Lk 23:2-25; Jn 18:28-19:16). As Luke 23:6-12 indicates, Pilate, after a preliminary hearing of the case and on learning that Jesus was of Galilee, as a friendly gesture, sent Him to Herod, who was in Jerusalem at the time. Herod, after encountering complete silence from Jesus, sent Him back to Pilate to be judged. Jesus had three Roman trials, first before Pilate, then before Herod, and then again before Pilate. Matthew, Mark, and John combine the two trials before Pilate.

According to Luke 23:1-2, the trial began with various accusations being leveled against Jesus, including that He perverted the nation, forbade to give tribute to Caesar, and claimed that He was a king. It is at this point that Matthew begins his record because of the special interest in the gospel of Matthew in Jesus Christ as King.

Pilate asked Jesus, according to Matthew 27:11, "Art thou the King of the Jews?" Jesus replied, "Thou sayest," in other words, affirming that it was true. The full conversation between Jesus and Pilate is recorded in John 18:33-38. From John's account, it is evident that Pilate explored fully the possibility that Jesus was a king who might threaten his rule and satisfied his mind that there was nothing to the charge.

His conversation with Jesus ended up with the philosophical question, "What is truth?" According to John 18:38, Pilate at this time declared Jesus innocent in the words, "I find in him no fault at all."

After Jesus was pronounced innocent, the chief priests and scribes renewed their vehement accusations, in reply to which Jesus was completely silent. As Lenski points out, this is the second important silence of Christ, the first being in Matthew 26:63 and the third in John 19:9.¹⁵⁸ Pilate marveled that Christ could keep silent under the circumstances. The fact is that after Pilate pronounced Him innocent, Jesus was under no obligation to answer the Jews further; and, if more investigation was required, it was up to Pilate to reverse his former judgment and continue the examination. It was in the course of further accusation by the chief priests and the scribes that Pilate learned that Jesus was from Galilee and used this as an occasion to refer the whole matter to Herod.

When Jesus was later sent by Herod back to Pilate, a plan occurred to Pilate to get out of his problem. According to Matthew 27:15, it had been the custom for many years to release a prisoner whom the people would choose on the occasion of the feast. Pilate picked the worst possible prisoner, Barabbas, who, according to Mark 15:7, was guilty of insurrection and murder. (There is an interesting play on words here, as Barabbas means "son of the father." Barabbas was released instead of Jesus who was the true Son of the Father.) Pilate, assured that Jesus was popular with the people and that the plot against Him was connived by the Jewish leaders, thought the people would choose Jesus rather than Barabbas and thus relieve him of the problem of making a final judgment. Matthew 27:18 notes that Pilate knew that the chief priests had delivered Jesus to him because of envy.

While in the process of discussing this, the wife of Pilate sent him a message which said, "Have thou nothing to do with that just man: for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him" (v. 19). There has been much speculation as to who Pilate's wife was and what the background of this incident could have been. The simplest explanation is that she had such a dramatic dream that she felt compelled to share it with her husband, with whom, no doubt, she had discussed Jesus on previous occasions. As Tasker points out, Pilate's wife was concerned at the possibility of an innocent man of prophetic character being killed unjustly.¹⁵⁹

Meanwhile, however, the chief priests and elders had been busy persuading the people to ask for Barabbas and to request that Jesus be killed. To Pilate's amazement, when the question was posed to the people, they asked for Barabbas to be released. In his astonishment, he asked, "What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ?" He hoped for a punishment short of death. They replied, "Let him be crucified" (v. 22).

Pilate was now occupied not only with the justice in the case but how he could reasonably sentence a man who had not been convicted of any real crime. Accordingly, he asked again, "Why, what evil hath he done?" But the people cried all the more, "Let him be crucified." Unquestionably, they were influenced by the chief priests and elders.

Pilate, then, under great pressure lest there be an insurrection against him which would be damaging to his reputation, publicly took water and washed his hands before the multitude saying, "I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it." Remarkably, in the same chapter, Jesus is pronounced innocent both by Judas and by Pilate (vv. 4, 24). The people recklessly responded, "His blood be on us, and on our children." How tragically these words seem to have been fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem and the slaughter of several hundred thousand Israelites on that occasion.

Having reversed his earlier judgment that Jesus was innocent, Pilate now released Barabbas, scourged Jesus, and delivered Him to be crucified.

Jesus Mocked and Scourged, 27:27-32

According to Matthew and Mark, Jesus was taken by the soldiers into the common hall, the praetorium, which was thronged with Roman soldiers. There, they stripped Him and mocked Him by putting on Him a purple robe and a crown of thorns. The indignities included being spit upon and being repeatedly beaten on the head. A parallel account is given in Mark 15:16-20, but Luke says only that Pilate delivered Jesus "to their will" (Lk 23:25). The fullest account is found in John 19:1-16, where the actual order of events which took place is given.

Putting the accounts together, it seems that Pilate himself observed and supervised this abuse of Jesus. His motivation was to degrade Him and to make His claim as a King of the Jews to be ridiculous. It is probable that Pilate hoped by this means to get off without actually having to order the crucifixion of Jesus. While Matthew introduces this idea of crucifixion in 27:26, John 19:16 makes clear that the order for crucifixion came at the end of the mockery rather than at the beginning. Matthew is simply recording the facts without necessarily giving the order of events.

That Jesus was submissive to this entire procedure is the measure of His total submission to the will of God. Here, the Lord of glory, capable of destroying anyone who put a hand upon Him, allowed Himself to be abused in this painful and humiliating way. Although the Scriptures are graphic, even they state only the essentials. The prophet Isaiah anticipated this when he stated in Isaiah 52:14, "His visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men." Jesus was beaten about the head and the body until He was almost unrecognizable.

Few incidents in history more clearly illustrate the brutality in the desperately wicked heart of man than that which was inflicted on Jesus the Son of God. The mockery of the crown of thorns, painful as well as humiliating, His being stripped naked in front of the large crowd; the mockery of the purple robe, intended to represent a kingly garment; His being spit upon and beaten over the head repeatedly as well as the mocking worship testified to the unbelief and sordidness of the actors in this situation. It was only after enduring all of this in complete silence, except for the conversation between Christ and Pilate recorded in John 19:8-11, that Jesus was finally led away to the crucifixion.

As the custom was, the accused had to bear His own cross. Luke 23:26-32 records some of the incidents that occurred on the way to Golgotha. Because of Christ's suffering, He was too weak to carry the cross Himself; and Simon of Cyrene, who is identified in Mark 15:21 as the father of Alexander and Rufus, was forced to carry the cross for Jesus. Some believe he was black, not of Jewish background. The hour had come for the Lamb of God to die for the sins of the whole world.

Jesus Crucified, 27:33-44

The account of Matthew and the parallel accounts in the other gospels (Mk 15:22-32; Lk 23:33-43; Jn 19:17-24) need to be combined to give the full account of the incidents that occurred at the crucifixion leading up to His death. The order of events seems to be as follows:

1. The arrival at Golgotha (Mt 27:33; Mk 15:22; Lk 23:33; Jn 19:17)
2. The offer of the wine mingled with gall (Mt 27:34; Mk 15:23)

3. The act of crucifixion between the two thieves (Mt 27:35-38; Mk 15:24-28; Lk 23:33-38; 19:18)
4. The first cry from the cross, "Father, forgive them" (Lk 23:34)
5. The soldiers taking the garments of Jesus, leaving Him naked on the cross (Mt 27:35; Mk 15:24; Lk 23:34; Jn 19:23)
6. The Jews mocking Jesus (Mt 27:39-43; Mk 15:29-32; Lk 23:35-37)
7. The conversation with the thieves (Mt 27:44; Mk 15:32; Lk 23:39-43)
8. The second cry from the cross with the words, "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise" (Lk 23:43)
9. The third cry, "Woman, behold thy son!" (Jn 19:26-27)
10. The darkness which overtakes the scene on Calvary (Mt 27:45; Mk 15:33; Lk 23:44)
11. The fourth cry, beginning, "My God, my God" (Mt 27:46-47; Mk 15:34-36)
12. The fifth cry, "I thirst" (Jn 19:28)
13. The sixth cry, "It is finished" (Jn 19:30)
14. The seventh cry, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit" (Lk 23:46)
15. The Lord dismissing His spirit by an act of His own will (Mt 27:50; Mk 15:37; Lk 23:46; Jn 19:30)

Matthew notes that Golgotha is "a place of a skull," which is what Golgotha means, apparently from the idea that the hill Calvary looked something like a human skull. The hill above the garden tomb discovered by Gordon has a skull-like appearance from the side. The top of the hill is now a Muslim cemetery, and there is a convenient tomb which is identified as the tomb of Jesus at the foot of the hill in the garden. Positive identification of this site, of course, is impossible today.¹⁶⁰

Matthew records Christ's refusal to drink the sour wine mingled with a drug, which would have tended to dull His senses and make the cross easier to bear. Matthew simply records His crucifixion 'without going into details, as the crude spikes were driven through His hands and His feet, and the entire cross was set up by being placed in a hole in the ground.

The soldiers took His garments, tearing them in four pieces so that each soldier could have a part, but they cast lots for the coat, which was a woven garment, as John 19:23-24 explains. Matthew regards this as a fulfillment of the prophecy of Psalm 22:18. Textual evidence seems to indicate that this was added to Matthew's gospel, but that in John 19:24, it is properly included.¹⁶¹ In any case, the prophecy was fulfilled.

The event of His crucifixion, as stated in Mark 15:25, reckoned according to Jewish time, was the third hour, or 9:00 a.m., or, as mentioned in John 19:14, the sixth hour, according to Roman time, actually meaning after 6:00 a.m., or early in the morning.

According to John 19:19, Pilate himself had ordered that the accusation made against Jesus should be nailed to His cross; and Matthew records this as, "THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS" (27:37). The wording in each gospel varies, and the title itself was written in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin (Jn 19:20).

Putting the accounts together, the full inscription was, "This is Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." All the accounts contain the phrase, "The King of the Jews," which was the substance of the accusation. Pilate intended this as a rebuke to the Jews, but at the same time it was a testimony to the person of Christ.

Mention is also made of the two thieves who were crucified on either side of Jesus. Only Luke 23:39-43 describes the conversion of one of the thieves. Matthew records the mocking of the crowd and the chief priests and scribes and elders, as they challenged Christ to come down from the cross, if He were indeed the Son of God who had said that He could destroy the temple and build it in three days.

How tragically true it was, as recorded in Matthew 27:42, "He saved others; himself he cannot save." It was not that He lacked power; it was because it was the will of the Father that He should die. The mockery accurately fulfilled the anticipation of Psalm 22:6-13. Tasker notes there were three classes of mockers: (1) "Ignorant sinners"; (2) "religious sinners"; (3) "condemned sinners."¹⁶² The tragedy was not that one was dying on the cross, but that the people beheld Him in hardness of heart and wickedness of unbelief.

Jesus Dies on the Cross, 27:45-56

The closing events of the life of Jesus as He died on the cross are recorded in all gospels (Mk 15:33-41; Lk 23:44-49; Jn 19:30-37). Matthew records that from the sixth hour, or noon in Jewish reckoning, there was darkness over the land until the ninth hour, or 3:00 p.m. This darkness seems to have begun after the third cry of Christ on the cross in which He put His mother, Mary, under the care of John (Jn 19:26-27). It was in this period of darkness that Jesus became the sin offering and, as such, was forsaken by God the Father. Matthew records the fourth cry of Jesus on the cross as being spoken in a loud voice: "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (27:46). Matthew's account uses the Hebrew for "My God," eli, but "lama sabachthani" is Aramaic, the spoken language of the Jews. Mark changes the Hebrew eli to eloi, which is Aramaic. The petition of Jesus is, of course, the quotation of Psalm 22:1, although the gospels do not mention it as a fulfillment.

The cry of Jesus has been variously interpreted, but it seems clear that God had judicially forsaken Jesus on the cross in contrast to the fact that He had strengthened Him in the garden of Gethsemane. Here Jesus was bearing the sins of the whole world, and even God the Father had to turn away as Jesus bore the curse and identified Himself with the sins of the whole world. When Jesus actually died, He commended Himself back into the Father's hands.

Those who heard Jesus utter this cry mistook the word eli for Elias, and thought that He was calling for Elijah. Matthew records that one of them took a sponge, filled it with sour wine, and put it on a reed, in order to bring it to the lips of Jesus, to enable Him to speak more clearly. The rest of the observers, however, said that he should let Jesus alone to see whether Elijah actually came to save Him. While they observed, according to Matthew, "Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost" (27:50). Luke 23:46 records that Jesus said: "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." John records simply that Jesus said, "It is finished" (Jn 19:30). Jesus had lived as no man has ever lived, and He died as no man ever died. Having completed His act of sacrifice, He dismissed His spirit by an act of His will. As He had stated earlier, in John 10:18, in regard to His life, "No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again."

At the moment of His death, a number of awesome things took place. An earthquake occurred, and the heaving ground brought fear to those who observed. According to Matthew 27:51, the heavy veil of the

temple, which separated the holy of holies from the holy place, was torn in two from the top to the bottom. As the divine commentary in Hebrews 10:19-22 signifies, the death of Jesus opened the way for ordinary believers to go into the holy of holies, where formerly only the Jewish high priests could go.

Although not immediately known to those who witnessed the scene of Christ's death, Matthew also records an event not mentioned elsewhere in the Bible: "And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared to many" (27:53). As a careful reading of this account reveals, the raising of the bodies of the saints, although mentioned here, actually occurred after the resurrection of Jesus. This event is nowhere explained in the Scriptures but seems to be a fulfillment of the feast of the first fruits of harvest mentioned in Leviticus 23:10-14. On that occasion, as a token of the coming harvest, the people would bring a handful of grain to the priest. The resurrection of these saints, occurring after Jesus Himself was raised, is a token of the coming harvest when all the saints will be raised.

The centurion, impressed by the darkness and the earthquake, although he probably was not informed of the tearing of the veil of the temple, according to the Scriptures, feared greatly, saying, "Truly this was the Son of God" (27:54). Although he had witnessed many executions, there never before had been one like this.

Matthew comments that many of the women who had followed Christ were beholding this from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee's children. No doubt, with the coming of evening and the knowledge that Christ had died, they went sorrowfully to their homes.

Burial of Jesus, 27:57-61

Ordinarily, there was little ceremony in connection with those crucified, and their bodies would be thrown into a shallow grave or even on a refuse heap. The problem of what to do with the body of Christ was quickly solved, however, by the intervention of Joseph of Arimathea. The account given in all four gospels (Mk 15:42-47; Lk 23:50-56; Jn 19:38-42) indicates that he was a wealthy and influential man, a member of the Sanhedrin (Lk 23:51), and one who had been secretly a disciple of Jesus (Jn 19:38). He went boldly in to Pilate, although this involved ceremonial defilement for a Jew during the feast, and requested the body of Jesus. Mark 15:44-45 records Pilate's surprise that Jesus was already dead, his inquiry from the centurion to verify the fact, and his permission to Joseph.

Matthew and the other gospels record the details of His burial. In the custom of the Jews, He was wrapped in clean linen cloth, and His body was placed in a new tomb hewn out of the rock. The stone door was rolled before the opening of the tomb, as they completed the act of burial. Matthew records that the two women, Mary Magdalene and "the other Mary," identified in Mark 15:47 as "mother of Joses," watched the burial. John 19:39-40 adds that Nicodemus, who first encountered Jesus in the incident recorded in John 3, participated in the burial, bringing myrrh and aloes of about one hundred pounds, the spices being used to saturate the linen cloths in which the body of Jesus was bound. John also records that the place of burial was in a garden.

The entire burial operation was done with some haste, because the Sabbath, which began at sundown, was already beginning (Mk 15:42; Lk 23:54; Jn 19:42). The Sabbath following the Passover had a special meaning, leading as it did to the seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread.

Sealing of the Tomb, 27:62-66

Only Matthew records the incident of the chief priests and Pharisees coming to Pilate the next day, which was Saturday, and requesting that the tomb be sealed to keep the disciples from stealing the body of Jesus and then claiming that He was risen from the dead. It is most interesting that the chief priests and Pharisees, who were unbelievers, remembered the prediction of Jesus that He would rise again after three days, while this truth does not seem to have penetrated the consciousness of the disciples in their sorrow. With Pilate's permission, the Jews sealed the stone, which had closed the tomb's door, and set a watch of soldiers to be sure there was no interference with the tomb.

The temple soldiers were not used for this purpose, as their jurisdiction was only the temple area. A regular detachment of Roman soldiers was sent to watch the tomb. Pilate had said to them, "Make it as sure as ye can," and so they did. Stealing the body of Jesus was an impossibility, but chief priests, and Pharisees, and all the power of the Roman government could not prevent Jesus rising from the grave. Their care in thus guarding the tomb only added to the certainty of the evidence when the resurrection took place.

156 R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel*, p. 1078.

157 *Ibid.*, pp. 1082-83.

158 *Ibid.*, p. 1085.

159 R. V. G. Tasker, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, p. 260.

160 Lenski, pp. 1105-6.

161 *Ibid.*, p. 1108; Tasker, p. 264.

162 Tasker, p. 265.

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