

Luke 23

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Examples of how Christians and non-believers are on trial for their eternal souls!

One question even the most pious Christian ponders is what's my eternal future going to be like? This chapter goes through the events leading up to Jesus' death and even what happened right after that with His body being put in a tomb. I realize we are on familiar ground here. I'd like everyone to think about those condemning Jesus and the fact everyone else is really on trial when others there think Jesus is the one being condemned! This chapter teaches about being a witness for Him in difficult circumstances. I realize almost none of us will receive as much torture and pain as what Jesus endured. What we gather here is how to be a witness for Jesus when our world is falling apart around us.

Again, the stories are familiar to most of us. In short, it is Jesus' three trials before Roman leaders. We get the story of a man "at random" picked to carry Jesus' cross. We get the story of the other two on the crosses next to Jesus, one who got saved and one who isn't. We get the story of a man named Barabass, who was set free as Jesus took His place. We get the scene of Jesus dying and a Roman Centurion who declared Jesus' innocent. We read of a few women who saw where Jesus was buried. We get a mention of a ruling Jewish leader who didn't consent to Jesus being condemned. We read of a few women who prepared spices to anoint Jesus' body! Chapter 23 can be summarized by those who wanted Jesus' dead and how those people were on trial far more than Him and those who believed in Him even with Jesus' dying. The moral is a reminder of why we're to use our lives as a witness for Him and the fact it's never about how good we are, but simply believing the fact Jesus is God and paid in full for our sins.

OK then time for details: Chapter 22 was mainly about Jesus' trials before the Jewish religious leaders. It included Jesus being arrested and the famous Peter's three denials. Chapter 23 mainly focuses on the three trials before the Roman leadership and Jesus' death and burial. On the surface, it seems like Jesus is the one on trial, but since God the Father ordained His death everyone else interacting with Jesus are the one's on trial for their souls. We'll read of a few saved people, but most people here get condemned simply by their interactions with Jesus. OK John, most of us know these stories which did occur 2,000 years ago. Why should I care if I'm saved? For starters it's a great reminder of our salvation is by faith alone. Studying this section reminds us of the consequences of turning against Jesus and a reminder of which people we know that we should be praying for!

The chapter begins with the religious leaders turning Jesus over to the local Roman rulers! The Jewish leaders knew Jesus was popular and they didn't want to be blamed for Jesus' death! Remember that the Jewish leaders cannot go to the Romans on "Jewish issues". So, they said Jesus is leading people not to pay taxes (a lie) and by claiming Jesus is a king and therefore a threat to Roman power! Pilate asked if Jesus was a king. (By the way lots of secular evidence Pilate was the governor there!) Even though the text states Jesus admitted He is the Jewish king, Pilate realized the Jewish leaders turned Jesus over out of jealousy and not that He was a threat to Rome! Pilate noted Jesus was from Herod's territory. They ruled different parts of Israel. Pilate thought, I can get out of this by "passing the buck" to Herod. (The same guy who had John the Baptist killed). That is why when the religious leaders were accusing Jesus before Herod, he wanted to see a miracle, but Jesus kept quiet. In effect, it was too late for Herod, and I would argue judgment on him already occurred. Since Herod could not get his "miracle show", he sent Jesus back to Pilate who said he could not find a reason to have Jesus killed!

The point for us is people dealing with Jesus should have done the right thing (freed Jesus). This is the "hour of darkness" ordained by God. It doesn't excuse bad behavior, but God allowed it to glorify Jesus in this situation. Sometimes evil rears its ugly head and we watch people suffer due to its existence!

So, we're back to Jesus and Pilate. He knows the religious leaders turned Him over due to jealousy. It is interesting to see how he tried to squirm his way out of it. The reason he wanted to punish Him after saying he was innocent was to try to pacify the crowd. Pilate also realized to keep his job he must deal with the local religious leaders, so he gave in to have Jesus killed. Again, we are seeing Pilate's trial for his eternal fate!

Next, we get what I call "The Gospel According to Barabas". This was a man convicted of murder. He was sentenced to be crucified, and I suspect Jesus' cross was meant for Barabas! The translation of the name Barabas means "Son of the Father". The religious leaders wanted to spare Barabas to show their hatred of Rome. Pilate agreed to get on with it! Barabas wasn't saved, but in effect Jesus' death set him free!

We now get to the crucifixion itself. The story includes a "man from the crowd" who was picked to be the cross bearer as Jesus was too weak from the beating. He's mentioned in one of the other Gospels as he and his sons became believers. The final speech Jesus gave on the way there, was to the women that were weeping (professional mourners and/or the women who knew Jesus)! His little speech was about the coming destruction of Israel about 40 years later. In effect it was Jesus final speech to believe what He's preached for 3 years as judgment on Israel is coming due to their failure to recognize His coming!

We then get the famous scene of one of the 2 men with Jesus being crucified asking Jesus to remember Him when He goes into the kingdom. This man, never baptized, simply trusted Jesus is God, and it led to his salvation! At 6pm that night Jesus died and the price for sin was paid. Jesus final word in Greek was "Tetelestai". It means "paid in full" referring to our debt for sin. That word is also the last word in the Greek translation of Psalm 22 which describes Jesus on the cross close to a 1,000 years earlier! All this took place while the women who followed Jesus watched the whole thing. The disciples feared for their lives and were hiding (except John).

The final bit of the chapter is about one of the religious leaders who voted "no" to Jesus' death, when it was the Jewish final vote before the Roman trial. He did not believe in the resurrection, but he put 100 pounds of fragrance on Jesus' dead body and placed it in the tomb he owned. That's a famous joke that goes, when Joseph (not Jesus' father, the guy who wanted Jesus body) asked Pilate for the body, Joseph said, it is no big deal, it's only for the weekend! The text also mentions that the women who ministered to Him when He was alive saw where Jesus' burial cave was located. That contradicts the argument of the disciples going to "the wrong cave" or Jesus simply fell asleep and recovered.

Whenever I hear the false argument that the Jewish people were the Christ killers, I'm reminded of that famous line by the late pastor Chuck Smith made in Israel about a quarter of a century ago: "You want to blame someone for Jesus' death, blame me (Chuck) as He died for my sins!" All of us will be judged for either accepting His sin payment or rejecting God's free gift of salvation. For the truly naïve, I trust God to judge people fairly. For believers, the question is what are we doing with our salvation? What's the key issue for us is about using our lives as witnesses for Him. None of us are perfect. That's not an acceptable excuse to waste the most precious thing He gives us, our time that we can use for His glory!

With that said, hope you like this study. I wrote a more detailed one some years back. If you want to read that, click on the link for the detailed study. It's still a joy to study this stuff and again I'm grateful for everyone who reads this.