

ST JOSEPH THE WORKER
ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH



LUKE 23

The Crucifixion

Crucifixion and Compassion: The Triumph of Redemption
In Luke 23, we encounter the depth of God's love for humanity, manifested in Jesus' crucifixion. Despite enduring grave injustice, mockery, and suffering, Jesus extends forgiveness, offers salvation, and entrusts Himself to the Father. This chapter encourages us to emulate Jesus' compassionate and trusting nature, reminding us of the triumph of divine love over human sinfulness and the hope of resurrection.

Trial Before Pilate (Luke 23:1-5)

Jesus is brought before Pilate, the Roman governor, accused of subverting the nation. Pilate finds no basis for the charges but sends Jesus to Herod upon learning that He is a Galilean.

Jesus and Barabbas (Luke 23:6-25)

Herod, finding no fault in Jesus, sends Him back to Pilate. Despite Pilate's efforts to release Jesus, the crowd demands the release of Barabbas, a criminal, and the crucifixion of Jesus.

Crucifixion at Golgotha (Luke 23:26-33)

Simon of Cyrene is forced to carry Jesus' cross to Golgotha, where Jesus is crucified between two criminals.

Jesus and the Two Criminals (Luke 23:34-43)

Despite the mockery and pain, Jesus prays, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." One criminal mocks Jesus, but the other recognizes Jesus' innocence and asks to be remembered in His kingdom. Jesus assures him of salvation that day.

Death and Burial of Jesus (Luke 23:44-56)

Jesus dies, declaring, "Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit." The centurion praises God, recognizing Jesus' righteousness. Joseph of Arimathea buries Jesus in a tomb.

Luke 23 is a deeply moving chapter that unfolds the climactic moments of Jesus' life on earth: His trials, crucifixion, death, and burial. As the narrative progresses, we witness not only the depths of human cruelty and injustice, but also the heights of divine love, mercy, and the promise of salvation.

Themes

Trial Before Pilate: Politics and Justice.
Jesus and Barabbas: The Innocent for the Guilty.
Crucifixion at Golgotha: Sacrifice and Salvation.
Jesus and the Two Criminals: Mercy Amidst Suffering.
Death and Burial of Jesus: Finality and Hope.

Topics

Jesus' Trial Before Pilate
Release of Barabbas
Jesus' Crucifixion
Conversation Between Jesus and the Criminals
Death and Burial of Jesus

People

Jesus Christ
Pontius Pilate
Barabbas
Simon of Cyrene
The two criminals
The centurion
Joseph of Arimathea

Locations

Pilate's Headquarters
Golgotha (The Place of the Skull)
The tomb

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Luke 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 Messiah, a king.**”

3 So Pilate asked Jesus, “Are you the king of the Jews?”

“**You have said so,**” Jesus replied.

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

23:1–5 The involvement of Pilate and his interactions with the Jewish leadership are recorded throughout the sequence of events in verses 1–25. The widespread culpability in the death of Jesus is evident in the range of participants. The overall emphasis, however, is on the innocence of Jesus. Three charges are brought before the Roman ruler Pilate. The charges begin with a broad charge of disrupting the nation and thus endangering the peace with Rome (v. 2; see also vv. 5,14), followed by two charges that elaborate on the first charge. The second charge—that Jesus opposed paying taxes to Caesar—is a false charge. The third charge—that Jesus is the Messiah, a king—is true, though he is not a king in the political sense and is therefore not a threat in that regard (20:20–26). Pilate picks up on the third charge, and once again Jesus’ answer is a qualified endorsement of it (23:3; cf. 22:70). Pilate pronounces the first of many references to Jesus’ innocence in this chapter (23:4,14,15,20,22,41,47).

23:6–12 Herod Antipas (3:19) ruled over Galilee but was in Jerusalem for the Passover festival, so Pilate saw this as an

to Herod, who was also in Jerusalem at that time.

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 a sign of some sort.

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. 1

2 That day Herod and Pilate became friends—before this they had been enemies.

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.”

18 But the whole crowd shouted, “Away with this man! Release Barabbas to us!” 19 (Barabbas had been thrown into prison for an insurrection in the city, and for murder.)

opportunity to pass Jesus off to him for a verdict. Jesus’ appearance before Herod adds to the number of those antagonistic to Jesus and adds another official testimony to Jesus’ innocence.



23:10

23:13–25 The sequence of trials comes to a climax here with Pilate’s repeated statements of Jesus’ innocence. The Jewish leadership, now with the support of the people, oppose Pilate’s requests. The reference to “the people” in verse 13 introduces a shift from the previous attitudes of the people (18:43; 19:48; 21:38). To appease the crowd, Pilate declares he will have Jesus punished before releasing him. This is the first of three statements indicating Pilate’s desire to release Jesus (23:16,20,22). The crowd demands Jesus to be crucified and Barabbas to be released instead (v. 18). Ironically, Barabbas had been thrown in prison for an insurrection and for murder. Barabbas is contrasted with the innocent one who is to be punished in his place (vv. 19,25). Pilate weakly

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.

The Crucifixion of Jesus

26 As the soldiers 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 childless 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!’”

abdicates his responsibility for justice and gives in to the crowd’s demands.

23:26–31 The crucifixion account is developed in three stages:

the journey to the crucifixion (vv. 26–31), the mockery and crucifixion of Jesus (vv. 32–43), and events surrounding the death of Jesus (vv. 44–49). Simon from Cyrene models in a physical way what Jesus said following him would entail (v. 26; cf. 9:23). Jesus addresses the women who are weeping and following him. He indicates that they are representative of the people of the city, and thus they should weep not for him but for themselves. They should cry to the mountains and hills because of the horror and scale of the judgment that is to come (cf. 19:41–44)

31 For if people do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?”

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, they crucified him there, 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.

35 The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, “He saved others; let him save himself if he is God’s Messiah, the Chosen One.”

36 The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar 37 and said, “If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.”

38 There was a written notice above him, which read: this is the king of the Jews.

39 One of the criminals who hung there, hurled insults at him: “Aren’t you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!”

23:32–43 The actual crucifixion is now told with a focus on the varying responses of the two criminals who are crucified with Jesus. Also included is a focus on the mockery of the leaders and the soldiers. The place of the crucifixion is called “the Skull,” which is Golgotha in Aramaic (cf. Jn 19:17) and calvaria in Latin—from which comes the English word Calvary. The prayer of Luke 23:34 is unique to Luke among the Gospels (cf. Ac 7:60). The taunt from the rulers for Jesus to save himself (Lk 23:35) is ironic given that Jesus is accomplishing salvation in the very act of dying. This taunt also begins a regular emphasis on salvation in this crucifixion scene as Jesus is crucified as Savior (vv. 35,37,39). The language of kingship in the inscription is also ironic given that Jesus is ruling from the cross, as the following discussion with the criminal illustrates (v. 39; cf. vv. 2–3). In contrast to blasphemous insults hurled at Jesus by one of the criminals, the other criminal recognizes that as condemned men they should fear God the Judge and not mock an innocent man. This second criminal recognizes the justness of his condemnation given what he has done and then declares Jesus’ innocence. Following his statements of his own guilt, the criminal addresses Jesus by name, recognizes Jesus’ kingship on the cross, and entrusts his future into Jesus’ hands as he entreats Jesus to remember him when Jesus rules beyond his

40 But the other criminal rebuked him. “Don’t you fear God,” he said, “since you are under the same sentence?”

41 We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.”

42 Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”

43 Jesus answered him,
“Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

The Death of Jesus

44 It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, **45** for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two.

46 Jesus called out with a loud voice,
“Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” When he had said this, he **breathed his last.**

47 The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, “Surely this was a righteous man.”

48 When all the people who had gathered to witness this sight saw what took place, they beat their breasts and went away.

49 But all those who knew him, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these

crucifixion (vv. 40–42). In response, Jesus assures the man he will join Jesus in paradise. The general time reference of “when you come” is matched with an emphatic and specific “today” (v. 43). The reference to “your kingdom” becomes personal: “with me in paradise” (cf. Ge 2:9–10; Isa 51:3; Eze 31:8; 2Co 12:4; Rev 2:7). Thus, Jesus exercises his saving rule by his word from the cross.

23:44–49 Events surrounding the death of Jesus are described. The darkness over the land for three hours from about noon may indicate God’s judgment (cf. vv. 31,40–41; 22:42). The tearing of the temple curtain points to the end of the temple system and indicates that entrance into the presence of God is now through the sacrificial death of Jesus. Jesus again addresses his Father and entrusts himself into his Father’s powerful care. Then Jesus dies (23:46). A Roman centurion sees significance in Jesus’ death, praises God, and confesses the certainty of Jesus’ right relationship to God.

23:50–56 These verses focus on the reality and significance of the resurrection (23:50–24:53). Luke highlights the reality of the

things.

The Burial of Jesus

50 Now there was a man named **Joseph, a member of the Council**, a good and upright man, **51** who had not consented to their decision and action. He came from the Judean town of **Arimathea**, and he himself was waiting for the kingdom of God.

52 Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus’ body.

53 Then he took it down, wrapped it in linen cloth and placed it in a tomb cut in the rock, one in which no one had yet been laid.

54 It was Preparation Day, and the Sabbath was about to begin.

55 The women who had come with Jesus from Galilee followed Joseph and saw the tomb and how his body was laid in it.

56 Then they went home and prepared spices and perfumes. But they rested on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandment.

empty tomb (23:50—24:12). The description of Joseph as good and upright and waiting for the kingdom of God reminds readers of the hopes and expectations of individuals in the early chapters of Luke (cf. 1:68; 2:25,38). The references to Jesus’ body (23:52,55; 24:3) indicate both that Jesus was physically dead and that the body that went into the tomb also came out of the tomb. The perfumes and spices were to lower the stench and perhaps slow decomposition. The preparations by Joseph and the women show their obedience to the law, their respect and care for Jesus, their witness of the tomb and Jesus’ body in the tomb, and their expectation of his death as a finality.



Bible Study Questions

- 1. How does Jesus' trial before Pilate challenge your understanding of justice?**
- 2. What does the choice between Jesus and Barabbas reveal about human nature and societal values?**
- 3. How do you perceive the role of Simon of Cyrene in Jesus' journey to Golgotha?**
- 4. In the scene at Golgotha, what insights can you gain about suffering and sacrifice?**
- 5. How does Jesus' interaction with the two criminals inform your understanding of mercy and salvation?**
- 6. What is your response to Jesus' prayer for His persecutors?**
- 7. How does Jesus' death impact your perception of His mission and identity?**
- 8. How can the account of Jesus' burial deepen your appreciation of the Easter story?**
- 9. How does the centurion's declaration after Jesus' death inspire your faith?**
- 10. In what ways can you relate to the different responses of the two criminals towards Jesus?**
- 11. How do Jesus' final words inform your understanding of His relationship with God the Father?**
- 12. What lessons can you draw from Pilate's and Herod's handling of Jesus' trial for your life?**
- 13. How does Jesus' assurance of salvation to the repentant criminal affect your understanding of grace?**

- 14. How can we embody Jesus' compassion and forgiveness in our daily interactions?**
- 15. In what ways does the burial account affirm Jesus' humanity?**
- 16. How can Jesus' willingness to face suffering and death motivate you in times of hardship?**
- 17. How does the crowd's choice of Barabbas over Jesus influence your understanding of societal pressures and groupthink?**
- 18. How can we apply the lessons from Jesus' trial and crucifixion to modern issues of justice and truth?**
- 19. How should Jesus' prayer for His persecutors influence our attitude towards those who wrong us?**
- 20. What steps can we take to entrust ourselves fully to God, as Jesus did at His death?**