

Family Worship Booklet



God tells us that Ezra read from the book of the Law,
day after day, and that the people of God
were filled with joy!

Friday – Luke 23:32-38 – Jesus on the Cross.

Jesus speaks from the cross. It is a prayer spoken audibly for all present to hear. It is an astonishing prayer. Jesus is experiencing an increasing level of suffering. The physical suffering is horrific, and as for the bearing of God's wrath for sin, we cannot even begin to enter into trying to understand the magnitude of that. Yet Jesus remains lucid, and his mind is focused, not on himself but on his enemies, those who have brought this torrent, this flood, this tsunami of suffering upon him, including the people living in Jerusalem and their rulers (Acts 3:17). There is no appeal, for either justice to be done or retribution to be administered. Instead, a request is made to the Father that He will forgive, literally 'send away the eternal consequences for those whose decisions and actions have brought him to the place of The Skull and this Cross.' Interestingly, Jesus cites ignorance on the part of these people as the ground for his appeal. But what ignorance? Surely, they knew exactly what they had been involved in; it was transparently clear. Yes, in terms of Jesus of Nazareth, they were without excuse, but in respect of the 'Lord of glory,' they were clueless (1 Corinthians 2:8). They had no idea whom they were dealing with. Even though the prophecies were clear, and there were those like Simon and Anna, who with the help of the Holy Spirit had discerned the truth about who Jesus was, even from the beginning of his human life; the people Jesus now prays for, were blind to the spiritual reality that was now unfolding. A reality in which they had been playing an integral part. Of course, Jesus is not asking for a unique process of forgiveness. No sin can be pardoned without the graces of repentance and faith being granted to the soul. So, this forgiveness can and will only be granted by the Father, based solely on the Son's death as an atonement sacrifice. What is it a prayer that was answered? Acts chapter 2 indicates that it was.

Luke passes over the garments division without giving many details, but those are available in John 19:23, 24. Again, we note from John that this happened as with each aspect of what is happening because it had been specifically prophesied to take place, in the case of the garments in Psalm 22:18. Let this fact weigh on our heart and mind for a moment, that even the destination of the very clothes on Jesus' back was preordained. Nothing is happening here by 'chance.'

- Q1. To whom does Jesus now speak with from the cross?
- Q2. What does he ask God the Father to do?
- Q3. What happens to his clothes and why?

Thursday – Luke 23:18-38 – The transgressors and the cross.

The streets are thronging with people watching and wailing as Jesus is led to the place where he will be put to death for crimes he did not commit. He has said little during the various illegally convened and unjust trials he had been the innocent subject of, but now he speaks, and it's to the women of the city who are weeping as they follow him. His comment is simple, 'stop weeping for me, instead weep for yourselves and your children given the judgement that is coming.' It has something he has already done for the city, as we read in Luke 19:41. The analogies that follow are taken straight from the Old Testament - Hosea 10:8 and Ezekiel 20:47, again showing that all that is happening and will happen has been foreordained by God, and Jesus knows it.

The focus now moves, from those who are following to the men who will be crucified beside Jesus, one on either side of him, for he is to be put to death with 'the transgressors' (Isaiah 53:12), as Jesus has foretold (Luke 22:37). According to Matthew 27:28, these men were common criminals, robbers. Their presence seeks to discredit and demean the person and the work of Jesus to the basest level. Even after all that is done, there is no escaping the fact that he will be remembered as the man who was crucified with 'other' criminals.

The place where the final act of this terrible injustice is to be played out is called 'The Skull,' so called because its location was a hill that looks like the top of a skull. It was here that the Lord was nailed to the cross. A large nail was driven into each wrist and one through each ankle. The cross was lifted into place; it wasn't that high, probably only a few feet off the ground. It didn't need to be up high to inflict the excruciating pain it would render. The small block of wood on which the torso body 'rested' was not a feature to provide relief but to prevent the body from collapsing under its own weight and expediting death. As the sun beat down on the body, raked with pain as it hung by the arms, and as thirst took hold of the mind causing dehydration to the entire physical human system and resulting in devastating issues for the body's vital organs, death was slow and unbelievably painful.

- Q1. What does Jesus say to the weeping women, and why?
- Q2. Who was crucified with Jesus, and why?
- Q3. How painful was death on a cross?

Monday – Luke 23:18-25 – Pilate wants to let Jesus go, but...

So, Pilate had found Jesus not guilty of any crime and was determined to release him, but not until he had him punished, probably by scourging. This would have involved lashing the person's back with whips with pieces of bone or lead fastened into the tips. The damage scourging did to the individual was horrendous. Not only was the person's back lacerated, but some of the organs were often exposed as the flesh was ripped off the body, and it was not uncommon for people to die from the ordeal. So, this wasn't just a smack on the legs, and when you consider that Pilate had found Jesus innocent of all charges, the idea of his being brutalized in this way is quite astonishing; it's simply unbelievable. But it didn't happen. Why not? Did Pilate change his mind about the scourging? No, he abdicated his responsibility yet again. He had tried, unsuccessfully, to get Herod to decide what to do with Jesus, and now Pilate handed the decision over to the crowd gathered in the square. Mark tells us that the crowds are amassing because it is a custom that the Roman Governor would release a prisoner, someone whom the Jewish crowds appealed for during the Festival of Unleavened Bread (Mark 15:6). When you think of it, it fits well with the idea of release from the bondage that the Festival celebrated. It also made the Governor look good, especially with tens of thousands of people from all over the nation gathered in Jerusalem. Pilate wasn't going to miss the opportunity, and he was confident, given Jesus' reputation as an exceptional rabbi and miracle worker, that all he had to do was offer Jesus to the people, and they would instantly call out his name as the one to be released; so that's what he does. Who would have guessed otherwise? Yet again, what seems obvious does not happen. Incredibly, the people denounce Jesus - 'away with this man' - and demand the release of Barabbas. What? So, who is this Barabbas that the people, stirred up by the Sanhedrists and the Levitical police, are now calling with unbelievable unity for his release? He was a terrorist and murderer. A convicted brutal beast of a man. How is this possible? How could the people have got it so wrong? After all, it was just a couple of days before that when Jesus had entered Jerusalem with the masses calling out, "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" (Luke 19:38). Pilate had declared Jesus innocent; but lacking the courage of his conviction he had handed the final decision over to the people, anticipating them to do what he hadn't the courage to do. But they wouldn't play ball with him.

- Q1. Even though Pilate declared Jesus innocent, what did he want to do to him?
- Q2. How did Pilate try to avoid making the decision? What happened?

Tuesday – Luke 23:18-25 – The people shout, Crucify him!

Following the custom of releasing a prisoner during the Passover festival, Pilate offered the people amassed in the square the choice between a renowned murdering terrorist called Barabbas and Jesus. They choose Barabbas. Stunned by what he has heard, Pilate again speaks to the crowd and offers to release Jesus because, knowing that Jesus is innocent, that is what he wants to do. Furthermore, the response of the gathered assembly is deafening not only in noise but because they are all shouting the same thing, “Crucify, crucify him!” which is the Roman means of prosecuting the death penalty. Matthew tells us this is a response to Pilate’s asking them what they wanted him to do with Jesus if he released Barabbas (Matthew 27:22). This is unbelievable; again, you couldn’t make it up.

Pilate tries a third time. It shows the level of desperation he has descended to. Who had ever heard of a Roman Governor asking, no - begging, with his Jewish subjects to give him the answer he wanted? The Pilates of this world didn’t ask the Jewish people, let alone virtually beg them for anything. They made statements and then enacted what they wanted, if need be, with the short-stem sword of their Roman legions. Yet, here is Pontius Pilate, acting as a pseudo defence lawyer for Jesus, pleading for permission to let Jesus go, albeit again with an appeasement offer of scourging him. The Jewish crowd is not having it; they are incessant, and their voices beckon in unison for one thing, that Jesus is crucified. Luke writes, “and their voices prevailed.” Pilate concedes, even though he could have done otherwise. Luke is the only gospel writer to tell us that Pilate passed his sentence on Jesus; note again, it’s not based on a crime, but because the people, led by the members of the Sanhedrin, wanted it.

The execution of the sentence follows immediately. First, Barabbas is released. He must have been overcome with amazement when told what had happened. The shock of it is underscored by the restatement of Luke of Barabbas’ criminality. Now, he is set free to continue his reign of terror at the instigation and incitement of the supreme religious court in the Jewish nation. Then Jesus, without any statement of his crime, for none could be made, is handed to the Roman soldiers to be taken and prepared for immediate execution. Roman citizens could appeal for a delay in the implementation of their sentence; Jesus, the soon-to-be Mediatorial King of billions of royal citizens, was not to be afforded such a privilege.

- Q1. How many times did Pilate offer to release Jesus?
- Q2. What did the people shout out that they wanted to be done to Jesus?
- Q3. What happened to the murdering terrorist Barabbas, and what happened to Jesus?

Wednesday – Luke 23:26-31 – The walk to Golgotha.

The ‘trials’ have taken place in the Sanhedrin before Herod and by Pilate, and although absolutely innocent, Jesus is now led away to be put to death. Throughout the history of the world, innocent people have been found guilty and punished, but has there ever been a case where a knowingly innocent man, in the sense that everyone knows he is innocent, has been found guilty?

There is no delay in the execution of the sentence. Jesus is immediately taken out, and the cross on which he will die is placed over his shoulder. He will have to drag this heavy wooden, crudely constructed instrument of death to where he will be nailed to it and then hung up on it to die. This glorifying of capital punishment was common practice. As prisoners would be led through the most populated streets in Jerusalem, everyone would see and presumably take note of what happens to those found guilty of a capital crime. In other words, it was a spectacle geared towards deterring serious crime. For some reason, presumably because Jesus, given the beating he had endured by the Levitical police, was collapsing under the weight of the cross, a man called Simon, a Cyrenaic, is pulled in by one of the Roman soldiers to carry it for Jesus. Interestingly, Mark mentions the names of Simon’s two sons, Alexander and Rufus (Mark 15:21), which begs the question, why? Was it that Simon was converted through this encounter with Jesus, and his two sons subsequently played a role in the church’s life in Jerusalem? Otherwise, why mention them?

As these processions would make their way through the streets, they would have been boisterous affairs, with people hurling insults at the guilty party as they passed by carrying their cross. But this was on another scale. The sheer size of the crowd, many of whom would have been calling for Jesus’ crucifixion at the Praetorium, meant that the streets would have been packed with people, and then, of course, there would have been the followers of Jesus who would have been observing with grief. No one in the city would have been ignorant of what was happening. The death wail of the women would have been deafening as the throng made its way through the narrow streets of Jerusalem toward Golgotha.

- Q1. What happens after Pilate has passed his sentence on Jesus?
- Q2. Does Jesus carry his cross to Golgotha?
- Q3. How many people in Jerusalem were aware of what was happening?