

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 23:50-56 – Jesus’ burial

Jesus’ friends stood around the cross, looking at his body on the cross, not knowing what to do. Whom could they turn to? Jesus was dead, and Peter, the natural leader, had denied knowing Jesus three times before the cock had crowed. It seemed that the Lord’s body would be unceremoniously taken from the cross, although maybe not if the centurion who had proclaimed him innocent had anything to do with it, and taken to an unmarked grave. Whatever the thoughts of those still standing around the cross, God was already beginning to fulfill what had been prophesied in Isaiah 53:9, “And they made his grave... with a rich man in his death.” A man named Joseph appeared. Isn’t it interesting that a man with the same name as the man who cared for Jesus as his human ‘father’ now comes forward and almost inexplicably takes charge of the situation? He is a significant individual, a member of the Sanhedrin; but Luke tells us that he is unlike his peers, for he characterizes him as “a good and righteous man, who had not consented to their decision and action”. John tells us that he was actually a disciple of Jesus who had kept the fact secret out of fear (John 20:38). That being the case, he is well placed to know what must now happen, so he goes to Pilate, possibly at the suggestion of the centurion, and asks that the body of Jesus be released into his care. This interaction with Pilate makes him ceremonially unclean for the rest of the day, but that doesn’t even register in his thinking. He has one goal in mind, and he pursues it as if it is the only thing that matters in his life. He may have been cautious about following Jesus during Jesus’ life, but now he is driven with courage, born of love for the Saviour.

Mark tells us that Pilate, surprised by the news that Jesus had already died, asks the centurion to confirm the fact, and once that is done, he grants Joseph’s request. Mark also tells us that Joseph then went and brought a linen shroud before returning to the cross to take down the lifeless body of the Lord and wrap it in the shroud (Mark 15:44-46). Interestingly, only John mentions the 100 lbs of spices (the 75 lbs referred to in John 19:39 was a Roman weight measurement) that Nicodemus brings - yes, the same Nicodemus who had climbed the tree to see Jesus and then became a believer.

Jesus was laid in a new tomb, witnessed by the women who had loved and cared for him during his ministry. They intended to return the next morning when the Sabbath was over so they could anoint the body.

Q1. Who deals with the burial of Jesus?

Q2. What is Nicodemus’ involvement?

Q3. What do the women do and why?

Thursday – Luke 23:44-49 – The loud cry.

While Matthew speaks of the earthquake, tombs opening, saints who had fallen asleep rising and entering the city (Matthew 27:51), all taking place at the same time as the curtain being rent, Luke focuses on the words spoken by Jesus at the moment of his death when, having finished his work on earth, having laid down his life as the atonement sacrifice for sin, he commits his human spirit into the Hands of the Father. It's not a quiet whimper; he does so with a loud cry. His body was battered and broken; his face was disfigured with agonizing pain; his soul was deluged with wrath. But he was claiming victory over sin and its eternal consequences for his beloved elect in all the world, and those within earshot would hear it. (This is the fullest realization possible of what David had declared in Psalm 31:5.)

Luke says, “and having said this; he breathed his last”. The Lord Jesus had died. The separation of his soul from his body had taken place. Never again would he walk the earth, as he had done in human form as the incarnate Jesus. Yes, as we shall see, he would rise from the dead, but the form of his body would be a new glorified reality.

The centurion had been observing all that had been happening: the events at the Praetorium; the release of Barabbas; the mocking by the soldiers when they'd dressed Jesus up; the journey through the streets to Calvary with Simon carrying the cross; the nailing of Jesus to the cross; the dividing up of his garments; the mocking by the priests, scribes and elders, and then the soldiers around the cross; Jesus' silence; the comments of the thief to the other thief and then the conversation between him and Jesus; the darkness; the earthquake; and Jesus' final loud cry and death. He had seen and heard it all, and now he speaks. Reread what he does and what he says in verse 47. First, he praises God, note not just that he fears God - but he praises Him; and second, he declares that Jesus was an innocent man. The Roman governor Pontius Pilate didn't have the courage of his conviction, but this Roman centurion suffered from no such ailment, regardless of who heard him. Whom do you say Jesus is?

When Jesus dies, there is a marked change in the thousands of people who have been party to all that had been unfolding. There are no more jeers, nor joke-laden remarks, for it has been slowly dawning on them that something unimaginably profound has taken place. They departed the scene filled with distress, while those who had known and loved Jesus continued to look on, unable to leave, being heartbroken.

Q1. What does Jesus now do from the cross?

Q2. What happens to Jesus next?

Q3. What does the Centurion say about Jesus?

Monday – Luke 23:32-38 – The barrage at the cross.

We read in verse 35 that “the people stood by watching, but the rulers scoffed at him,” and it almost gives the impression that the ordinary people were innocent bystanders; but don't forget who it was that had screamed out ‘crucify him, crucify him’ at the Praetorium. Having said that, the Sanhedrists do take it a stage further. Note that it's not just a handful of them. They're all present, as is clear from Matthew's unusual listing of the three classes: chief priests; scribes; and elders (normally two groups suffice) (Matthew 27:41). These men, who have been conspiring for months to see the end of Jesus, are now all present. Not one of them is going to miss the end game. Not after all their conniving, their illegally convened trials, acceptance of false self-perjuring witnesses, and badgering of Pontius Pilate. They are here to see Jesus die and enjoy it, as their vindictive insults continue unabated. This ‘blasphemer’ Jesus, ‘the one who identified himself as the Messiah’, will not be left to die in ‘peace’, even if it means forsaking their much-garnered public dignity. Their statements that Jesus ‘saved others’ and that he is the ‘King of the Jews’ are, of course, sarcastic. They are neither recognizing whom Jesus is nor giving him credit for what he has done in the previous three years. This is mockery in its basest form, and it leads to the vicious taunting of a dying man (as they view him) to save himself.

The soldiers pick up on the lead given by the religious leaders. They may even have been the same men who had had their own ‘fun’ with Jesus in the Praetorium, when they had stripped him of his clothes, dressed him up in purple, placed a crown of thorns on his head, given him a reed to hold as a sceptre, and mocked and spat on him (Matt 27:28-31). Whoever they were, these soldiers are now echoing what the priests, scribes, and elders are shouting, just like younger children do when they copy the behaviour of older children. Their hesitation is quickly dissipated as they glance at the inscription Pilate had asked to be placed over Jesus' head. The inscription itself was written in three languages - Latin, Aramaic, and Greek (John 19:20); and although the chief priests had wanted the wording changed, from “The King of the Jews” to “This man said, ‘I am the king of the Jews’”, on this one Pilate stood his ground, because he knew that it indicated that Jesus was innocent of any crime. In God's providence, it has heralded the truth of who Jesus is across the centuries.

Q1. Who initially heckles and taunts Jesus?

Q2. What does this tell us about these men?

Q3. Who joins in the mockery, and what encourages them to do so?

Tuesday – Luke 23:39-43 – The thief on the Cross.

Both Matthew and Mark state that when the three men were first crucified, that is, Jesus and the two convicted criminals, the two other men both joined in on the taunting of Jesus (Matthew 27:38, Mark 15:27). At some point, one of the crucified men begins, by the grace of God, to see that the man on the middle cross is different. Based on what Jesus will say to him, he is obviously a Jew, a son of the covenant who had evidently rejected what he had been taught as a child and engaged in a life of crime. But now he has become silent, reflecting on his life as he faces death. When the other thief continues reviling Jesus, demanding that Jesus save himself and 'us', the now silent thief speaks up and rebukes him. Is it because the Holy Spirit has brought to his mind the words that he would have been taught as a child from Isaiah 53:7, "and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth", that as he observes the silence of Jesus in the face of great provocation, he now realizes that he is a sinner who is in the presence of the Messiah? Whatever the process was leading up to it, God awakens new life in this man's heart and mind, which ushers forth in new speech. And this new speech, born from a new heart, poses a question to the other dying thief about his fear of God. The implication is that even a rudimentary fear of God would be enough to end the mocking. Obviously, the other thief didn't have such a fear. Although he was not alone, for, despite all their statements to the contrary, the priests, scribes and elders didn't have any true saving fear of God either.

The challenge made, the saved thief now speaks with Jesus and asks that he be remembered when Jesus comes again to establish his Kingdom at the end of the world. Does this not show just much he has grasped the reality of Christ's second coming? Astonishingly, what had been in this man's heart as a child, now becomes eternally significant to him in the last hours of his life. Jesus' response is, as we have come to see throughout this gospel, wonderfully pastoral. He doesn't say, 'yes, I will do that'; no, Jesus says, "today you will be with me in paradise." You see, it's all about today. Today, this man's physical suffering will end; he will die, and as will Jesus, something that was uncommon for the crucified as they could live for three or four days. This man's sins have been forgiven, and he will be with Jesus in Heaven today. The question I ask myself and you is - where are we today in Christ?

Q1. One of the two thieves now speaks to the other thief; why?

Q2. What does he say?

Q3. When he speaks to Jesus, what does he ask, and how does Jesus respond?

Wednesday – Luke 23: 44-49 – The darkness comes, and the curtain is rent.

The first great sign of the crucifixion is the strange darkness that comes over the land from noon (the sixth hour) until three o'clock in the afternoon (the ninth hour). It's a darkness that comes at the height of the sun's power in the middle of the day and lasts for three hours. An eclipse - not possible. No astronomer would support such an explanation. So why did this unprecedented darkness, which covers the whole earth, happen? It happened because God made it happen. Luke tells us that God caused the 'sun to fail'. Imagine the sun, that gives the world the light and heat that it needs to be sustained, 'failing' for three hours at the command of God. Why did God do this? Because these are the hours in the history of the world when God would turn His face away from His only begotten Son and pour out the tsunami of His wrath upon him. God's judgement is clearly identified with darkness in Scripture (Joel 2:21, 3:14,15, Isaiah 5:30, 13:9, Matthew 24:29, Mark 13:24, Luke 21:25) and no one, whether on Calvary's hill or in the farthest reaches of man's dwelling on earth, would spend these three hours basking in the sun's light, as God's judgement is poured out upon His Son for the elect.

Two events then happen simultaneously - the death of the Lord Jesus and the tearing of the temple curtain. Luke cites the splitting of the curtain first, whereas Matthew and Mark speak of Jesus' loud cry first. The noise and the sight of the two parts falling apart, exposing the Holy of Holies, must have shaken those who observed it to the core. But what was its purpose? This huge heavy curtain was the inner curtain that hung between the Holy and the Holy of Holies described in Exodus 26:31; 36:35 and 2 Chronicles 3:14. It was that which separated man from the presence of God. Of course, God is present everywhere all the time, but it was beyond this massive curtain that the High Priest would have gone once a year, on the Day of Atonement, carrying the blood of the lamb that would be sprinkled on the Ark for the cleansing of the sins of God's people. At the moment of Christ's death, this separating curtain is rent in two, right down the middle. In doing this, God proclaimed that the role of the Jewish high priest was at an end. Because Jesus the Great High Priest had, through his death, his broken body and shed blood, made the only acceptable, once for all sacrifice for sin.

Q1. What comes upon the earth, and how long does it last?

Q2. How did this darkness happen, and why?

Q3. What happens to the inner curtain in the temple?