

LUKE 23

THE CRUCIFIXION OF JESUS

When the Jewish chief council had decided that Jesus was worthy of death, they brought Him to Pilate, the Roman governor, so that he might confirm their sentence and execute the cruel penalty of crucifixion. The trial before Pilate developed into a disgraceful contest between the murderous and determined Jewish rulers, and the weak and indecisive Roman governor – who ended up acting contrary to his own conscience, by allowing himself to be compelled to submit his will to that of the subjects whom he detested.

Pilate lacked the courage of his convictions. He declared Jesus to be innocent; but since he feared to offend the rulers and the crowds whom they had won to their side, he hesitated to release Jesus. But he attempted to avoid making a decision, and he tried to shift the responsibility to King Herod. When he was finally compelled to act, he scourged Jesus and proposed a compromise by releasing Him as a notable criminal, as was usually the custom at the Jews' Feast of Passover. But the people and rulers asked instead for the release of a notorious murderer named Barabbas; and as they saw Jesus coming forth from the scourging – torn and bleeding – they cried out for His life, "Crucify him!" When the Jewish rulers hinted that they would report Pilate to the Roman emperor as one who was shielding a political revolutionist, his conscience gave way. He decided to do what he knew to be wrong, and "gave sentence that what they asked for should be done."

The Gospel narratives spare us the distressing details of the crucifixion of Jesus. This was the most cruel and agonizing form of execution, but the facts are written with surprising delicacy and reserve. As Jesus was being led out of the city to be put to death, a man called Simon of Cyrene was pressed into the service of carrying His cross. This action was to give Simon immortal fame; and he was the first of that long line of men, women, and children who have taken up the cross and followed Christ in a spiritual manner.

Of all the Gospel-writers, Luke alone speaks of the women who followed Jesus out of the city, with wailing and lamenting. It is quite fitting that in this Gospel, in which womanhood is so greatly exalted, a place should be found for this picture. Our Lord turned to these women with a message of sympathy; and He told them that they were not to weep for Him, but for themselves and their children. He was not rebuking them for their compassion; rather, He meant to indicate that while His sufferings were to be lamented, their own were even more worthy of tears – for they were to be even more intense. He had in mind

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ Jesus is found to be innocent but is still condemned to death – verses 1-25
- ❖ He is led outside of the city of Jerusalem to be executed – verses 26-32
- ❖ He is crucified between two thieves, where He suffers and dies – verses 33-49
- ❖ His body is honorably buried by Joseph of Arimathea – verses 50-56

the destruction of the city, due to its impenitence; for this destruction was made certain by its rejection of Him, their Redeemer. Even in this very hour of His own anguish, Jesus thought of others rather than Himself; for He did not pronounce this prophesy in resentment, but in infinite tenderness and pity.

The place of the execution was a hill outside the city gates, called Golgotha – meaning “the skull.” While the actual sufferings of the crucifixion are not described, Luke tells us of the cruel mockery to which Jesus was subjected. He states that two criminals were crucified on either side of Jesus. This was evidently intended to add to the disgrace and humiliation of His cruel death, as if He was the chief villain of the three suffering ones. As Jesus tasted the first bitterness of His anguish, He was heard to pray: “Father forgive them; for they know not what they do!” He did not only have in mind the soldiers who were involuntary instruments of His death; but also the Jews, who had not fully recognized the enormity of their crime. The crowds stood gazing upon the Sufferer, but the rulers and the soldiers cruelly mocked Him. As for the soldiers, they made sport of Him by casting lots for His garments and offering Him drink.

As He hung upon the cross, Jesus was a dying Man; but at the same time, He was a forgiving God. His transforming grace changed a robber into a saint. The repentant thief acknowledged that it was against a Divine Being that he had sinned, and he recognized that the penalty which he was suffering was just. And in the bleeding and dying Sufferer hanging next to him, he saw One Who is yet to return as universal King; and to Him, he addressed his prayer: “Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom!” And this was the promise that was given him by Jesus: “To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.”

The death of Christ was an event of such supreme importance, that it was very properly accompanied by supernatural signs of deep significance. Of these, Luke mentions two. The first was the darkened skies – a fitting symbol of the blackest crime in all the history of mankind. The second was the rending of the veil in the Temple – a picture of the “new and living way” that has been opened for all believers into the presence of God. And after Jesus’ sufferings of mind and body were fulfilled, He breathed His last, and His earthly ministry ended.

The body of Jesus was given an honorable burial by Joseph of Arimathaea. This powerful and influential member of the Sanhedrin “had not consented” to the “counsel and deed” of the rulers who had desired the death of Jesus. And now he risked the scorn of the people and the hatred of the rulers, and wrapped the body in linen cloth, and lay it reverently in his own new tomb. The women who had followed Jesus noted the place of His burial, purchased perfumes to embalm the body, and then rested upon the Sabbath.

Thank You, Lord Jesus, for making our peace with the Father and reconciling us to Him by the blood of Your cross! Amen.

