

Passion Week: Friday – *The King's Triumphant Death*
 Luke 22:66-23:49

Introduction: Ironic twists, unexpected endings, and unforeseen conclusions make for good drama and storytelling. From Citizen Kane (oh, Rosebud was the sled - still don't get it), to the fact that Luke's father was really his mortal enemy in movie history, to the world being duped by a call for peace from 1930's Germany, even while they were amassing an army, brutalizing citizens, and moving into sovereign nations lands, irony holds our attention and deepens our appreciation of unfolding events.

There is great irony at Calvary. An innocent king is convicted by a powerless tribunal, sentenced to death by puppet magistrate, called to be crucified by a people who need saving, pictured as a great defeat, yet was the greatest victory this world has ever experienced and made way to save the very ones who called for it to happen. Friday of Passion week is the *dénouement*, the necessary step that Jesus had been moving toward, as He fixed His gaze on Jerusalem (Luke 9:51). Before we get to the glories of Easter and the resurrection, we must walk through the depths of darkness at Calvary. We are reminded of the three parts of the gospel that are *irreducible and necessary*:

"Now I would remind you, brothers, of **the gospel I preached to you**, which you **received**, in which you **stand**, and by which you are **being saved**, **if you hold fast** to the word I preached to you --- unless I have preached in vain.

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that **Christ died** for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that He was **buried**, that He was **raised** on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve."

1 Corinthians 15:1-5

- **Jesus is Christ incarnate** - God had to put on flesh, becoming a man and living a life as perfect humanity, keeping and fulfilling the entire Law. This is what Jesus did throughout His private and public ministry, acknowledging the title as Christ, Messiah, performing miracles to validate that title, and ultimately facing death because of this very claim.
- **Jesus had to die** - Only God could satisfy the requirement of God. The only way that God could be **just** and **justifier** (Rom. 3:26) of anyone who has faith in Jesus. Death was NOT the mistake, it was not the result of an unseen plot, but was rather the point, the goal, and the mission. Jesus had to take the place of those He came to save, and that could only take place through the means of death.
- **Jesus had to rise again** - Easter is necessary because without the resurrection death would have the victory (1 Cor. 15:54-55). The true victory of the cross is that death could not contain Jesus, and though there was a sting in death, it was not enough to stifle the victory. Because Jesus was risen, we too will be with Him forever.

This is the message we received, the message in which we stand, because it is this that alone saves us. When we talk about putting our faith in Jesus, **all of these are necessary**. We must believe Jesus is God, that He died, and rose again conquering sin and death. If we fall short in any of these, we MISS THE GOSPEL! So we look at the **glories of Calvary through the lens of irony**, a dismal story of wickedness seemingly gaining the victory, and yet the prophetic plot twist that death was the ultimate victory and innocence the ultimate atonement.

Irony of Calvary #1 – *An Innocent on Trial*

After Judas delivered Jesus up to the Sanhedrin on Thursday night, there was a mad scramble to get Jesus on the cross before the dawn broke, since they still feared the people and wanted to get the deed done before they would celebrate Passover. They had to have a formal charge brought against Him so that the waiting Pilate could have grounds to put Him to death. Let's quickly trace the narrative of these 6 phases or stages of Jesus' trial:

3 Phases of Jewish Trial

- **1st** - Before Annas, the Father in Law of Caiaphas (John 18:13-24) - not much accomplished, except Peter is recognized in the courtyard - Jesus is transferred to Caiaphas
- **2nd** - Before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin (Matt. 26:57-68; Mark 14:53-65; Luke 22:54) - False witnesses brought to bear false witness, but no two witnesses could agree; **Are you the Christ?** (a messianic term - in other words, are you saying you are king and not Caesar). Jesus identifies Himself as the Son of Man from Psalm 110:1; they tear their clothes in indignity calling Him a blasphemer (between the 2nd and 3rd trial - Peter denies)
- **3rd** - Sanhedrin (Luke 22:66-71) - *Are you the Christ?* Again quotes Psalm 110:1, I am the Son of Man. *Are you the Son of God, then?* It is as you say (Yes I am) - *What further testimony do we need???!?* Notice that Jesus wanted to be identified clearly as the Son of God and THAT is why He was condemned. (after this, Judas hangs himself - Matt. 27:3-10)

These trials were **illegal, done out of envy** (Matt. 27:18), **and showed the cafeteria morality that this false religion stood for** (wouldn't eat the Passover before this, but were willing to bring false witness and kill an innocent man)

3 Phases of Gentile Trial

- **1st** phase - Pilate (Matt. 27:2, 11-14; Mark 15:1-5; Luke 23:1-5; John 18:28-38) - Finds no fault except blasphemy (which he didn't care about). Remembers He's from Galilee and Herod Antipas is in town, sends Jesus to him
- **2nd** phase - Herod Antipas (Luke 23:6-12) - Herod tries to make Jesus dance, makes sport of Him, but Jesus says nothing and is sent back to Pilate
- **3rd** phase - Pilate (Matt. 27:15-26; Mark 15:6-15; Luke 23:13-25; John 18:39-19:16) - Pilate tries like crazy to NOT put Jesus to death. Jesus reassured Pilate that the one who delivered Him (Caiaphas) had greater sin (John 19:11).

Plight of Pilate

Pilate had used up all his equity with Rome, and his major benefactor there named Sejanus had been killed in October as a traitor. He was out of chances, out of friends, and out of options. He tried to flog Jesus saying "Is this the great man you fear", he tried to release Barabbas, but the rabid fear and hate of the leaders was too great. They finally pulled the trump card, "**If you release this man, you are not Caesars friend**" (John 19:12). So he reluctantly gave Him over to be crucified.

Irony of Calvary #2 – Victory Secured in Death

Instrument of extreme death brings miraculous life

"Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us --- for it is written 'Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree.'" Galatians 3:13

"And I when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." He said this to show what kind of death He was going to die." John 12:32-33 (cf. John 3:14; John 8:28)

"And when they came to the place that is called the Skull, there they crucified Him, and the criminals, one on his right side and one on his left side."

What was the nature of crucifixion?

Rome had perfected this method of death through years of practice. It created a message for any and all who would even think or entertain the idea of rebellion.

- **CRUEL** - Before being nailed by feet and hands, the prisoner was often scourged, which would open up deep wounds on the back side of the victim. Like Jesus, convicted felons would carry their own cross beam a distance, which was made of wood, splintering into the gashes opened up. On the cross, within a few minutes the condemned would have to lift himself up to get a breath, each time creating the shocking and shooting pain throughout the body.
- **LINGERING** - Death by hands of government is nothing new, nor are the instruments of death. In October 1789, a French physician named Joseph-Ignace Guillotin proposed that all the deaths during the French Revolution be performed by a simple, humane, and quick death of decapitation. Crucifixion was no such thing. A person could live for days in agony as the reflex to fight for life kicked in and the competition against death was waged. The cross maximized pain, for the longest length of time to create the greatest affect for the people.
- **PUBLIC** - Crosses would be set up at the gates of the city where commerce would continue, crowds would gather, and even children would be exposed. For days the dying would be seen and heard, as blood ran down and punishment was poured out. Rome wanted everyone to see what would happen if insurrection was your goal. They were in constant fear that the populous, especially the majority of the slave class would unite and rebel.
- **CERTIFIABLE** - Other forms of corporal punishment happened in the Bible, particularly stoning. But these were not always 100% effective, like when Paul was stoned, left for dead, but got up and went back into the city (Acts 14:19-20). Crucifixion was accurate and final. In fact, if a prisoner was taken down too early and still breathed, the soldiers on duty would face the wrath of death. The condemned were taken down **ONLY** when they were completely dead (not mostly dead, which is slightly alive).¹

Jesus was lifted up on the cross, publically seen and executed, so that all those who would look upon Him would be saved.

Weep for yourself, not me

"But turning to them Jesus said, 'Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and your children. For behold, the days are coming when they will say, 'Blessed are the barren and the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed! Then they will begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall on us', and to the hills, 'Cover us.' For if they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry.'" Luke 23:28-31

¹ This is why the supposed "swoon theory" of the resurrection has not plausibility. This theory states that Jesus was not fully dead on the cross, was brought to the cave, revived by His disciples (after they bested the Roman soldiers), moved the stone, and snuck Jesus out. This is the stuff of science fiction, not reality.

As Jesus was moved from His final trial down the street to the place of the Skull, massive crowds followed Him, many weeping and lamenting this sight. They felt pity. They mourned the fact that the one they had loved and followed was now in this predicament, facing the awful prospect of heinous death. But the irony is that far from agreeing with their assessment of His situation, He turned the sorrow toward them. As He marched toward the cross, He issued a **warning toward those around**. The real danger in this scenario was those who would continue to reject Him, since the corporate rejection of His Messianic credentials would lead to the utter destruction of Jerusalem within a generation.

Wrongly judged forgives

"And Jesus said, 'Father forgive them, for they know not what they do.' And they cast lots for His garments." Luke 23:34

The accused called for the forgiveness of the accuser. The soldiers were there doing what soldiers do, nailing His limbs to the cross, dividing up any garments of value left, and inflicting the pain that resulted from carrying out their job. Remember, a soldier who failed in their job would face the same death they were charged to carry out. There were those who were willfully sinning (the Sanhedrin), with others sinning against Jesus in ignorance. The need of both was the same: *forgiveness*. Here Jesus calls for the Father to forgive those who in blindness acted according to that darkness. This is a poignant reminder to us that when we face treatment that is **unfair, unwarranted, or unwanted** in the course of righteousness, we should be quick to ask for and offer forgiveness to those who operate by the only light they know.

One facing death saves

"Jesus remember me when you come into your kingdom." And He said to him, "Today you will be with me in Paradise." Luke 23:42-43

Jesus was lifted up between two criminals, thieves, murderers, and insurrectionists who were most likely the partners of the recently released Barabbas (we call these "fallguys"). The soldiers were mocking, the rulers scoffed, and the people looked on. One of the condemned criminals began to rant against Jesus - "Aren't you the Christ? Why don't you save yourself, and while you're at it, save us!" **Why was this man, at this moment of certain death, still railing against the innocent man next to him?** Because the darkness HATES the light (John 3:19), and those who do wickedly love the darkness rather than the light.

But there was the other man, just as wicked and lost, who had a grace infused, faith driven catharsis. Notice how his eyes were opened to the reality of the situation:

- **He realized who he really was - a sinner** - We are receiving the due reward of our deeds - There was no blame shifting, no deflecting, no self-justifying. This man knew that he was a sinner, confirmed by the way he lived his life and what he did to deserve death. Most prisoners will proclaim innocence, believing their own deception and lie, even as they tumble into the grave. This man knew his status, and that changed everything.
- **He realized what he really deserved - death** - There was a fear of God, which meant there was a recognition of His holiness compared to his own sin, which would mean that God's wrath was justified.
- **He realized who he really needed - an innocent Savior** - At the last hour of life, the second criminal became a defender of Jesus, as well as an evangelist of the good news. He pointed to his co-conspirator that they deserved to die, but this man was innocent, dying for the sins done by others.

- **He realized what he really needed - mercy** - In the most glorious request one could make, this criminal asked for the only thing a sinner can: **MERCY**. Jesus do not give me what I deserve, which is death, but withhold that and simply remember me when you deliver on what you've promised. Notice he did not ask for a great seat at the table or a position of honor like the disciples had, he simply wanted Jesus to take notice of him in the most lowly and humble of ways.

Jesus response to this man was historic and unprecedented. Instead of saying "someday" after dying and going to *sheoi* (the OT understanding of death), this man would be WITH JESUS that day in paradise. Salvation came to one who lived his life contrary to the truth, yet grace was greater on the cross. Perhaps the greatest picture of salvation by **faith alone apart from works**, Jesus delivered to the most undeserving, as He still does for us today.

Father satisfied in loss

*"And about the ninth hour, Jesus cried in a loud voice, saying, **Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?** that is **My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?**" Matthew 27:46*

*It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, while the sun's light failed. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Then Jesus calling in a loud voice, said, "**Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!**" And having said this He breathed His last."*

Luke 23:44-46

"When Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "**It is finished**", and He bowed His head and gave up His spirit." John 19:30

At about noon (the ninth hour) darkness covered the land. It was probably not pitch black, but as if a curtain of gray had to cover this gloriously horrendous scene. For three hours Jesus endured what He had dreaded in His humanity (see John 12:27; Luke 22:44). What happened in this time is not only a **mystery**, but is also the **content of our salvation**.

- **Jesus experienced death** - The death that we all face is not merely physical. In fact, we have already seen those who faced physical death could be raised again by a word (Lazarus, come forward). But this is really a secondary result. The main problem of death is a spiritual death, a separation of our soul from body. Remember when Adam sinned, he experienced death by being separated from God, while facing physical death centuries later. There is only one way in which spiritual death could be cured, and that is the substitutionary death of another.
- **Jesus became sin** - "For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God." (2 Cor. 5:21). Jesus lived the life that we could never live so that God could treat Him the way we deserved. God's wrath was poured on Christ in totality of the debt we owed. In three hours, God exhausted His wrath to the last drop on Christ so that He was satisfied, looking no longer at our sin but at Christ's righteousness.
- **Jesus was judicially disfellowshipped from the Father** - Jesus experienced alienation from the Father, becoming a curse and bearing our sin. This caused Him to cry out that which echo's into the expanse of the universe - My God, why have you forsaken me??!!

As Jesus' physical condition reached its conclusion, he declared His thirst, from a physical condition that would have dehydrated Him and caused His tongue to swell and stick to the roof of His mouth. Taking the bitter sponge full of full, He whet His lips enough to utter the words, "**IT IS FINISHED. Father, into**

your hands I commit my spirit (a quotation application of Psalm 31:5). It is finished! The veil that separated the people from God was rent in two, meaning that no longer would there need to be the blood of animals shed, no longer a priest who would be a go between, no longer anything other than the blood of Christ poured out for us to make us acceptable to God. It is finished! It was enough! It was forever! It was accomplished completely! The propitiation was accepted (1 John 2:2)!

- **We can stop trying to earn our salvation through things we do** - we simply yield to God by faith in the finished work of Christ, repenting of our sin and turning from our many idols to serve our living God!
- **We can stop fearing judgment** - since perfect love casts out fear, and fear has to do with judgment (1 John 4:18). We are moved from slaves to sons, from slaves of sins to slaves of righteousness.
- **We can stop living in the shame of the past** - we are a NEW CREATION; old has passed away, having been nailed to the cross with all its debts paid for (2 Cor. 5:17; Col. 2:14)
- **We can start delighting in access to God in Christ, seeking Him as our greatest treasure and surest joy!**

IT IS FINISHED! Christ did it all and calls us to turn from our sin, to believe in Him, yielding our life to Him and trusting in His finished work. Don't wait until next week! Do not wait until tomorrow! Repent and believe today, right now, and experience the kind of peace and rest that a wretched criminal experienced on the cross on a Friday when the world changed forever.