

CHAPTER 31: The Gospels Part 9

Pilate addresses the crowd: **“Which of the two do you want me to release for you?” And they said, “Barabbas!”** (Matthew 27:21) This is NOT working out quite like Pilate had anticipated.

But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him [Pontius Pilate] release Barabbas instead. (Mark 15:11) Matthew says, **the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus killed.** (Matthew 27:20) So clearly the religious leaders are the ones instigating this mob. **So Pilate spoke to them again, “Then what do you want me to do with the one you call the king of the Jews?”** (Mark 15:12) “What do you want me to do with Jesus?” I pointed this out before. The Jewish religious leaders never referred to Jesus as “the king of the Jews.” This was a term that Pilate himself had coined. The religious leaders only said that Jesus claimed **“that He Himself is Christ, a king.”** (Luke 23:2) The crowd wastes no time and shouts back at Pilate, **“Crucify Him!”** (Mark 15:13)

Pilate is still looking for a way that he can release Jesus. He knows Jesus is innocent and tries to reason with the crowd. **Pilate asked them, “Why? What has He done wrong?” But they shouted more insistently, “Crucify Him!” Because he wanted to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas for them.** (Mark 15:14-15) Pilate goes a step further. He says, **“I will therefore flog Him and release Him.”** (Luke 23:22) Pilate hopes that by punishing Jesus he will satisfy this blood-thirsty crowd.

He orders his soldiers to scourge Jesus. The soldiers take Jesus, strip Him, and tie Him to a post. A whip of leather thongs with pieces of bone or metal on the ends tears into Jesus’ back. He is bloodied and weakened severely. **The Roman soldiers untie Jesus. They stripped [Jesus] and put a scarlet robe around Him, and after braiding a crown of thorns, they put it on His head. They put a staff in His right hand, and kneeling down before Him, they mocked Him. “Hail, king of the Jews!” They spat on Him and took the staff and struck Him repeatedly on the head.** (Matthew 27:28-30) After they have had their fun, they hand Jesus back over to Pilate.

So Jesus came outside, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, “Look, here is the man!” When the chief priests and their officers saw Him, they shouted out, “Crucify! Crucify! Crucify Him!” (John 19:5-6) Pilate is incredulous at the Jews’ insistence on killing their own king! The Jewish leaders tell Pilate, **“He ought to die, because He claimed to be the Son of God.”** (John 19:7)

Fearful and desperate for answers, Pilate brings Jesus back inside his residence away from the crowd. He asks Jesus, "Where do You come from?" Pilate is beginning to wonder if perhaps Jesus could be one of their gods. The Romans have many gods. He thinks perhaps that Jesus is one of them.

But Jesus refuses to answer Pilate. **So, Pilate said, "Do You refuse to speak to me? Don't You know I have the authority to release You, and to crucify You?" Jesus replied, "You would have no authority over Me at all, unless it was given to you from above. Therefore, the one who handed Me over to you is guilty of greater sin."** (John 19:10-11)

Jesus says the one who handed Him over to Pilate has the "greater sin." If you could pinpoint the one individual who could have stopped this whole thing it would be the high priest Caiaphas. With that being said, the Jews – the religious leaders as well as the people – went along with him. So, while it is true that both the Romans and the Jews are culpable for their treatment of Jesus, here Jesus strongly implies that it is the Jews led by Caiaphas who have the greater sin. Why does Jesus say this? Because they have more knowledge about Jesus than do the Romans. They are aware of all the prophecies about their Messiah that Jesus has fulfilled in their midst for three years. They know Jesus's claims about Himself. They've witnessed countless miracles that Jesus performed almost daily. So the Jews, having the greater knowledge, have the greater sin.

Pilate brings Jesus back outside to face the hostile crowd. He wants to release Him, but realizes at this point he cannot do that. Pilate knows that if he releases Jesus he'll have a major riot on his hands. When word gets back to Rome, more than likely he will get demoted and sent back home and Pilate doesn't want that.

John gives this commentary: **Now it was the day of preparation for the Passover, about noon.** (John 19:14) On this day most Judeans celebrate the Passover feast. The Galileans (which including Jesus and the disciples) had celebrated the Passover the day before. So don't be confused by the two different Passover celebration days.

Pilate said to the Jewish leaders, "Look, here is your king!" (John 19:14) He points over to a disfigured Jesus. **Then they shouted out, "Away with Him! Away with Him! Crucify Him!"** Pilate asked, **"Shall I crucify your king?"** The high priests replied, **"We have no king except Caesar!"** (John 19:15)

Pilate can see that he is getting absolutely nowhere with these people. **When Pilate saw that he could do nothing, but that instead a riot was starting, he took some water, washed his hands before the crowd and said, "I am innocent of this Man's blood. You take care of it yourselves!"** (Matthew 27:24) The crowd's response

is chilling – **“Let His blood be on us and on our children!”** (Matthew 27:25) Pilate releases Barabbas and hands Jesus over to the Roman execution detail.

Inexplicably, this very same Jesus, the One to whom the crowd had shouted “Hosanna!” and welcomed as their Messiah King – just a few days before – is about to be put to death!

Then Pilate handed [Jesus] over to them to be crucified. (John 19:16) The Romans force the condemned individuals to carry their own cross to the place of execution. So Jesus carries His. He is very weak from the scourging and has suffered a great loss of blood. The Roman soldiers lead Jesus and two other convicted criminals down the narrow streets of Jerusalem. Jesus can barely walk. A group of people follows close behind, many of them weeping for Jesus. Along the way Jesus collapses. The soldiers compel one of the bystanders, Simon of Cyrene, to carry Jesus’s cross. They place the heavy crossbeam over Simon’s back and he carries it alongside Jesus. They walk toward the Gennath Gate, through the gate and then to the execution site outside the walls of the city of Jerusalem. The place is an old quarry location that had been used for one of King Herod’s many building projects. **They come to a place called Golgotha, which means “Place of the Skull.”** (Matthew 27:33)

When they reach the execution site Simon of Cyrene drops the crossbeam to the ground and is dismissed by the Roman soldiers. Jesus is forced to lie down while His arms are stretched out on the crossbeam. Jesus once stated, **“I am the good Shepherd. The good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.”** (John 10:11)

Jesus’s hands are nailed to the crossbeam with metal spikes. The suffering servant of Isaiah 53 is being **“pierced for our transgressions.”** (Isaiah 53:5) The crossbeam is then attached to a vertical post to which Jesus’s feet are nailed. One can only imagine the excruciating pain that Jesus is experiencing.

This cross onto which Jesus has been nailed is raised up by the soldiers. They drop it into place and secure it. This is the “lifting up” to which Jesus had referred to a few days before when He was in the temple.

Above His head they put the charge against Him, which read, “This is Jesus, the king of the Jews.” Then two outlaws were crucified with Him, one on His right and one on His left. (Matthew 27:37-38)

Then the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, “Do not write, ‘The king of the Jews,’ but rather, ‘This man said, “I am king of the Jews.”” Pilate answered, “What I have written, I have written.” (John 19:21-22)

As Jesus hangs on the cross suffering and dying He prays out loud: **“Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they are doing.”** (Luke 23:34)

The people also stood there watching, but the rulers ridiculed Him saying, “He saved others. Let Him save Himself, if He is the Christ of God, His chosen One!” The soldiers also mocked Him, coming up and offering Him sour wine, and saying, “If You are the king of the Jews, save yourself!” (Luke 23:35-36)

One of the criminals who was hanging there railed at Him, saying, “Aren’t you the Christ? Save Yourself and us!” (Luke 23:39)

But the other rebuked [his fellow criminal], saying, “Don’t you fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we rightly so, for we are getting what we deserve for what we did, but this man has done nothing wrong.” (Luke 23:40-41)

Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom.” And Jesus said to him, “I tell you the truth, today you will be with Me in paradise.” (Luke 23:42-43)

Standing near the cross are four individuals who are close to Jesus. One is His disciple, John. His mother Mary is also there along with His aunt and Mary Magdalene, a devoted follower of Jesus. **So when Jesus saw His mother and the disciple whom He loved [John] standing there, He said to His mother, “Woman, look, here is your son!” He then said to His disciple, “Look, here is your mother!” From that very time the disciple took her into His own home.** (John 19:26-27) Thus, Jesus commits the care of His mother to His disciple John.

Roman crucifixion is a slow and torturous death. In many cases it can last for several days. The condemned man on the cross struggles to breathe. He clings to life as long as he possibly can. It is a horrific way to die!

Starting at noon and lasting for about three hours the skies over Jerusalem darken. This is normally the brightest part of the day, so what is causing this unusual darkness? It is a supernatural act of God. God blots out the sun. It is His divine commentary on the darkness of this moment. As Jesus bears the sins of the whole world, God the Father turns away from His Son. For the first time EVER the Son of God is separated from His Father.

The emotional pain of this is far greater to Jesus than even His physical pain. **Around three o’clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice... “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”** (Mark 15:34) Jesus quotes part of David’s lament from Psalm

22. It expresses His deep sense of loneliness and the overwhelming anguish at being completely abandoned.

Jesus knows the end of His life is near. **After this Jesus, realizing that by this time everything was completed, said (in order to fulfill the scripture), “I am thirsty!”** (John 19:28) The scripture being fulfilled here is also from Psalm 22. The grief-stricken psalmist describes his mouth being parched and dry from thirst. **A jar full of sour wine was there, so they put a sponge soaked in sour wine on a branch of hyssop and lifted it to His mouth.** (John 19:29)

When He had received the sour wine, Jesus said, “It is finished!” (John 19:30) Mission accomplished! Jesus’s work is complete. Luke records Jesus’s final words... **Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, “Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit!” And after He said this He breathed His last.** (Luke 23:46)

Jesus is dead. What a sad story! The long-awaited Jewish Messiah, the Servant of the Lord, the Son of God, the King of Israel has been rejected and killed by His very own people!

When Jesus’s spirit leaves His body several bizarre things take place in and around the city of Jerusalem. First, the large curtain that separates people from the Most Holy Place, the Holy of Holies in the temple, is ripped in two from top to bottom. Only God could do this. It signifies that there is now direct access into the holy presence of God. Second, when Jesus dies the earth shakes and rocks are split. Third, tombs are opened and the bodies of many dead saints can be seen walking around the city.

Now when the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and what took place, they were extremely terrified and said, “Truly this one was God’s Son!” (Matthew 27:54)

As tragic as Jesus’s death appears at this moment, it is important to remember what He told His disciples earlier during His ministry... **“This is why the Father loves Me – because I lay down My life, so that I may take it back again. No one takes it away from Me, but I lay it down of My own free will. I have the authority to lay it down, and I have the authority to take it back again. This commandment I received from My Father.”** (John 10:17-18)

So then, this story isn’t quite over yet!

When the Romans put someone to death they want to be sure that the person is really dead. To ensure this, one of the Roman soldiers jabs a spear deep into Jesus’s side. **Blood and water flowed out immediately.** (John 19:34) This indicates to them that Jesus is, in fact, dead. The soldiers prepare to remove Jesus’ lifeless body.

At this point we are introduced to a wealthy man, a member of the Sanhedrin by the name of Joseph of Arimathea. He goes to Pontius Pilate and requests the body of Jesus. Joseph is **“a good and righteous man,”** (Luke 23:50) who opposed the Jews’ plan to kill Jesus. For fear of the Jewish leaders, Joseph secretly followed Jesus. So there were those who followed Jesus even among the Jewish leaders. Pilate agrees to give Joseph the body of Jesus. He immediately goes and removes Jesus’s body from the cross. Joseph takes His body and wraps it in a clean linen shroud. He transports Jesus’ body to his own new tomb, cut into the rock near the crucifixion site. There he lays the body.

Mary Magdalene and Jesus’ aunt, who had been present during the crucifixion, follow Joseph so they will know the tomb’s location. This becomes important later. Accompanying Joseph to the tomb is another member of the Sanhedrin, Nicodemus. We met him before. He’s the Pharisee who visited Jesus secretly in the night. The two men bind Jesus’ body with linen cloths. As they wrap His body they place a sweet smelling mixture of myrrh and aloes on it. They close up the tomb by rolling a large stone over the entrance.

Meanwhile the chief priests and the Pharisees go to Pilate with a request of their own. They say, **“Sir, we remember that while that deceiver was still alive He said, ‘After three days I will rise again.’ So give orders to secure the tomb until the third day. Otherwise His disciples may come and steal His body and say to the people, ‘He has been raised from the dead,’ and the last deception will be worse than the first.”** (Matthew 27:63-64)

Pilate accommodates their request. He makes the tomb secure by sealing the stone with a Roman seal and ordering armed Roman soldiers to guard the entrance. If Jesus’ disciples really do plan to steal Jesus’ body, this precautionary action will prevent that from happening. And so the stage is set. It’s dusk on Friday evening. Jesus’ lifeless body is wrapped in linen cloths, covered in myrrh and aloes, and securely sealed inside a rock tomb, heavily guarded by Roman soldiers...

It is very early Sunday morning, still dark outside. **Suddenly there was a severe earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descending from heaven came and rolled away the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were shaken and became like dead men because they were so afraid of him.** (Matthew 28:2-4.) And that’s it. That’s all we know. None of the Gospel accounts actually give us a description of the bodily resurrection of Jesus.

All we know is that sometime between Friday evening and Sunday morning Jesus’s body is no longer in the tomb. HOW Jesus comes out of the tomb and WHEN He comes out are a mystery.

Sunday morning at dawn the same two women who had followed Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus to the tomb after the crucifixion (Mary Magdalene and Jesus's aunt) return. They are accompanied by two other women who are also followers of Jesus. These four women are heading to Jesus's tomb to place aromatic spices over the body of Jesus. They had not had time to do that because the Sabbath was coming. When they arrive they see that the large stone covering the entrance to the tomb has been rolled away. They enter the tomb, but Jesus's body is not there! They look at each other perplexed. Where is Jesus?

Mary Magdalene is very upset. **So she went running to Simon Peter and the other disciple whom Jesus loved [John] and told them, "They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we don't know where they have put Him!"** (John 20:2) Hearing this, Peter and John take off running toward the tomb.

Back at the tomb, two men in dazzling white clothes suddenly appear to the three women who remain there. These men are actually angels. **The women were terribly frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has been raised! Remember how He told you while He was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again."** Then the women remembered His words... (Luke 24:5-8)

The angel then adds this: **"Go, tell His disciples, even Peter, that He is going ahead of you into Galilee. You will see Him there just as He told you."** (Mark 16:7)

And when they returned from the tomb they told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. (Luke 24:9)

Peter and John finally reach the tomb. They look inside and sure enough, just like Mary Magdalene had said, Jesus's body is gone. All they see are the linen cloths that had covered Jesus' body and the face cloth that had been on Jesus' head lying there. They do not see any angels. They have no idea what has happened to the body of Jesus. They don't recall Jesus telling them that He would rise from the dead. Later on they will learn from the women what the angel told them. But for now they are quite confused by what they see and so they return home.

Not long after Peter and John leave Mary Magdalene returns to the tomb. She is weeping. She's very upset that someone has taken Jesus's body. When she looks into the tomb she notices two angels sitting where the body of Jesus had lain. Mary is so distraught that she doesn't even get frightened at seeing these angels. They ask her why she's crying and she tells them, **"They have taken my Lord away, and I do not know where they have put Him!"** (John 20:13)

When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Who are you looking for?” Because she thought He was the gardener, she said to Him, “Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have put Him, and I will take Him.” Jesus said to her, “Mary.” She turned and said to Him in Aramaic, “Rabboni,” which means Teacher. (John 20:14-16) Mary recognizes Jesus’s voice!

Jesus replied, “Do not touch Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father. Go to My brothers and tell them, ‘I am ascending to My Father and your Father, to My God and your God.’” (John 20:17) For the first time Jesus refers to His disciples as “My brothers.”

Mary Magdalene came and informed the disciples, “I have seen the Lord!” And she told them what Jesus had said to her. (John 20:18)

Jesus meets up with the three other women. They are on their way to inform the disciples of what the angels told them at the tomb. **But Jesus met them, saying, “Greetings!” They came to Him, held on to His feet and worshiped Him. (Matthew 28:9) Just like Mary Magdalene, they recognize Jesus by His voice. Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid. Go and tell My brothers to go to Galilee. They will meet Me there.” (Matthew 28:10) Again Jesus refers to His disciples as “My brothers.”**

These women cannot contain their excitement. They have some amazing news to share with the disciples. They have seen Jesus with their own eyes! The reaction of the disciples... **But these words seemed like pure nonsense to them, and they did not believe them. (Luke 24:11)**

Remember the Roman soldiers who had been assigned to guard Jesus’ tomb? Well, they have some explaining to do! They tell the Jewish leaders everything that they witnessed – there was this angel, a bright light, an earthquake, the stone being rolled away, and the utter terror they experienced. They tell the religious leaders everything. And what is the response to this shocking report?

After they had assembled with the elders and formed a plan, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, telling them, “You are to say, ‘His disciples came at night and stole His body while we were asleep.’ If this matter is heard before the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.” So they took the money and did as they were instructed. And this story is told among the Jews to this day. (Matthew 28:12-15)

Rather than believe and accept the truth that Jesus did what He said He would do – rise from the dead on the third day – they decide to fabricate what they and the soldiers know to be a lie.

The words of Abraham to the rich man in the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus ring true once again: “...**they will not be convinced -- even if someone rises from the dead.**” (Luke 16:31). These words have proved to be quite prophetic!