



Mark 15; Matthew 27; Luke 23; John 19

The Crucifixion of Jesus Christ

Five times Christ is declared innocent of the charges brought against Him by the Jewish religious leaders. Pilate repeatedly said Jesus was innocent. (1) Luke 23:4; John 18:38; (2) Luke 23:14; (3) Luke 23:15; (4) John 19:4-6; Mark 15:14; Matt. 27:23; Luke 23:22 (5) Matt. 27:24

However, Pilate yielded to the manipulation and vehement accusations before pronouncing the sentence to crucify Jesus, and released Barabbas the insurrectionists and murder. He had Jesus scourged and delivered to be crucified.

The scourging of Jesus was a brutal custom by the Roman soldiers, and was part of the capital punishment. The prisoner was stripped and tied in a bent over position to a short post in the ground. The scourge was made of leather thongs, weighted with sharp pieces of bone, glass, lead, metal hooks, etc. The victim was stripped naked and often beaten until unconscious or dead. The church historian Eusebius saw Christian martyrs die while being scourged.

The Roman soldiers took Jesus into their quarters at the Praetorium and contemptuously mocked Jesus as a king. The pagan soldiers treated Him as they pleased.

Roman Soldiers Mock Jesus

Mark and Matthew record how the Roman soldiers mocked Jesus before leading Him out of the Praetorium to His crucifixion (Mark 15:16-19; Matt. 27:27-30). The Sanhedrin had earlier mocked Jesus when they condemned Him to death. Herod Agrippa had also mocked Him and put a gorgeous robe of a king on Him (Luke 23:6-12).

The Roman soldiers who were on duty called on their comrades to join them in making sport of Jesus. The scarlet robe was probably a military cloak worn by the Roman soldiers and used in the imitation of an imperial Roman robe.

"Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole Roman cohort around Him. They stripped Him and put a scarlet robe on Him. And after twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on His head, and a reed in His right hand; and they knelt down before Him and mocked Him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" They spat on Him, and took the reed and began to beat Him on the head" (Matthew 27:27-30, NASB95). All Scripture references are from the *New American Standard Bible* 1995 Update unless otherwise noted.

The crown of thorns (*stephanos*) was made by twisting together a flexible branch of thorns so as to represent a royal diadem of a king, and then pressed down on the head of Jesus.

They put a reed cane in his hands to mock Him as a king with his royal scepter. Then they used the cane to continue to strike Him in derision. They continued to ridicule Him in mock gestures as if salutation to a king. They spat on Him.

The verbs in all of these actions in verses 29 and 30 indicate repeated action. They kept it up for a period of time. Then when they had finished mocking Him they put His cloths back on Him and led Him out like a persecuted animal to His death.

Jesus on the Way to the Cross

It is before 9 a.m. on Friday morning, and the trials are over and Jesus is led away to be crucified by the Roman soldiers.

The crucifixion was invented to make death as painful and as lingering as possible. The Romans borrowed it from the Carthaginians and then adapted it to make it the most inhuman and cruel form of execution imaginable. People would linger in extreme anguish for days before they would die. Roman government would not allow one of their own citizens to be crucified. This form of execution was reserved for slaves and foreigners.

John Shepherd tells us, "The victim was usually first stripped naked, the garments falling to the lot of the executioners . . . First the upright was planted firmly in the ground and then the victim was laid down with arms extended on the crossbar to which they were fastened by cords and afterwards by nails through the palms. Then the transom was raised to its position on the upright and nailed while to the body was left to swing or its weight rested on an iron saddle peg driven into the upright. Following this the feet were nailed either through instep separately, or both together with a single iron spike. There the body was left to hag in agony sometimes two or three days, until death from the pain and starvation ensued" (*The Christ of the Gospels*, p. 596).

Mark and Matthew tell us after the Roman soldiers had mocked Jesus they took off the robe and put His garments back on Him and led Him away to crucify Him (Mark 15:20; Matt. 27:31-34). John adds they took Jesus and He went out bearing the cross Himself (John 19:16-17).

Because of sheer exhaustion from the scourging, mockery and abuse of the trials, at some point along the way the Roman soldiers compelled a man from Cyrene, named Simon, to go with them and carry the cross for Jesus (Mark 15:21; Matt. 27:32; Luke 23:26). Tradition says that Jesus fell under the weight of the heavy cross beam that He bore on His shoulders. "When they led Him away, they seized a man, Simon of Cyrene, coming in from the country, and placed on him the cross to carry behind Jesus" (Luke 23:26).

Along the way to Calvary Jesus encountered a large group of women beating their breasts and wailing for Him. Jesus was concerned for them and the suffering they would endure shortly. He had previously predicted the suffering of the people of Jerusalem in Matthew 23:36-24:3. Within a generation these words came true at the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

"And following Him was a large crowd of the people, and of women who were mourning and lamenting Him. But Jesus turning to them said, 'Daughters of Jerusalem, stop weeping for Me, but weep for yourselves and for 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 tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?' Two others also, who were criminals, were being led away to be put to death with Him. When they came to the place called The Skull, there they crucified Him and the criminals, one on the right and the other on the left" (Luke 23:27-33).

Alfred Eldersheim observed, "If the Romans dealt with Jesus thus, whom they considered innocent, how much worse will they deal with the guilty and rebellious ones in the time of the future way. And so it was later when more than a million Jews perished in Jerusalem in a few days' time. . . . if the leaders of Israel now do these things, such as deliver up their Divine King, in the early stages of Israel's history, thus setting a flame to her green tree; how terrible will become the judgment of God in the dry wood of an apostate and rebellious people in future years" (*Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, vol. 2, pg. 585).

The place called "the skull" was Golgotha in Hebrew. It probably refers to a skull-shaped hill on the highway near the outskirts of Jerusalem where the execution of Jews normally took place. Gardens and tombs dating to the first century have been found in the area.

They offered Jesus wine mingled with myrrh to dull the pain, but Jesus repeatedly refused the exceedingly bitter drink (Mark 15:23; Matt. 27:34). He was unwilling to blunt the pains of dying, and wanted to be fully conscious of His suffering for the sins of His people. His death was a voluntary death on behalf of sinners.

First Three Hours on the Cross

The simplest way to arrange the chronological order of the events at Calvary is to follow the arrangement of Mark. Jesus arrived at Calvary around nine a.m. and utters three sayings from the cross between 9 a.m. and noon. The terrible darkness that hid His suffering was from 12 noon until 3 p.m. During that time He uttered four more sayings from the cross.

Without describing any of the horrible details of the crucifixion the Gospel writers simply declare, "they crucified Him." They removed His garments and the Roman soldiers cast lots to decide how to divide up His garments between them. Jesus was probably absolutely naked before the glaring world. This further humiliated the sinless Lamb of God. "Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took His outer garments and made four parts, a part to every soldier and also the tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece" (John 19:23). Matthew quotes the psalmist indicating it is fulfillment of prophecy (Matt. 27:35). "They divide my garments among them, And for my clothing they cast lots" (Psalm 22:18).

A Roman centurion was in charge of the crucifixion with four soldiers stationed at each cross. As always, the cross was borne to the execution by the person who was to suffer on it. The soldiers usually took the longest route to the place of execution, along the most crowded streets, so as to attract most public attention.

"Father forgive them" (Luke 23:34)

"When they came to the place called the Skull, there they crucified Him and the criminals, one on the right and the other on the left" (Luke 23:33). There was a lot of activity taking place around the cross of Jesus. Jesus was praying from the cross. "Jesus was saying" or "kept saying" is in imperfect tense in Greek indicating continuous action in past implying He kept it up. Jesus was saying over and over again, 'Father, forgive them; for they do

not know what they are doing.' And they cast lots, dividing up His garments among themselves" (Luke 23:33-34). No one knows how many times Jesus prayed that pray from the cross that afternoon.

The Son of God was praying for His enemies from the cross. A. T. Robertson said, "It is certain Jesus spoke these words for they are utterly unlike anyone else!" They do not fit the lips of anyone else. No one ever prayed like Jesus prayed.

The word "Father" implies an intimate love relationship of trust. Jesus does not pray, "Father, forgive Me." He was the spotless Lamb of God, without blemish, offering Himself up as the perfect sacrifice for the sin of the world. Father forgive them, and condemn Me. He was dying as our substitute (2 Cor. 5:21).

Not only was Jesus praying for the Roman soldiers nailing Him to the cross, the Jewish religious leaders who condemned Him, the people mingling about the cross spitting on Him, and the criminals with their pleas, but He was praying for you and me while He died on that cross.

Pilate's way of getting even with the Jewish leaders was by placing an inscription above Jesus' head implying this is what we will do to any of you claiming to be the king of the Jews.

"There they crucified Him, and with Him two other men, one on either side, and Jesus in between. Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It was written, 'JESUS THE NAZARENE, THE KING OF THE JEWS.' Therefore many of the Jews read this inscription, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, Latin and in Greek. So the chief priests of the Jews were saying to Pilate, 'Do not write, 'The King of the Jews'; but that He said, 'I am King of the Jews.' Pilate answered, 'What I have written I have written.' Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took His outer garments and made four parts, a part to every soldier and also the tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece. So they said to one another, 'Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it, to decide whose it shall be'; this was to fulfill the Scripture: 'They divided My outer garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots'" (John 19:18-24).

"Today you will be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:35-43)

Jews from the city of Jerusalem were gathering about the cross and shouting with malicious jeering and insults. They heaped insults on Jesus. "And those passing by were hurling abuse at Him, wagging their heads and saying, 'You who are going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross'" (Matthew 27:39-40; cf. Mark 15:29-30).

The chief priests lead the crowd mocking Jesus, "In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking Him and saying, 'He saved others; He cannot save Himself. He is the King of Israel; let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe in Him. He trusts in God; let God rescue Him now, if He delights in Him; for He said, 'I am the Son of God.' The robbers who had been crucified with Him were also insulting Him with the same words" (Matthew 27:41-44).

"And the people stood by, looking on. And even the rulers were sneering at Him, saying, 'He saved others; let Him save Himself if this is the Christ of God, His Chosen One.' The soldiers also mocked Him, coming up to Him, offering Him sour wine, and saying, 'If You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself!' Now there was also an inscription above Him, 'THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.' One of the criminals who were hanged there was hurling abuse at Him, saying, 'Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!' But the other answered, and rebuking him said, 'Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And

we indeed are suffering justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.' And he was saying, 'Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!' And He said to him, 'Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise'" (Luke 23:35-43).

The rulers of the Jews were saying over and over again, "He saved others; let Him save Himself if this is the Messiah of God, His Chosen One." The Roman soldiers chimed in mocking Jesus continuing to come up to Him, offering Him sour wine, and continuing to say, "If You are the King of the Jews, say Yourself!" One of the criminals who were being crucified with Jesus kept blaspheming or kept on abusing Jesus saying, "Are You the Christ? Save Yourself and us!" The other criminal rebuked him saying, "Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong." Then he kept on repeating, "Jesus, remember me when You come into Your kingdom!"

Once and for all, not to be repeated, Jesus said, "I solemnly say to you, this very day you will be in Paradise with Me." Here is the greatest example of saving faith in the New Testament. The One making the promise dies first! Nothing is superimposed, not even baptism or church membership or last rites or communion or good works or living a perfect life. The penitent sinner is saved by faith alone in Jesus Christ alone.

The penitent thief spoke of the future; Jesus reassured him of "today you will be with Me in Paradise." Jesus gave him eternal assurance of salvation. He was saved by the grace of God alone by means of personal faith in Christ.

"Woman behold your son" (John 19:25-27)

When the disciple John saw Jesus nailed to the cross, he went back to the city of Jerusalem and brought with him Mary, the mother of Jesus. It could well be that the other women at the cross also came with John and Mary. "Therefore the soldiers did these things. But standing by the cross of Jesus were His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene" (John 19:25). Where were the half-brothers and sisters of Jesus? They were not with Mary at the cross. Jesus turns to His disciple John to care for His mother.

What would Jesus have to say to His mother? Will He have a special position for her in His kingdom? What special privilege of grace will He assign to Mary?

"When Jesus then saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing nearby, He said to His mother, 'Woman, behold, your son!' Then He said to the disciple, 'Behold, your mother!' From that hour the disciple took her into his own household" (John 19:26-27).

In effect Jesus was saying to Mary, "From now on, not I, but John, is your son." The amazing fact is Jesus did not call Mary, "mother," but "woman." He did not say "mother." He could just as easily said "mother," but He chose to say "woman." Jesus was not being disrespectful. He must terminate the earthly relationship. It was as if Jesus was saying to Mary: "Mother, look to John. Call him son. He will be with you and take care of you. I must be about My Father's business. Mary lost a son, but found a savior.

R. G. Lee wrote: ". . . Jesus cut Himself off from mother-love. He forsook the best earth had to offer Him. He renounced every tie that might interfere with His Saviourhood. He removed even the obstruction of filial devotion. He gave up all for sinners. He gave up all for me. He gave up all for you . . . It was a greater

renunciation when Christ gave up the glories of heaven to come to this earth and die for the sins of mankind. He renounced His mother in order that he could become her Savior."

Three Hours of Darkness on the Cross

The last four saying take place during the three hours of darkness between noon and 3 p.m. just before the death of Jesus.

Matthew, Mark and Luke inform us that a darkness covered the land from noon until 3 p.m.

"My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me" (Matt. 27:46)

"The robbers who had been crucified with Him were also insulting Him with the same words. Now from the sixth hour darkness fell upon all the land until the ninth hour. About the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, 'Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?' that is, 'My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?'" (Matthew 27:44-46; cf. Mark 15:33-34).

Martin Luther sat contemplating these words, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" For a long time, without food or water, he sat in deep meditation reflecting on this saying of Christ. After a long time he rose from his chair and exclaimed in utter amazement, "God forsaken of God! Who can understand that?"

These words of Jesus from the cross must be the most staggering sentence in the Bible.

Godforsakenness describes the depths of His suffering for us. John R. Broadus, "In Himself the Savior was still well-pleasing to the Father, in voluntarily laying down His life that He might take it again (Jn. 10:17f); it must have been as our substitute, because He 'bares our sins in His own body on the tree,' that He was forsaken."

John Shepherd writes: "These words mark the climax of the suffering of Christ for a lost world. Here He drank to the dregs the cup of sorrow, grief, and pain on our behalf. In these hours when the sun refused to shine upon suffering deity, Jesus found fitting expression to His feeling of desolation in the words of the Psalmist. Isaiah had given a vivid portrayal of the suffering Servant who was to be 'wounded for our transgressions.' John the Baptist pointed to Jesus as 'the Lamb of God that takes away the collective sin of a world of sinners.' Christ gave Himself a 'ransom for many.' Him who knew no sin God 'made sin' for us. On the cross Christ became a 'curse for us' and so redeemed us from the curse of the law. We are 'redeemed by the precious blood of Christ' shed on Calvary. He gave Himself a 'ransom for all.' The writers of the Gospels make it plain that Jesus 'had a baptism to be baptized with' and a 'cup to drink,' Paul and other writers of the epistles lay out clearly the same plan of redemption. Jesus had to pay the price alone and tasted death—spiritual death—for every man. Spiritual death is broken communion. Jesus had a taste of such a broken communion, the first and last He ever experienced—in those desolate hours when darkness lay upon the earth and upon His soul. That is the reason He used the words of distressed astonishment: Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani (Hebrew)—'my God, my God, to what end or purpose hast thou forsaken me?'" (*The Christ of the Gospels*, p. 602).

The Hebrew prophet Isaiah said the Suffering Servant would be "wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities." The LORD God was laying on Him "the iniquities of us all." The Suffering Servant of Yahweh was crying out, "My God, My God . . ."

John the Baptizer pointed to Jesus and declared, "Behold the Lamb of God who lifts up and takes away the collective sin of a world of sinners" (Jn. 1:29, 36).

"I thirst" (John 19:28-30)

Some of those near the cross thought Jesus was calling for Elijah, and someone ran and filled a sponge full of sour wine put it on a reed and lifted it up to Jesus' lips. "Immediately one of them ran, and taking a sponge, he filled it with sour wine and put it on a reed, and gave Him a drink. But the rest of them said, 'Let us see whether Elijah will come to save Him'" (Matthew 27:48-49). This is not the drugged wine referred to in Matthew 27:34, but the sour wine, a cheap wine drunk by the Roman soldiers. Some were saying stop, don't give Him anything to drink, let's see if Elijah was come and save Him.

"After this, Jesus, knowing that all things had already been accomplished, to fulfill the Scripture, said, 'I am thirsty.' A jar full of sour wine was standing there; so they put a sponge full of the sour wine upon a branch of hyssop and brought it up to His mouth" (John 19:28-29).

H. C. Lenski writes, "The entire Scriptures in all that they present concerning the earthly work of Jesus have now been turned into actuality, the work mapped out by Scripture is now a work actually accomplished" (*John*, p. 1303). Nothing else needed to be done. His work of suffering is complete. In a few minutes Jesus will sip the sour wine at His lips and shout "Finished!" announcing to the world that His work is done. The price for our redemption is paid in full.

What was accomplished took place in those three hours of darkness when Jesus, covered with our guilt, experienced that even God had turned his face from Him. Jesus' suffering in bitter agony was over, and our redemption was completed. All that the Scriptures had foretold concerning His earthly work was completed. Nothing more was needed but to give up His spirit and die. The long, great work of redemption was completely done.

"It is finished!" (John 19:30)

"Therefore 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).

Jesus did not say, "I am finished." He declared, "It is finished!" The work of salvation is completed, done, finished. The "it" that is finished is the payment of the penalty due to us is paid in full by Jesus. We deserve to die for our sins, but Jesus paid our penalty for us.

"Finished (*Tetelestai*) is perfect tense meaning it was finished and as a result it is finished forever. "Done." "It stands finished." The victory is complete.

The "it" is the payment of the penalty of the accumulated guilt and sin of all men. It is paid in full. "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23). Jesus died that death for us. He is our substitute who paid our debt to God's rigorousness.

Leon Morris writes, "Jesus died with the cry of the victor on His lips. This is not the moan of the defeated, nor the sight of patient resignation. It is the triumphant recognition that He has now fully accomplished the work that He came to do." The eyewitness John gives us the touching detail that He bowed His head and gave up His spirit. It "is the thought of a peaceful death, the death of One who trusts in His Father . . . His relation to

death is not the same as that of other people." In his footnote Morris says, "Most important is the truth that Jesus' work was finished. He came to work God's work, and this meant dying on the cross for the world's salvation. This mighty work of redemption has now reached its consummation. It is finished" (*John*, p. 815).

The "it" of Isaiah 53:6 was declared finished. "The Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all." It is the "it" of Isaiah 53:12, "He poured out his soul unto death."

The "it" of 2 Corinthians 5:21 was finished. "God has made Christ to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him."

The "it" of 1 Timothy 2:5–6 is finished. "For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all . . ."

The "it" of Revelation 5:9 is finished. "And they sang a new song, saying, 'Worthy art Thou to take the book, and to break its seals; for Thou wast slain, and didst purchase for God with Thy blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.'"

The "it" Jesus completely satisfied was the personal penalty due you and me because of our individual sin

"Father, into Your hands I commend My spirit" (Luke 23:46)

"And Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, said, 'Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit.' Having said this, He breathed His last" (Luke 23:46). The loud voice appears to be the scream, shriek (*krazo*) Matthew refers to in 27:50. If so, it would be an inarticulate scream, and then the words of Jesus in a loud voice, "Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit."

The slaying of the Passover lambs took place at the Temple at the very moment the Lamb of God died on the cross. Jesus summoned death to serve Him. Augustine said, "He gave up His life because He willed it, when He willed it, and as He willed it."

How many times was Jesus mocked that day? The Sanhedrin and the Jewish leaders (Luke 22:63-65); Herod Antipas and his soldiers (Luke 23:11); Pilate's Roman soldiers (Matt. 27:27-30); the people mingling about the cross who were stirred up by the religious leaders (Luke 23:35; Matt. 27:39-44); the soldiers about the cross (Luke 23:36), and the criminals being crucified with Jesus (Luke 23:39; Matt. 27:44) were all mocking Jesus.

If you were there, how would you have treated Him? What is your relationship with Jesus Christ?

We stand guilty before a holy and righteous God. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). But God in His amazing grace has provided for us what we could never provide for ourselves. He sent His Son who knew no sin to die as our substitute and pay our sin debt. "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23). "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16). That love is demonstrated at the cross when Jesus died for us. "For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. . . . But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). All that we need to have a perfect relationship with the LORD God has been provided for us. What then must we do to receive God's free gift of salvation or eternal life? "If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the

dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. . . . for 'Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved'" (Romans 10:13).

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Wil is a graduate of William Carey University, B. A.; New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, Th. M.; and Azusa Pacific University, M. A. He has pastored in Panama, Ecuador and the U. S, and served for over 20 years as missionary in Ecuador and Honduras. He had a daily expository Bible teaching ministry head in over 100 countries from 1972 until 2005. He continues to seek opportunities to be personally involved in world missions. Wil and his wife Ann have three grown daughters. He currently serves as a Baptist missionary and teaches seminary extension courses and evangelism conferences in Honduras, Nicaragua, Peru and Ecuador.