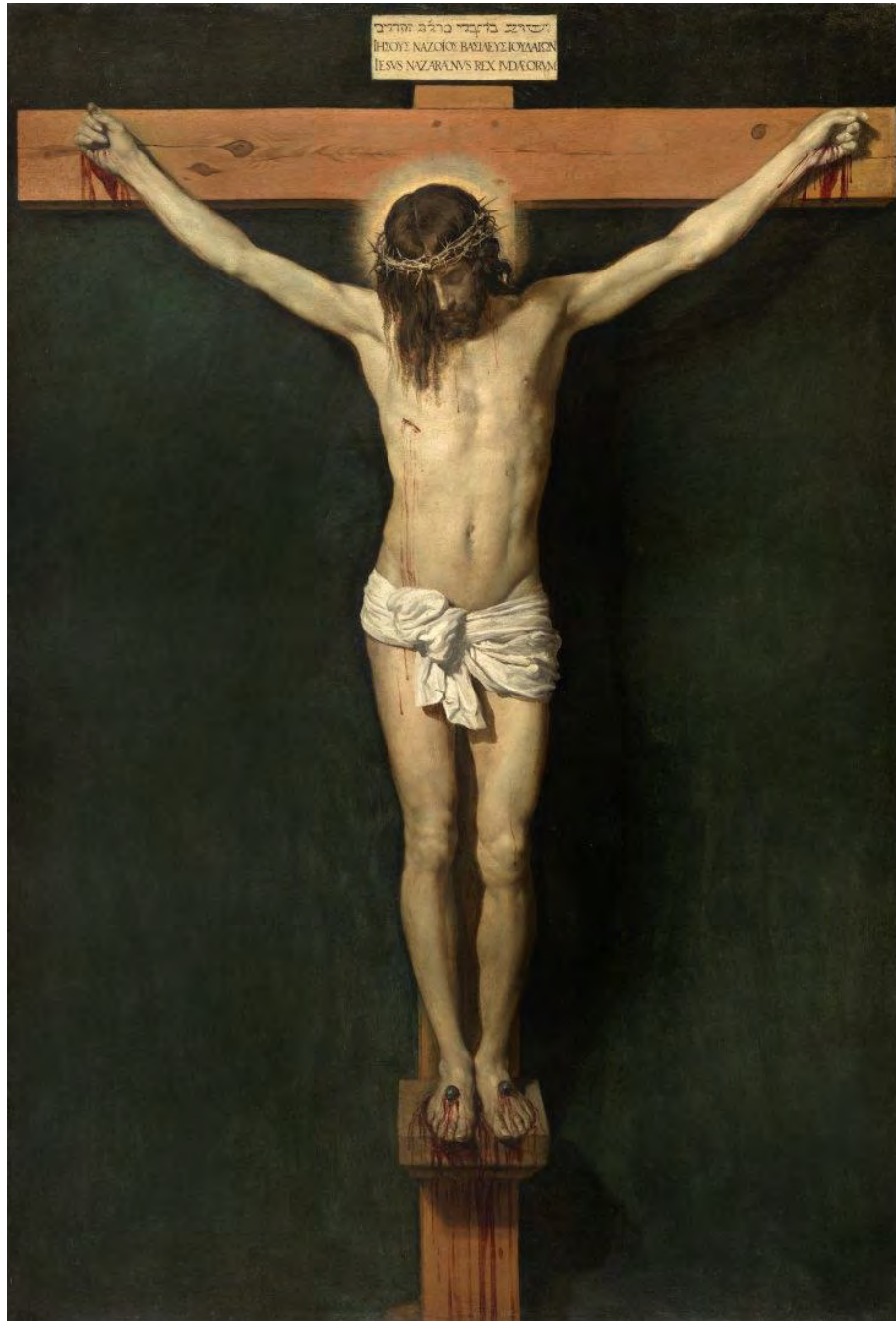


LUKE—WEEK 29

TRIAL AND CRUCIFIXION



F. Michael Slay
A DEEP Study

The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Cover Picture is “Christ on the Cross” by Diego Rodriguez da Silva y Velázquez (1599–1660) on display at Museo del Prado, Madrid

Pilate and Herod find Jesus innocent, but Pilate caves to the rabble and sends Jesus to the cross anyway.

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T. M. Moore, Principal
tmmoore@ailbe.org

Thank you.

Luke 23:1–38 — Trial and Crucifixion
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1 Luke 23:1–7 (ESV)

Then the whole company of them arose and brought him before Pilate. And they began to accuse him, saying, “We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that he himself is Christ, a king.” And Pilate asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” And he answered him, “You have said so.” Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, “I find no guilt in this man.” But they were urgent, saying, “He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee even to this place.”

When Pilate heard this, he asked whether the man was a Galilean. And when he learned that he belonged to Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him over to Herod, who was himself in Jerusalem at that time.

Pilate's actually a pretty good Roman bureaucrat, so he kicks this rabble out of his office.

Pilate is a high-level administrator; the authority to crucify was not common. Just because Rome practiced crucifixion doesn't mean they took it lightly.

These peasants get him out of bed early to settle a religious argument—and it's not even his religion. Like any high-level administrator, he's irritated that he has to handle something that should have been handled at a lower level.

Pilate sizes up this situation as not worth his time, and displays his pique when he says, “*I find no guilt in this man.*” Make no mistake; this is designed to infuriate the council. They think He's guilty as sin.

The next sentence is comedy gold. *But they were urgent, saying, “He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee even to this place.”* Wow, the crime of stirring.

Then they let it slip that Jesus is from Galilee. Pilate sees an out and packs them off to Herod.

He wants no part of a kangaroo court. As brutal as Roman justice is, it's organized and professional.

Their council is being disrespectful of the system.

Always pray for your civil leaders, especially the ones you don't agree with. Like Pilate, they're confronted with things they'd rather not have to deal with.

Pray that God will grant them wisdom and patience. Ask the Lord to bless them and their families. Ask God to let them see the benefits of all their sacrifice and hard work.

Ask Him to give them peace as they're forced to accept the crazy schedule that serious responsibility inevitably produces.

People often leave government service “to spend more time with their family.”

That's not always just an excuse.

2 Luke 23:8–16 (ESV)

When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had long desired to see him, because he had heard about him, and he was hoping to see some sign done by him. So he questioned him at some length, but he made no answer. The chief priests and the scribes stood by, vehemently accusing him. And Herod with his soldiers treated him with contempt and mocked him. Then, arraying him in splendid clothing, he sent him back to Pilate. And Herod and Pilate became friends with each other that very day, for before this they had been at enmity with each other.

Pilate then called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people, and said to them, “You brought me this man as one who was misleading the people. And after examining him before you, behold, I did not find this man guilty of any of your charges against him. Neither did Herod, for he sent him back to us. Look, nothing deserving death has been done by him. I will therefore punish and release him.”

Jesus presents even less of a defense to Herod than He did to Pilate. Yet Herod acquits Him too. Herod and Pilate agree, and this turns enmity into friendship.

What?! How can this even happen, and how can it be important enough to include in scripture? How can Herod recognizing Jesus’s innocence heal this relationship with Pilate?

Obviously, their little tiff must have been job-related; if it was personal, a wise judicial ruling wouldn’t matter. Little is known about their enmity—it’s only mentioned in Luke—but the way it ends indicates it was a matter of respect.

Pilate was very senior to Herod. He was a full blown prefect, while Herod (Herod Antipas) was a mere tetrarch (quarter-king) who inherited only part of the kingdom of his father, Herod the Great—who was subordinate to Rome anyway. This Herod didn’t even earn his position; he inherited it.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pontius_Pilate

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herod_Antipas

Pilate may have assumed that Herod was out of his depth; that certainly fits what happened. Still, we don’t know the whole back-story to this enmity. We only know that Herod’s acquittal of Jesus caused Pilate to end it. That speaks volumes about the legal case against Jesus. Not only was He acquitted twice, but the junior judge’s decision to acquit changed the senior judge’s opinion of him.

That adds weight to his ruling. Pilate viewed Herod’s judgement of Jesus as a litmus test.

What a simple but beautiful point—Jesus was innocent. Here’s another simple point—we’re not. The innocent suffered for our guilt. “*And can it be, that I should gain, an interest in the savior’s blood?*”

We don’t appreciate this enough, even though we’ve memorized the words. We should regularly pray to see the magnitude of the contradiction. It’s ridiculous that we need to ask for help in this—but we do.

Ask God to open your heart so that you can appropriately appreciate what He did.

3 Luke 23:18–25 (ESV)

But they all cried out together, “Away with this man, and release to us Barabbas”—a man who had been thrown into prison for an insurrection started in the city and for murder. Pilate addressed them once more, desiring to release Jesus, but they kept shouting, “Crucify, crucify him!” A third time he said to them, “Why, what evil has he done? I have found in him no guilt deserving death. I will therefore punish and release him.” But they were urgent, demanding with loud cries that he should be crucified. And their voices prevailed. So Pilate decided that their demand should be granted. He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, for whom they asked, but he delivered Jesus over to their will.

Pilate is irritated that this matter requires his attention, but imagine what would happen if this ends up on Caesar’s desk. That seems far-fetched, but this mob is nuts. They keep *shouting*, “Crucify, crucify him!” Pilate is baffled by this and asks, “*Why, what evil has he done?*”

They don’t give an answer; they just keep screaming for Him to be crucified. It’s starting to look like he’s either going to have to accede to their demands or put down a riot by force—something well within his power to do.

But that’s not a prospect he relishes, so he caves. The great irony here is that Jesus’s accusers are committing the exact crime that they accused Jesus of back in verse five—stirring up the crowd. Jesus is perfectly innocent (the most innocent ever), while his accusers are perfectly guilty.

That’s the point. Jesus walked all the way to Jerusalem to be the innocent sacrifice for guilty people. His accusers have unwittingly built a model of the gospel right there in Pilate’s courtyard.

Actually, they’re building two models. Their cry to have Barabbas released is the other one. He’s obviously guilty—these people are crazy to want this thug back on the street—but he’s a perfect model of the gospel. They will nail Jesus to the cross they were supposed to nail Barabbas to.

The innocent dies in the guilty one’s place.

Watching this unfold, I’d be tempted to hope that Pilate would call in a SWAT team and give these clowns an attitude adjustment. The disciples may have been hoping for (and praying for) something like that.

In retrospect, we can see how misguided that prayer would be. This is one of those cases where we get to see God’s purposes—and our ignorance. That’s an attitude adjustment too.

It’s good to ask God to reveal His purposes, especially if we’re angry or frustrated about something.

He’ll never let us see all of it—that would be more than we could handle—but we can ask for enough for an attitude adjustment.

It’s okay to be upset, even to scream, as long as you’re being honest with God.

4 Luke 23:26–31 (ESV)

And as they led him away, they seized one Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, and laid on him the cross, to carry it behind Jesus. And there followed him a great multitude of the people and of women who were mourning and lamenting for him. But turning to them Jesus said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep 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 wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?”

You think this is bad? Wait until you see what’s next. “*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!’*” Jesus is saying that something’s coming that’s worse than crucifixion. Yikes, is that even possible?

You bet. History records plenty of brutal sieges, but the siege of Jerusalem in 70 AD tops them all. In this passage, Jesus tones it down for general audiences. Josephus, the great Jewish historian, gives us the R-rated details.

<http://www.rjgeib.com/thoughts/desolation/josephus.html>

But what about, “*For if they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?*” This metaphor is strange to us, but the meaning can be deduced—and it’s even more chilling.

Green wood isn’t right for any use. It doesn’t burn well. Making something out of green wood leads to problems later when the wood dries and shrinks. The only thing you should do with green wood is dry it.

So, “*they do these things when the wood is green*” refers to an unsuitable application of something. *What will happen when it is dry* refers to appropriate applications.

They’re crucifying an innocent man; imagine what they’ll do with people who merit crucifixion. In Roman law, rebellion is *the* classic crucifixion-worthy crime.

And the Roman response to the Jewish rebellion of AD 66–70 is *the* classic brutal put-down.

The rebellion and the Roman response are a picture of pride on steroids. It’s Jewish pride vs. Roman pride.

<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/revolt.html>

Think we’re better? Think again. Pride can be a tough nut to crack; you can even be proud of your humility.

Pride can only be cured supernaturally. Ask the Lord to cleanse us of this most hideous sin.

Ask Him to hold up a mirror to your soul and show you the horrors inside.

5 Luke 23:32–38 (ESV)

Two others, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. And Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” And they cast lots to divide his garments. And the people stood by, watching, but the rulers scoffed at 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!” There was also an inscription over him, “This is the King of the Jews.”

At first, this passage feels like a list of disconnected details, but it’s actually a painting of a very disturbing scene.

Picture this. They’ve walked up *to the place that is called The Skull*. Scholars aren’t sure how it got that name. It may have been a rock formation shaped like a skull.

However, since they often left people on the cross until animals had picked their bones clean, *The Skull* could have been a reference to what people noticed most when they were there. Then again, in that case the name probably would have been *The Smell*.

There they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. That’s three crosses with Jesus on the middle one.

And the people stood by, watching, but the rulers scoffed at him ... The soldiers also mocked him. The crowd is large and varied. Notice that Jesus is getting all the attention.

Jesus says, “*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.*” Who are “they”? Well, in the sentence before and the sentence after this, “they” refers to the soldiers.

Jesus is praying for the guys who are killing Him.

And they cast lots to divide his garments.

What you think this means, that they stripped Him down to His skivvies? Crucifixion was designed to be degrading. Art depicting His crucifixion is done tastefully, but that conceals how distasteful it really was.

Jesus died naked.

Christians have many strong feelings when we think about what Jesus did on the cross: shame, horror, guilt, thankfulness—the list is endless.

But there’s one we lack—nausea. Somewhere along the way, crucifixion got sanitized. We call it horrible, but we don’t really know how horrible it was. People who lived with crucifixion had awful sounds and smells living in their heads 24/7.

That’s exactly how Rome designed it.

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. How would you react to an offer to serve in an important, but life-sucking, high position in government?
2. Have you ever served on a jury? How did you determine truth?
3. Have you ever seen (or experienced) a great injustice?
4. Do you know anyone who seems to not be prideful?
5. What do you know about how crucifixion works and why Rome practiced it?