

Life and Teaching of Jesus Christ

Lecture 19

Jesus' Final Hours

Introduction

- We have now reached the final moments in Jesus' earthly life. The four Gospels tell the story with slightly differing emphases or details. However, there are no contradictions between them. As we have already noted, any differences help to strengthen the authenticity of the Scriptures rather than weaken them. If all the details were perfectly harmonised, critics would have reason to argue that the Scriptures had been edited by a redactor so that they would appear genuine. There are very plausible explanations for all the differences between the four accounts, eg the question of when Jesus ate the Passover with His disciples.¹ None of the so-called contradictions create any doctrinal problem concerning the death of Jesus – there is a little variation in the words that were spoken at different times – it all represents a composite picture in which no one Gospel records each detail or word but all together they give a united picture and message. The differences can also be understood simply by remembering that each Gospel writer had some different emphases in mind, eg Matthew vs. Luke – Matthew writing to Jewish readers and uses language and details which were meaningful for them, whereas Luke writing as a Gentile for readers who were largely non-Jewish, hence his need to occasionally interpret Jewish traditions etc.
- In God's Redemptive History, the "hour" (kairos) had finally arrived when He would be offered up as the "propitiation" (atoning sacrifice) for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:1-2; 4:9-10; cf. John 12:23,27) – the hour that had been anticipated even back in the Garden of Eden (Gen.3:15) – the hour that God had planned and foreordained (Acts 2:22-24; 3:13-18) – we are greatly blessed to be able to read the story of Jesus' sufferings through God's eyes, i.e. through the wider witness of the Scriptures – see also Isaiah 53.

¹ The Daily Bible, Commentary by F. LaGard Smith, Harvest House Publishers, Oregon, 1984; pp.1454-1456

Jesus' agony in the Garden of Gethsemane

- As was His custom, Jesus withdraws from His teaching ministry in the Temple to be alone with His disciples in the Mount of Olives – see Luke 22:39. Jesus is fully aware of what is now fast approaching – He goes there knowing full well the evil plot that is being hatched between Judas Iscariot and the Jewish religious leaders behind the scenes – cf. John 13:21-30 – He is not afraid for He has entrusted His life and all matters into the hands of His Father in heaven.
- He encourages His disciples to stand with Him in prayer – to fight with Him knowing that it was a very “dark” night (Luke 22:40) – Jesus hopes His followers will support Him in prayer but they fall asleep – the emotional strain of the hour is telling upon them.
- To see Jesus in the Garden (“Gethsemane” = olive press) is to behold Jesus, the Son of God *and* the Son of Man = the Son of God in full submission to His Father’s will (see Heb.5:7-8), the Son of Man facing the strain and anticipation of His darkest night and longest day, the approaching agony in His spirit together with the utter revulsion and horrors of death – see Luke 22:43-44 – if Jesus would cruised through His sufferings, then it would have been dreadfully apparent to all that His humanity was nothing but a sham.
- *“That he withdrew from them, and prayed himself; they had their errands at the throne of grace, and he had his, and therefore it was fit that they should pray separately, as sometimes, when they had joint errands, they prayed together. He withdrew about a **stone’s cast** further into the garden, which some reckon about fifty of sixty paces, and there he **kneeled down** (so it is here) upon the bare ground; but the other evangelists say that afterwards he **fell on his face**, and there **prayed** that, if it were the will of God, this cup of suffering, this bitter cup, might be **removed from him**. This was the language of that innocent dread of suffering which, being really and truly man, he could not but have in his nature.”²*
- He goes apart by Himself and prays:
 - He agonises in prayer asking, *“If it be possible, Father, take this cup from Me”* – Luke 22:41-42 – the word “cup” is the cup of God’s wrath that Jesus must drink to the full, right to the dregs of the cup if the Father could then offer this grace-gift to all the world, cf. Isaiah 51:17,22; Jer.25:15; Matt.20:22-23; Mark 10:35-40; Luke 22:17,19; John 18:11 – God’s plan

²Henry, M. *E4's Matthew Henry's Complete 6 Volume Commentary* (electronic ed.). .: :

was to pour out His wrath on Jesus for the sin of the whole world so that He could then show mercy and kindness to all who would receive His gifts through death and resurrection of His Son – see Is.53:10-12; cf. Rom.5:9.

- He continues in prayer – the disciples are unable to stay awake – He chides them and counsels them about prayer, perseverance and alertness.

Jesus' arrest and trial

- At this moment in the night, a band of men arrive on the scene escorted by one of Jesus' own disciples, Judas Iscariot, who knew exactly where they would find Jesus – Luke 22:47 – Judas had already negotiated Jesus' betrayal with the religious leaders who were delighted to discover this unexpected “ally” – see Matt.26:14-16; Luke 22:3-6
- No one can know for sure what was in Judas' mind or heart that gave birth to his scheming (was it that his mind was so enslaved by Mammon that he could be easily bought with money? or was it that he was frustrated with Jesus' slowness in bringing in the kingdom of God in which he would have power?) – what we do know is that he was “*a son of perdition*” who though he followed Jesus, his heart had not been truly “converted” – see John 17:12 (“*While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled.*”) – it is best for us not to speculate but rather to accept Scripture at face value – we cannot fathom all the mysteries yet (eg our minds cannot fathom how Jesus could have chosen Judas Iscariot to be one of His followers when He knew that he would be His betrayer) – when Satan knocked at Judas' “door” with the offer and plan, he opened the door and Satan entered his heart (Luke 22:3; John 13:27), cf. Eph.4:27 – it's a severe warning for all believers and followers of Jesus that we need to stay constantly on guard against Satan's evil devices to worm his way into our lives/hearts – if we are careless with sin, allowing sinful ways slowly to become “agreeable” to us, then we are in reality making it relatively easy for Satan, as Judas did with his sinful ways of handling the team's money, to come to us at an unsuspecting moment with a seemingly innocent proposal, and almost without our awareness we have fallen in line with Satan's evil intention with all the resulting destruction and judgment.
- Jesus' arrest takes place without any resistance from Jesus though there was a foolish and weak attempt at resistance by one of Jesus' disciples (Luke 22:49-50;

John 18:10,cf. v.26) – what we witness is Jesus’ dignity and authority (*He* is the One in control of the whole drama, not His captors; cf. John 18:2-7, ** v.6), also His divine compassion – He heals the ear cut off by Peter (Luke 22:50-51 – note how Luke the physician adds the medical detail which is not included in some of the other Gospels) – finally all of Jesus’ followers run for their lives, one of them, possibly Mark, leaving his cloak behind returning home naked, cf. Matt.26:30-33 (all the sheep were scattered when the Shepherd is taken from them).

- Jesus is arrested, bound and led away to brought before the Jewish Sanhedrin:
 - Jesus’ non-resistance, like a sheep before her shearers is dumb – see 1 Peter 2:21-23.
 - The Jewish religious leaders’ hastily convened, special Council hearing – Luke 22:54a, 66-71.
 - Peter’s denial and then his brokenness, remorse and repentance (= turning back) – Luke 22:54b-62 – almost certainly Peter himself was the one who related these details to Luke
 - Jesus’ torturous sufferings at the hands of His captors and later the Roman officers – “*bruised for our iniquities*” – Luke 22:63-65; Isaiah 53:4ff; John 19:1-5.
 - Jesus’ witness to the religious leaders – on the basis of His own testimony (Luke 22:67-70) and the failure of the testimonies of false witnesses to produce a guilty verdict, the Jewish leaders hand Jesus over to Pilate to be condemned to death – Pontius Pilate was the Roman governor in Palestine – their judgment was that Jesus was guilty of death because of the sin of blasphemy = He had claimed to be God.
 - The trial by Pilate – Luke 23:1-7,13-25 – note Jesus’ quiet agreement that He was the King of the Jews, cf. Pilate’s discussion with Jesus in John 18:33-38
 - Pilate tries to push through a “not guilty” verdict – Luke 23:4,14-16,20,22
 - He also tried to get this case off his hands by involving Herod Antipas – Luke 23:6-12; the offer to release someone condemned (according to custom): Jesus or Barabbas?? – Luke 23:17-19,25; passing the blame on to the religious leaders – Luke 23:20-22
 - The religious leaders incited the crowd to demand Jesus’ crucifixion – Luke 23:18,21,23

- Pilate's final judgment – Luke 23:24, capitulating to the will of the mob – Jesus is handed over for further torture and then crucifixion – Luke 23:25 – what was the real reason for Pilate's final decision? Did he reach this decision as a “political compromise,” i.e. giving in to the wishes of the religious leaders in order to save Jerusalem from a major religious riot and all the negative press that he as the governor would get back in Rome?
- Jesus' *Via Dolorosa*:
 - Jesus is utterly weak, requiring the Roman soldiers to conscript Simon from Cyrene to carry His cross (i.e. the crossbeam) – Luke 23:26
 - The weeping and wailing of the women and Jesus' calm and loving words – Luke 23:27-32

Jesus' crucifixion

- When it comes to Jesus' crucifixion, if we have often read and heard this story, it is too easy to read the Gospel account without any sense of the terror, horror, evil and depth of human suffering that accompanied this most cruel form of torture and death. It was the most inhumane and humiliating form of killing a “criminal” that man could ever possibly imagine. Here is Jesus descending to the lowest of the low – hanging naked by huge nails to His hands and feet, stretched out before the contemptuous eyes of passers-by – enduring the deepest level of excruciating pain imaginable to say nothing of the greatest humiliation – “*in our stead*” – we must not allow ourselves to read these details as if this is a movie drama that never happened in real life but rather read it with bowed heads and with broken hearts, worshipping our gracious Lord and Saviour for taking our sins upon Himself on this accursed tree – 2 Cor.5:21 “*God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*”
- Highlights of the crucifixion scene from Luke's account in 23:33-49:
 - Jesus is led away to be crucified at a place called “The Skull” – v.33, cf. Matt.27:33, (this name is given because of the appearance of the rock formation like a skull, Golgotha or “Calvarius” in Latin) – i.e. outside the city walls, cf. Heb.13:11-12 – Jesus is led there like the “scape-goat” was taken outside the camp so as to carry away the sins of the people.

- Jesus is crucified between two criminals (robbers – Matt.27:38) – v.33 – fulfilling prophecy – see Matthew’s account for prophetic fulfilments.
- Jesus’ prayer: *“Father, forgive them....”* (v.34a) – this is the first thought and prayer proceeding from the mouth of our Lord – no recriminations, hatred, bitterness, revenge – here is the Son of God manifesting the heart of the Father – a heart longing to show mercy, to forgive – here is God pouring His wrath upon His Son’s head so that instead of wrath, He might shower love and mercy upon His people – here is God opening a way to forgive all who come to Him for grace.
- People in the crowd by Jesus’ cross:
 - The soldiers:
 - They were entertaining themselves with light-hearted gambling – v.34b
 - The soldiers also joined the mocking chorus: *“If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself”*- v.36-36 – cf. what about the scorn and mocking that we can suffer because of Jesus? Jesus bore all of this for us so we can bring the pain in our hearts caused by the sneering of loved ones or the crowd, looking up to Jesus, receiving the comfort and the peace that He gives because He has already taken all kinds of suffering to the cross.
 - Lookers-on / passers-by – “spectators” – their minds terribly hardened, their consciences hardly moved in the face of this horrific scene – v.35
 - The Jewish rulers:
 - Sneering, laughing, full of scorn, thinking that they had finally silenced the One who had been the greatest threat to their religious authority among the ordinary people: *“He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, the Chosen One.”* -
 - They questioned the inscription above Jesus’ cross: *“This is the King of the Jews”* (in Greek, Latin & Hebrew) – v.38 – probably intended by the Romans as a form of ridicule – an inscription above a person being crucified was intended to inform the crowd concerning the crime for which he was

dying – cf. John 19:19-22 – the Jewish leaders tried to have this inscription changed, asking Pilate to add the words: “*He said....*” but Pilate refused their request – thus the truth was announced to all though only those who would accept their King would one day enjoy the blessings of His kingdom – was Pilate’s refusal to change the inscription his way of hitting back at these Jewish leaders for forcing his hand in delivering a “guilty” verdict?

- The criminals/robbers:
 - One of the two criminals (robbers) crucified with Jesus joins in cursing and blaspheming chorus against Jesus – his words: “*Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!*” (v.39) like Satan’s taunting Jesus through him to take things into His own hands and save Himself with a great display of His messianic power (cf. Satan’s temptation in the wilderness) – to save Himself would have been possible as He had thousands of angels at His command, but it would have robbed Him of the glory of His victory over Satan and robbed us of eternal salvation
 - The other thief recognised who Jesus was, confesses with his mouth that Jesus was a perfect man suffering unjustly and that Jesus was indeed the King (“your Kingdom”) – see vs.40-42
 - Jesus speaks the word of welcome into His eternal kingdom – v.43
- Jesus’ mother, other women and Jesus’ disciple, John: see John 19:25-27
- God displays His awesome power – vs.44-45:
 - He causes a great darkness to descend over the whole land – thick darkness (cf. Ex.10:21-22 and the plague of darkness) – symbolic of the blackness and terror of sin, of the darkness which comes upon all when the radiance and glory of God is cut off and replaced by the darkness of His wrath and rejection – at this point Jesus is experiencing His ultimate suffering, i.e. God turning His face away

from His beloved Son as Jesus carries the sin of the whole world upon His own shoulders

- He causes the veil in the Temple to be torn in two – making open “the Holy of holies”
- Jesus breathes His last breath – v.46 – here is the Son of God, not involuntarily succumbing to death’s power but in full consciousness giving Himself into the hands of His Father – He has completed the work He had come to do (cf. *“It is finished!”* – John 19:30), i.e. His Father’s mission for the salvation of the world, so now He can surrender Himself into His Father’s safe and loving Hands, cf. Psalm 16:9-10; 1 Peter 4:6
- Responses/reactions – vs.47-48
 - The response and witness of a Roman soldier – v.47
 - He praised God (N.B. Luke’s focus on giving glory to God)
 - Having witnessed the hours of Jesus’ suffering and the moment of His dying, this man spontaneously responded in the hearing of all the others gathered around: *“Undoubtedly this man was innocent.”* (cf. Matt.27:54 *“Surely he was the Son of God.”*)
 - The response of many in the crowds – beating their breasts (a sign of deep mourning and sorrow) – v.48
 - All these events were observed by a group of faithful eye-among the followers of Jesus, viz. a few faithful women – v.49

Jesus’ burial

- Joseph from Arimathea takes action – Luke 23:50-51 – note four things the text says about Joseph:
 - He was a member of the (Jewish) Council or Sanhedrin = a leader, a person with standing in the Jewish community, a person of some wealth (he had just purchased a tomb)
 - He had not consented with the other members of the Sanhedrin in requesting the death sentence for Jesus
 - He was “a good and righteous man”
 - He was “waiting for the Kingdom of God” – cf. those who were just taken up with this life, making money, living for themselves et al

- Joseph went to Pilate – v.52 – a courageous step – to request that he be allowed to give Jesus an honourable burial – and was granted his request
- Jesus' body was taken down, wrapped lovingly in keeping with the Jewish burial customs, then laid in this tomb that had never before been used – v.53
- All this took place at the end of Friday, when the Sabbath Day was about to begin (i.e. at sunset on Friday) – v.54 – all this “work” needed to be completed without delay
- The women from Galilee who had been witnessing all that had been inflicted on their beloved Master to this point had not left and returned home – vs.55-56a – they saw the place where Jesus had been laid and went home in order to prepare the necessary spices and perfumes for Jesus' body (even though Jesus' body had been anointed before His death – see John 12:7)
- Then everyone went away to rest according to the Sabbath commandment – v.56b

These notes were written and prepared by Rev. Graham M. Roberts, M.Th. for the B.Min. “Life and Teaching of Jesus Christ” course at the Asian College of Cultural Studies – February 2004.