

AT
THE
CROSS
WITH JESUS

(“Were you there when
they crucified my Lord?”)

By

Rev. Dr. Brian Hooper

INTRODUCTION

“**Were you there when they crucified my LORD**” is an old negro spiritual gospel song. I have it on an early “LP” (long-play) vinyl record sung by Ethel Waters. And sung with great feeling, might I add. I have ‘goose-bumps’ now as I recall hearing it for the first time in my teen-age years. The questions the song raises: “Were you there when they crucified my Lord?” You will notice I wrote ‘questions’ – not ‘question’. The main question is: “Was I there watching Jesus die?” And how did I feel about it? What did it mean to me? And the singer of the question challenges me with “Would you care enough about Jesus to go along to His execution, an execution of inhuman torture, and watch Him die? Not to view Him dying, but to live His dying with him. Because the second question is encased in an affirmation by the singer. “Were you there watching my precious Lord die?” This man who was crucified, is my Lord, my master, the one I serve, the one I love. “Were you there to watch my Jesus die?” And if so, what is your response?

In a set of ten studies we are going to look at individuals or groups who were there. People who watched him die. And we will seek to put ourselves in their position. We will watch their reactions and see if their presence at the cross and their responses touch us deeply and emotionally. *Brian Hooper*

CONTENTS

Study 1	Simon from Cyrene; Some women of Jerusalem.	Page 3
Study 2	The robbers – and – the soldiers	7
Study 3	Jesus of Nazareth – the King of the Jews	09
Study 4	Pilate, chief priests, teachers of the law, elders & soldiers mock	13
Study 5	But one criminal didn’t mock	15
Study 6	Special Women: “Here is your son”.	17
Study 7	“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”	22
Study 8	The unknown man who gave Jesus wine-vinegar	25
Study 9	The Centurion, and women watching from a distance	28
Study 10	The disciple whom Jesus loved.	31
Bonus	The Seven Sayings of Jesus on the Cross	33

SIMON FROM CYRENE: SOME WOMEN

The time frame will be about seven hours – from about 8:00am until around 3:00pm in our time of reckoning. It begins with Jesus being handed over by Pilate to the soldiers who take control of Jesus and lead him towards the cross. It finishes with Jesus breathing his last breath on the cross. Within this time frame, Jesus is led away carrying *“his own cross”* – as John records it. Matthew, Mark and Luke all record the encounter with *“a man from Cyrene”* – a city in north-east Libya, North Africa. This man, from the Greek city of culture and learning, is *“forced to carry the cross”* – as all three gospels put it.

It was routine for the Romans to interrogate the accused which often included a flogging to aid in obtaining a confession. Once a prisoner was judged and condemned, were scourged so thoroughly that many criminals collapsed on their way to execution. The drugged wine offered by the Guild of the Women of Jerusalem, at the Judgment Gate, served the double purpose of reviving and anaesthetising the prisoners. This Jesus refused

Acknowledgment: *“A Harmony of the Four Gospels”* (NIV) Orville E. Daniel. This set of studies features a harmony of the four accounts of the crucifixion as given by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. You will be informed, moved, impacted and blessed.

Matthew 27:32

Mark 15:21

Luke 23:26

John 19:16

As they were going out,

they met a man from Cyrene, named Simon, and they

A certain man from Cyrene, Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by on his way in from the country, and they forced him to carry the cross.

As they led him away,

they seized Simon from Cyrene, and

put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus.

So the soldiers took charge of Jesus.

Carrying his own cross, he went out to the Place of the Skull.

27. A large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wailed for him. 28. Jesus turned and said to them, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. 29. For the time will come when you will say, ‘Blessed are the barren women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!’ 30. Then they will say to the mountains, “Fall on us!” and to the hills, “Cover us!” 31. For if men do this when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?” 32. Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed.

DISCUSSION POINTS

1. Develop the thought that this ‘Simon of Cyrene’ had ‘come in from the country’ (Mark 15:21), that is, Libya – North Africa, on a pilgrimage to attend Passover in Jerusalem. Include Mark’s reference to his sons Alexander and Rufus as Mark seems to assume that his readers will know the sons and their father who is referred to as ‘a certain man’. Perhaps Mark mentions the sons had become Christians. Perhaps their father had also and that is why he was part of the watching crowd. Simon, and his sons, would probably be black. They may have been the first black followers of Jesus. Mark is the only one to write about the two sons, but Matthew and Luke, who wrote later, and would know Mark’s gospel, chose to simply mention the black man from Cyrene.
2. Turn the parallel passages above into one complete Scripture narrative so you will end up with a complete Scriptural account of the crucifixion of Jesus. All the information that the Gospel writers give will be present. You will be aware that one Gospel writer may not include what another Gospel writer notes. This difference in the Gospels is evidence that each is a truthful account and points to the authenticity of four distinct eyewitnesses to the event. If it had been a contrived fictional account with four collaborating authors, the four would have made sure that they all said the same thing with nothing missed out. When you blend four different accounts into one you will be aware that all four are inspired (God-breathed) Scripture. All will speak to you. [J.B. Phillips, the translator of the New Testament was once asked how he felt reading the Greek original then putting it into English. His response was along the lines of: “I felt as if I were handling live electric wires.” I understand this comment comes from his book “*The Ring of Truth*”.]

Who was this man Simon of the city of Cyrene? Matthew, Luke and John name him, but only Mark says he was the father of Alexander and Rufus, as if they were known. Let us examine Mark’s words: *‘a certain man from Cyrene, Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus.’*

Ronald Brownrigg, in his ‘Who’s Who – The New Testament’ suggests that Mark mentions the sons by name because they were Christians known to him. Brownrigg goes on to say that Mark’s Gospel was believed to have been written in Rome during the year 64-65 and Paul, in the final part of his letter to Rome includes a greeting to *‘...Rufus, eminent in the Lord, also his mother and mine’* (Romans 16:13). Brownrigg adds that while we cannot make any certain identification with this family, the respect Paul had for the mother of Rufus and Alexander, coupled with Mark’s mention of them by name, strengthens the tradition that Simon of Cyrene and his family were converts to Christ.

Acts 6:9 presents an interesting thought: *“Members of a Jewish synagogue known as the ‘Libertines’, together with some from the synagogues of Cyrene and Alexandria, as well as some men from Cilicia and Asia, tried debating with Stephen...”* (Phillips)

And from the Weymouth Translation: ***“But some members of the so-called ‘Synagogue of the Freed-men,’ together with some Cyrenians, Alexandrians, Cilicians and Asians, were roused to encounter Stephen in debate.”***

First of all, Acts of the Apostles 6:9 makes it clear that there was a synagogue in Jerusalem for non-Jews with connections to other converts in Cyrene, Alexandria, Cilicia and Asia. Secondly, Simon was of Cyrene, and Mark’s Gospel says he was ***‘passing by on his way in from the country.’*** What was he doing? The Wycliffe Commentary says, “Simon had lodged outside the city over night, and was coming in for the day’s worship at the Temple. The guard, seizing him, pressed him to carry the cross of Jesus. Usually the prisoner carried his own, but our Lord, worn out by the tensions of the preceding hours, was unable to do so.” I think we can make a plausible scenario now.

1. Simon was a Jewish convert from Cyrene. He would come, perhaps once a year, to visit the Temple and fellowship at the local Jerusalem synagogue that provided for the needs of foreigners. There were converts from Alexandria, and it is no small accident that Simon had a son called ‘Alexander’.
2. So, Simon was on his way to worship but his pathway crossed that of Jesus carrying his cross. We may suggest a spiritual lesson in this. Here is a very sincere worshipper of the one true God, going to where he thinks God is to be found, and finds himself crossing the pathway of the Son of God – going in the opposite direction. The thought that this Jesus might be the Creator God of the Universe would never be expected to cross Simon’s mind.
3. I suggest that had this Simon been not known to Mark, the Gospel writer, we would never have heard of either him or the names of his children, remembered or written about. It seems to me that this encounter with Jesus, where Simon was called upon to bear the weight of the cross for a period, became indelibly written in his mind and spirit forever. It seems to me that he, his wife, and two of his children, came to faith in Jesus the Messiah. And while Mark hints at it, the Apostle Paul writes about it as he signs off his letter to Roman Christians (16:13).
4. Simon carried the cross. Luke (that doctor of detail) says that the soldiers ***‘made him carry it behind Jesus.’*** Jesus led the way to salvation. Simon followed. By the way, the name ‘Alexander’ means ‘defender of men’ and ‘Rufus’ means ‘red’
5. Rufus. The name Rufus is mentioned in Mark 15:21 and Romans 16:13 only. There is no certainty that they are the one and the same, but it is possible.

‘Jesus finally got one foot in front of him, but could not seem to bring up the other one. He was not moving, but his body was trying to lurch forward. The big beam began to sway. The people watched. His other foot came forward suddenly and his entire body heaved out of control. The Messiah felt himself falling, but he could not free his bound hands from the beam and, in a moment, he had pitched downward. The front of the big beam hit the ground first, and slid against the right side of his face as it stood almost on

end. He landed on his right knee and both elbows, and the cross-piece hung standing for a split second, and then fell away from him.

The centurion wanted everything to be orderly. He wasn't pleased. After a quick glance at the muddy face, and the fresh rivulets of blood starting from the thorns on the right side of Jesus' head, he knew it was useless to order this man to stand up and shoulder the beam. His eyes swept around the crowd seeking a man strong enough to shoulder the beam. He saw a man with brown bulging biceps, a man with a big dome of a head and a black beard. The centurion ordered the man to pick up the cross-beam and carry it.

The African's name was Simon of Cyrene. He had come to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover. He didn't want to be a problem to the Romans, so he did what he was told. Simon picked the cross-beam up out of the dust and threw it over his shoulder, hitching up his garments at the same time with his free hand. He was ready. But Jesus lay on his right side, gasping. Someone in the crowd pressing around bent down and lifted Jesus by the arm. The unknown support whispered to Jesus that he would not have to carry the tree any more. That the strong African man would do this for him.

Some Roman soldiers were on horses. The horses had stopped. But they started forward again, but quite slowly. The Cyrenian followed behind Jesus and knew that this this bleeding Jew was close to the point of total exhaustion. – because he had trouble moving his feet with only his weight in support. The parade moved down the street to the south, then turned right. Ahead was a formidable hill leading to the Ganneth gate. The walk to the place of crosses was a little more than half finished. Two thieves were in the procession too. Some in the crowd asked the thieves why they did what they did – but the two were silent.

As Jesus dragged his feet up the long hill, he was in such acute pain that his breathing could be heard by the ones nearby. Among them were some women. When one of them burst into tears, all began to sob. Many could no longer bear to look at him.

The Messiah stopped. His chest heaved with the effort to breathe, and his gaze turned shakily from one woman to the next until he had seen them all and had seen the reality of the tears – the first shed for his death. His voice strained, Jesus warned the women of the impending pillage of their city:

“Daughters of Jerusalem,” he said slowly and with massive effort, “do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and your children; for a time is coming when people will say ‘How blessed the barren are! How blessed the wombs that have never borne children, and the breasts that have never nursed!’ “Then they will cry out to the mountains, ‘Fall on us!’ and to the hills ‘Bury us!’”

For the last time in his earthly ministry, Jesus was a prophet and he had reserved his last warning for the women who were good of heart and could manage to accompany a man reduced almost to his last breath of life. “Yes”, the Messiah said, if this is done to the green wood, what must be the fate of the dry.” Jesus looked up towards the Ganneth gate. Fifty more steps would bring him to the pinnacle of God's plan. To die.’

(The Day Christ Died – Jim Bishop – an hour by hour account – Collins Fontana 1957 J.B.Phillips gives a back cover endorsement.)

THE ROBBERS - and – THE SOLDIERS

(Acknowledgment: “A Harmony of the Four Gospels” (NIV) Orville E. Daniel.)

Matthew 27:32	Mark 15:21	Luke 23:27 <i>32. Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed.</i>	John 19:17
Matthew 27:33-38	Mark 15:22-26	Luke 23:33-38	John 19:17b-19
<i>33. They came to a place called Golgotha (which means The Place of the Skull).</i>	<i>22. They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means The Place of the Scull).</i>	<i>33. When they came to the place called The Skull,</i>	<i>17b. ...he went out The Place of the Skull (which in Aramaic* is called Golgotha).</i>
<i>34. There they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall; but after tasting it, he refused to drink it.</i>	<i>23. Then the offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it.</i>	<i>there they crucified him,</i>	<i>18. Here they crucified him,</i>
<i>38. Two robbers were crucified with him, one on his right hand and one on his left.</i>	<i>27. They crucified two robbers with him, one on his right and one on his left.</i>	<i>along with the criminals - one on his right, the other On his left.</i>	<i>and with him two others – one on each side and Jesus in the middle.</i>
<i>37. Above his head they placed the written charge against him:</i>	<i>26. The written notice of the charge against him read:</i>	<i>38. There was a written notice above him which read:</i>	<i>19. Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross. It read,</i>
THIS IS JESUS		THIS IS	JESUS
THE KING OF THE JEWS	THE KING OF THE JEWS	THE KING OF THE JEWS.	OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS

GOLGOTHA – THE PLACE OF THE SKULL

“The traditional site of the crucifixion is a point outside the city to the west of the temple area, where the Church of the Holy Sepulchre now stands. A competing location, called Gordon’s Calvary, lies to the north of the city. Golgotha (called that in Matthew 27:33, Mark 15:22, John 19:17) is the Aramaic name for the spot, meaning a skull. Luke (23:33) simply calls the spot ‘the Place of the Skull’. Uncertainty surrounds the meaning of the word Golgotha. Possibly it refers to the shape of the hill, skull-like in formation. Even if the resemblance were only faint, the very fact that this was a place of execution could easily suggest a connection and lead to the use of the word.” Everett F. Harrison.



Gordon’s Skull Hill in the Garden Tomb

THE ROBBERS

“Two criminals were executed along with Jesus, but only in his case is an inscription mentioned. The others were common criminals; he was extraordinary. His advertised offence consisted in being King of the Jews. To the Roman mind this suggested Zealot sympathies; to the Jewish mind it suggested a (false) Messiah; to the Christian mind it suggested the Lord of glory whom sin-blinded men had failed to recognize (1 Cor. 2:8).”

THE SOLDIERS

“The work of the soldiers was done. All that remained was to watch and wait.”

The three sections above are by Everett F. Harrison in his ‘A Short Life of Christ’.

DISCUSSION POINTS

3. We will be discussing the robbers later. They were crucified one on the left and one on the right of Jesus. Jesus was placed in the middle. Any thoughts on placement?
4. “The work of the soldiers was done. All that remained was to watch and wait.” What do you know happened that made their day a day to remember?
5. Continuing on from the last assignment, turning the parallel passages above into one complete Scripture narrative.

Study 3

JESUS OF NAZARETH - THE KING OF THE JEWS

Acknowledgment: “A Harmony of the Four Gospels” (NIV) Orville E. Daniel.

THIS IS JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS

Matthew 27:37

Mark 15:26

Luke 23:38

John 19:19

20. Many of the Jews read this sign, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and the sign was written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek. 21. The chief priests of the Jews protested to Pilate, “Do not write ‘The King of the Jews,’ but this man claimed to be king of the Jews.” 22. Pilate answered, “What I have written, I have written.”

“The very publicity given the title (three languages) as well as the implication behind it, incensed the Jews, so that the chief priests requested that the wording be changed from a fact to a claim. This Pilate refused to do, showing an unyieldingness which sharply contrasts with his weakness during the trial.” [Everett F. Harrison, Th.D., Ph.D., Professor of New Testament, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA in the Wycliffe Bible Commentary.]

Harrison’s ‘**that the wording be changed from a fact to a claim**’ is masterly. Which sets us wondering, doesn’t it, where Pilate stood in this. Was he simply asserting his Roman authority? Maybe. But I think it was more than just that. I believe he saw that Jesus was innocent of any crime against the Roman occupied territory and, in fact, innocent of any crime against anyone in Israel. Further, I suspect Pilate felt that Jesus was who he claimed to be: A king or leader of the Jews. So he initiated a sign in three languages to state that fact. Perhaps he felt he had demonstrated weakness in the face of the rowdy rabble calling for Jesus to be crucified. Whatever the case, he wasn’t going to budge on what he had written. **“What I have written, I have written.”** That was that. I once heard an elderly man pray publicly, “...the Lord was lifted up on the cross, suspended between heaven and earth as though he was fit for neither...” But that lifting up was the transactional moment for the most wonderful and necessitous act in history. That the notice ‘The King of the Jews’ was there, with Jesus, suspended between heaven and earth affirms our great salvation. Furthermore, being written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek (John 19:20) affirms the offer of salvation to every language group.

WHO WAS THIS PONTIUS PILATE?

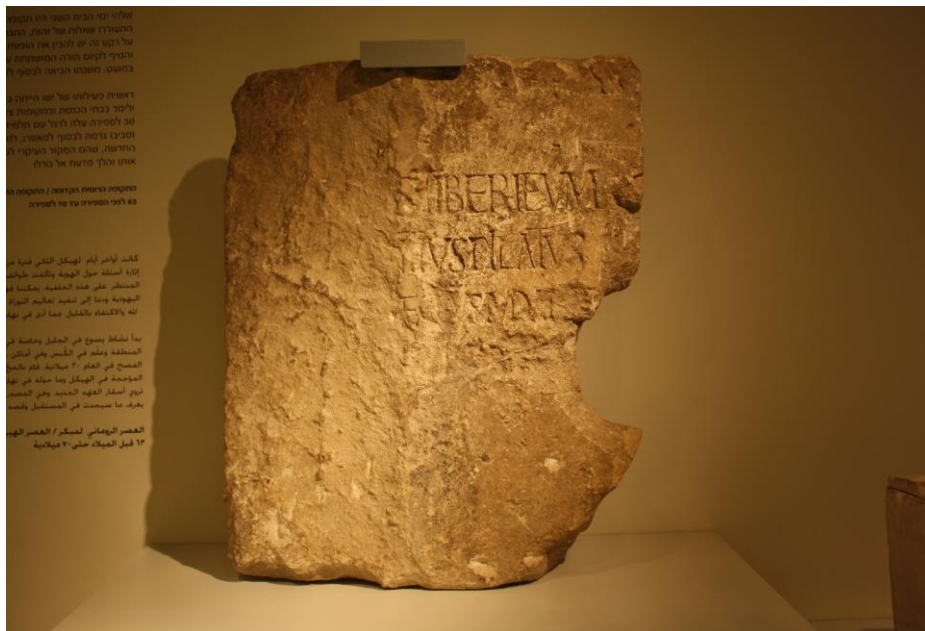
Who was this Pontius Pilate? We know he was the Roman Prefect of the territory that belonged to the Hebrew people. But what kind of a man was he? Did he cause Jesus to die?

The Roman historian Tacitus, who lived from AD/CE 57 - +117 wrote about Pilate and Jesus Christ. Although he calls Pilate a Procurator, Pilate was actually a Prefect, as governor of Judea, a position of lower rank. Tacitus writes (*Annals, book 15, chapter 44*) in 116 AD/CE:

“Christus, from whom [Christians obtain their name], suffered the extreme penalty [crucifixion] during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilate. So a most mischievous superstition was thus checked for the moment only to break out again in Judea, the first source of the evil. And even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their centre and become popular.”

- Wikipedia Tacitus

There are other references to Pontius Pilate such as Josephus, a Jewish philosopher who lived 37-100 CE but a most remarkable source was discovered in 1961 – the Pilate Stone.



There have been innumerable myths and dubious reconstructions on the life of Pilate but the 1961 discovery was the first physical evidence relating to Pilate. A block of limestone, it was found in the ruins of a Roman amphitheater at Caesarea, the capital of the province of Judea. It bore a dedication by Pilate of a *Tiberium* (a temple to honour the emperor Tiberius). The dedication states that Pilate was the *praefectus* (Prefect) of *Iuadeae* (Judea). The stone is dated from 26 -37 CE which is around the time of Jesus. The inscription is now housed in the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, and a cast replica stands in the town of Caesarea. This stone validates the existence and presence of Pontius Pilate in Judea and the Gospels’ accounts. We now turn to those accounts in seeking answers to Pilate’s actions.

WHAT DO THE FOUR GOSPELS SAY ABOUT PILATE?

In **Matthew** Pilate washes his hands to show he was not responsible for execution of Jesus and reluctantly sends him to his death. **Mark** depicts Jesus as innocent of plotting against the Roman Empire, and portrays Pilate as reluctant to execute Jesus. In **Luke** Pilate and Herod agree that there was no treason in Jesus’ actions. In **John** Pilate finds no guilt in Jesus and asks the Jews if Jesus should be released. But **Matthew (27:19)** also has something to say about the wife of Pontius Pilate: “*While Pilate was sitting on the*

judge's seat, his wife sent him this message: 'Don't have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him.'

THE JEWS PUT THREE ISSUES BEFORE PILATE

The interrogation of Jesus by Pilate began like this:

Then the Jews led Jesus from Caiaphas to the palace of the Roman governor. By now it was early morning, and to avoid ceremonial uncleanness the Jews did not enter the palace...29. So Pilate came out to them and asked, "What charges are you bringing against this man?" 30. If he were not a criminal," they replied, "we would not have handed him over to you." John 18:28

And they began to accuse him, saying, "We have found this man subverting our nation. He opposes payment of taxes to Caesar and claims to be Christ, a king." Luke 23:2

The Jews put three issues before Pilate. 1. That Jesus was perverting the nation. 2. That Jesus opposed the paying of taxes to Caesar and 3. That Jesus claimed to be a king.

1. Pilate was unconvinced Jesus was perverting the Jewish nation and didn't care anyway.
2. The tax issue was interesting! Pilate was responsible for imperial tax collections in Judaea. Jesus had asked the tax collector Levi, at work in his tax booth in Capernaum, to quit his post. Jesus also influenced Zacchaeus, 'a chief tax collector' in Jericho to resign.
3. But the issue that took Pilate's attention, was the Jews assertion that Jesus claimed to be a king. A governance threat was a serious matter.

So Pilate asked Jesus, "Are you the king of the Jews?" Luke 23:3 Matthew, Mark and Luke give the same wording in the response: *"Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied.* Pilate views Jesus as being no threat, especially as the Jews seem all against him anyway and asks the Jewish leaders to deal with Jesus themselves. This doesn't work so Pilate summons Jesus to the palace.

"Are you the king of the Jews?" 34. "Is that your own idea," Jesus asked, "or did others talk to you about me?" 35. "Do you think I am a Jew?" Pilate replied. "It was your people and your chief priests who handed you over to me. What is it you have done?" 36. Jesus said: "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now, my kingdom is from another place. 37. "You are a king then!" said Pilate. Jesus answered, "You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me." 38. "What is truth?" Pilate asked... John 18:33

Later, Pilate was to ask the crowd: *"Do you want me to release 'the king of the Jews'?" John 18:39* The influenced crowd chose Barabbas. Then later again came the humiliation of the mockery by Roman soldiers.

The soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head They clothed him in a purple robe 3. and went up to him again and again, "Hail, O king of the Jews!"
John 19:2

In the end, Pilate handed Jesus over to be crucified with the words, *"As for me, I find no basis for a charge against him."* **John 19:6**

Which brings us back to the Scripture with which we began:

20. Many of the Jews read this sign, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and the sign was written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek. 21. The chief priests of the Jews protested to Pilate, "Do not write 'The King of the Jews,' but this man claimed to be king of the Jews." 22. Pilate answered, "What I have written, I have written." **John 19:19**

Matthew 27:35

Mark 15:24

Luke 23:34

John 19:23

(1) *"Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."*

When they had crucified him, they divided up his clothes.

Dividing up his clothes,

And they divided up his clothes

When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes, dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining. This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom. 24. "Let's not tear it," they said to one another. "Let's decide by lot who will get it."

they cast lots to see what each would get.

This happened that the Scripture might be fulfilled which said, "They divided my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing. So this is what the soldiers did. [Psalm 22:18]

DISCUSSION POINTS

6. Who was this Pontius Pilate? What kind of a man was he? Did he cause Jesus to die? Who was mostly responsible – the Jews or the Romans? Both groups may have been responsible. If so, how would you apportion the responsibility?
7. The only mention of Pilate's wife is by Matthew (27:19). What do you think her dream was about? Thoughtfully develop what could have happened to her.
8. You may wish to continue on from the last assignment, turning the parallel passages above into one complete Scripture narrative.

**THE CHIEF PRIESTS, TEACHERS OF THE
LAW, ELDERS and SOLDIERS MOCK**

Acknowledgment: "A Harmony of the Four Gospels" (NIV) Orville E. Daniel.

Matthew 27:36

Mark 15:29

Luke 23:35

John 19:24...

*36. And sitting down
they kept watch over
him there.*

*39. Those who
passed by hurled
insults at him,
shaking their
heads 40. and
saying, "You who
are going to
destroy the temple
and build it in three
days, save yourself!
Come down from
the cross, if you
are the Son of God!"
41. In the same way
the chief priests,
the teachers of the
law, and the elders
mocked him, 42.
"He saved others"
They said, "but he
cannot save
himself!
He's the king of
Israel! Let him
come down now
from the cross, and
we will believe in
him. 43. He trusts
in God. Let God
rescue him now if
he wants him, for
he said, 'I am the
Son of God.'"*

*29. Those who
passed by hurled
insults at him,
shaking their
heads and saying,
"So! You who
are going to
destroy the temple
and build it in three
days,
30. come down from
the cross and save
yourself!"
31. In the same way
the chief priests,
and the teachers of
the law mocked him
among themselves.
"He saved others,"
they said, "but he
cannot save
himself."
He's the king of
Israel! Let this
Christ, this King of
Israel, come down
now from the cross,
that we may see
and believe.*

*35. The people
stood
watching
and
the rulers
even
sneered
at him.

They said,
"He saved others;
let him
save
himself
if
he is the
Christ of God,
the Chosen One.*

*44. In the same way Those
the robbers who crucified
were crucified with with him
him also heaped also heaped
insults on him. Insults on him.*

*36. The soldiers also
came up and mocked
him. They offered
him wine vinegar 37.
And said, "If you are
The king of the Jews,
Save yourself."
39. One of the
criminals who hung
there hurled insults
at him: "Aren't you
The Christ? Save
yourself and us.*

JOHN'S GOSPEL DOESN'T SAY A WORD ABOUT THE MOCKERS

Isn't that interesting! John, the 'one whom Jesus loved', completely bypasses the mockers. The three 'Synoptic' Gospel writers, as the first three are called, have all written about the mockers and John often writes about events the first three do not cover.

By the way, the first three Gospels are called 'Synoptic' because they mostly follow the same order of events, record the same happenings and use or miss out the same material. The word 'Synoptic' comes from two Greek words: 'Syn' means 'together' – from which we get 'syncretistic' etc. 'optic' means 'seen' – from which we get 'optics', 'optician' etc. Put together as 'Synoptic' means 'together seen' – same happenings, same events etc.

WHAT JOHN'S GOSPEL DOESN'T SAY

The Synoptic Gospels reveal that mockers insulted Jesus in several ways:

- They mock Jesus about his claim to rebuild the temple in three days. (Mt 27, Mk 15)
- They mock Jesus for saving others, but not himself. (Mt 27 Mk 15)
- They mock Jesus for calling himself 'The Son of God'. (Mt 27:40)
- They mock Jesus for calling himself 'The king of Israel' (or, a King). (Mt 27 Mk 15)

But none of this mocking section interests John. He has a different purpose - and bypasses it. But Luke adds something that is of great value to believers. Luke follows the 'mocking passage' with one of the seven sayings of Jesus not given in any other Gospel: ***"I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."*** (Lk 23:43)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

9. What did Jesus mean when he said: ***"Destroy this temple and I will raise it again in three days."*** (John 2:19)
10. And what effect on the disciples did that statement have?
11. If you wish: Continuing on from the last assignment, turn the parallel passages above into one complete Scripture narrative.

Study 5

BUT ONE CRIMINAL DIDN'T MOCK

Acknowledgment: "A Harmony of the Four Gospels" (NIV) Orville E. Daniel.

Matthew 27:45

Mark 15:33

Luke 23:40

John 19:25

But the other criminal rebuked him "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence? 41. We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong. 42. Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." 43. Jesus answered him, (2) "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."

Everett F. Harrison, Th.D., Ph.D., Professor of New Testament, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, in his *A Short Life of Christ* ISBN 0-8028-1824-2 page 222 says:

"Even one of the brigands who was being crucified, repeating the mockery he had heard from the crowd, lashed out at him. 'Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!' (Luke 23:39). It was the language of sarcasm rather than of faith. The other brigand, who apparently had joined in the reproach at first (Mark 15:32), now experienced a change of heart. What produced it we are not told. Perhaps it was the prayer of forgiveness. For this man to believe that Jesus would yet come in his kingly power (Luke 23:42), when nearly everyone was writing him off as a messianic pretender who was only getting what he deserved, reveals tremendous faith.

Already, while still on the cross, the uplifted Christ was beginning to draw men to himself, as he had promised (John 12:32). He offers immediate salvation ('today'). As Alexander White put it, the thief 'took heaven, so to speak, at a leap that day'."

"I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise." (Lk 23:43)

In 2 Corinthians 12 Paul shares his experience of when he was caught up into 'paradise'.

1. "Indeed, to boast is not profitable to me; for I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord. 2. I know a man in Christ fourteen years ago – whether in the body, or outside the body, I do not know; God knows- 4. that he was caught up into paradise and heard unspeakable words, which it is not allowed to a man to speak. On behalf of such a one I will boast; but I will not boast on my behalf. Except in my weaknesses."

[A literal translation by Jay P. Green Sr. of the Greek text in his *The Interlinear Bible*.]

The New Testament Wycliffe Bible Commentary (Merrill C Tenney, Ph.D., Dean of the Graduate School, Wheaton College, Wheaton, Illinois, USA) says:

43. Paradise is an old Persian term for a park or garden, a beauty spot. It became a name for the abode of God (cf 2 Cor 12:4)

W.E. Vine, in his *Expository Dictionary* has more to say on the term:

“ PARADEISOS is an Oriental word, first used by the historian Xenophon, denoting the parks of Persian kings and nobles. It is of Persian origin (Old Pers. *Pairidaeza*, akin to Gk. *Peri*, around and *Teichos*, a wall) whence it passed into Greek. [When the Hebrew Bible was translated by the 70 Greek scholars, they used ‘paradise’ in several places such as Genesis 2:8 – the Garden of Eden, Numbers 24:6, Isaiah 1:30, Jeremiah 29:5, and Ezekiel 31:8-9. See also Nehemiah 2:8, Ecclesiastes 2:5, Song of Solomon 4:13.]

In Luke 23:43, the promise of the Lord to the repentant robber was fulfilled the same day; Christ, at his death, having committed His spirit to the Father, went in spirit immediately into Heaven itself, the dwelling place of God (the Lord’s mention of the place as Paradise must have been of great comfort to the malefactor; to the oriental mind it expressed the sum total of blessedness). Thither the Apostle Paul was caught up, 2 Corinthians 12:4, spoken of as ‘the third heaven’ (verse 3 does not introduce a different vision), beyond the heavens of the natural creation (see Hebrews 4:14, R.V., with reference to the Ascension). The same region is mentioned in Revelation 2:7, where the ‘tree of life’, the figurative antitype of that in Eden, held out to the over comer, is spoken of as being in ‘the Paradise of God’ (R.V.), margin., ‘garden’, as in Genesis 2:8.”

Vine’s Dictionary explanation is very informative for our faith:

- No matter how bad we are, providing we acknowledge Jesus the Christ, we can be rewarded with a heavenly salvation.
- This reward comes to us immediately we die. That’s the good and glorious news. No ‘soul-sleep’ for us. Beyond our final breath the new eternal life begins.
- Paradise is another name for heaven. This is validated by Paul’s personal preview, and the way the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible uses it, and also the use of the word Revelation.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

12. Use your imagination and write how you think the effect the words **today you will be with me in paradise** had on the repentant robber?
13. Explain Revelation 2:7.
14. Continuing on from the last assignment, turn the parallel passages above into one complete Scripture narrative.

SPECIAL WOMEN: “HERE IS YOUR SON”

Acknowledgment: “A Harmony of the Four Gospels” (NIV) Orville E. Daniel.

Matthew 27:45

Mark 15:33

Luke 23:44

John 19:25

25. Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas and Mary of Magdala. 26. When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, (3) “Dear woman, here is your son,” 27. and to the disciple, “Here is your mother.” From that time on this disciple took her into his home.

Near the cross of Jesus stood:

- His mother
- His mother’s sister
- Mary the wife of Clopas
- Mary of Magdala.

Dr Everett F. Harrison (Wycliffe Bible Commentary – John) says:

John 19:25-27. Three women, all named Mary, took their station near the cross, sorrowfully contemplating the one who was so dear to them. The Greek text, however, is rather favourable to the mention of four, the mother’s sister (Salome, the mother of John) being noted but left unnamed. If so, these four may be intended to present a sort of contrast to the Roman soldiers. Solicitous for his mother, Jesus gave her into the care of the ‘beloved disciple’. His own brothers were not believers at this time. The unity of the Church, which the Lord was bringing into being, was to be spiritual rather than natural (cf. Matthew 12:50). **into his own home.** If John had a residence in Jerusalem, his acquaintance with the high priest is more readily explained (See John 18:16).

MARY, THE MOTHER OF JESUS

Mary, the mother of Jesus is named first.

HIS MOTHER’S SISTER SALOME, THE MOTHER OF JOHN AND JAMES

Salome, the mother of John and James is named after the mention of the mother of Jesus. This seems significant.

MARY, THE WIFE OF CLOPAS

Thirdly, John mentions a Mary the wife of Clopas. Ronald Brownrigg in his *Who’s Who in the New Testament*, writes as follows:

Mary, the wife of Clopas. This Mary is only mentioned in the Fourth Gospel., as present at the crucifixion of Jesus, together with his mother and her sister and Mary of Magdala. The equivalent mentioned in the Synoptic Gospels is Mary, the mother of James ((Matthew 27:56, Mark 15:40). If these two characters are identical, then this Mary and her husband Clopas were the parents of James the Younger and of Joses.

MARY, OF MAGDALA

Fourthly, John mentions the third Mary, Mary of Magdala.

DISCUSSION

15. Continuing on from the last assignment, turn the parallel passages above into one complete Scripture narrative.

Study 7

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

Acknowledgment: “A Harmony of the Four Gospels” (NIV) Orville E. Daniel.

Matthew 27:45

Mark 15:33

Luke 23:44

John 19:28

45. From the sixth hour until the ninth hour darkness came over the whole land.

33. At the sixth hour darkness came over all the whole land until the ninth hour.

44. It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour, 45. for the sun stopped shining.

46. About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice,

34. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice,

*“Eloi, Eloi, (4) lama sabachthani?”
which means,
“My God, my God,
why have you
forsaken me?”
[Psalm 22:1]*

*“Eloi, Eloi,
lama sabachthani?”
which means,
“My God, my God,
why have you
forsaken me?”
[Psalm 22:1]*

47. When some of those standing there heard this, they said, “He’s calling Elijah.”

35. When some of those standing near heard this, they said, “Listen, he’s calling Elijah.”

DISCUSSION

16. Continuing on from the last assignment, turn the parallel passages above into one complete Scripture narrative.

ONE OF THEM GOT A SPONGE

Acknowledgment: “A Harmony of the Four Gospels” (NIV) Orville E. Daniel.

Matthew 27:48

Mark 15:36

Luke 23:46

John 19:28

48. Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge. He filled it with wine vinegar, put it on a stick, and offered it to Jesus to drink.

36. One man ran, filled a sponge with wine vinegar, put it on a stick, and offered it to Jesus to drink.

28. Later, knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, “I am thirsty.” [Ps 69:21]

(5)

29. A jar of wine vinegar was there so

they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on stalk of the hyssop plant and lifted it to Jesus’ lips.

49. But the rest said, “Leave him alone. Let’s see if Elijah comes to save him.”

“Leave him alone alone now. Let’s see if Elijah comes to take him down,” he said.

(6) *30. When he had received the drink, Jesus said, “It is finished.”*

50. And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he

37. With a loud cry, Jesus

46. Jesus called out with in a loud voice,

(7) *“Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.”*

		<i>When he had said this, he</i>	<i>bowed his head and</i>
<i>gave up his spirit.</i>	<i>breathed his last.</i>	<i>breathed his last.</i>	<i>gave up his spirit.</i>
<i>51. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.</i>	<i>38. The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.</i>		

*The earth shook and
the rocks split.*

*52. The tombs broke
open and the bodies
of many holy people
who had died were
raised to life.*

*53. They came out of
the tombs, and after
Jesus' resurrection
they went into the holy
city and appeared to
many people*

Jesus was thirsty. How he felt was probably as David wrote in Psalm 22. (14.) "I am poured out like water....all my bones are out of joint. My heart is like wax. It has melted within me. (15) My strength is dried up...my tongue clings to my jaws...(NKJB)

DISCUSSION

17. Continuing on from the last assignment, turn the parallel passages above into one complete Scripture narrative.

THE CENTURION – and – SOME WOMEN

Acknowledgment: “A Harmony of the Four Gospels” (NIV) Orville E. Daniel.

Matthew 27:54	Mark 15:39	Luke 23:47	John 19:31
<p><i>54. When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified and exclaimed, “Surely he was the Son of God!”</i></p>	<p><i>39. And when the centurion who stood there in front of Jesus, heard his cry and saw how he died he said, “Surely this man was the Son of God!”</i></p>	<p><i>47. The centurion, seeing what happened,, praised God and said, “Surely this was a righteous man.”</i></p>	

Looking at the ‘harmony’ above, we notice that there is a seeming contradiction over what the centurion is quoted as saying. Matthew and Mark say that the centurion said, “Son of God.” Luke has the centurion say “a righteous man.” Orville E. Daniel, in his ‘harmony’, has Luke’s centurion **‘praising God’** and adding **‘righteous man’** then he puts Mathew and Mark’s centurion saying **“Son of God’** after the Luken exclamation.

In other words, there is no contradiction but a harmony of what the centurion really said:

- The centurion witnessed the earthquake etc. and realising that Jesus was all that he claimed to be immediately **praised God.**
- The centurion then said, **“Surely this was a righteous man.”** And then, as if he had received further enlightenment, added:
- **“Surely this man was the Son of God.”**

There is a centurion (Luke 7:2 on) who had a sick servant. He seemed to be different from the usual hard Roman soldiers and had built a synagogue (Luke 7:5). This centurion must have had a good relationship with the Jews otherwise the ‘elders of the Jews’ would not have pled his cause in asking Jesus the heal the centurion’s servant.

It is tantalising to think that the centurion who was spoken of by Jesus as one in whom Jesus said: **“I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.”** Wouldn’t it be amazing if someday we discover that the centurion at the cross was the same one who had a servant healed. In any case, the news of Jesus healing a centurion’s servant would certainly be whizzing around all the other centurions. They all would know that Jesus claimed to be the Son of God. Jesus would not have gone un-noticed in his last three years of miracle-working. The centurion who pleaded for his servant was already aware of the wonders Jesus performed and who he claimed to be.

A centurion was so-called because he had authority over one hundred Roman soldiers. We do not know how many soldiers were in the Holy Land. Capernaum, where Jesus healed the centurion’s servant, was 144 kilometers (90m) from Jerusalem. And there were hundreds of soldiers in the land. But there would not have been so many centurions. And the centurions could have been shifted around. It’s all speculation, I know, but we can thank God for that centurion at Capernaum who trusted Jesus to heal and also praise God that the centurion who witnessed the crucifixion who praised God.

Matthew 27:55

Mark 15:40

Luke 23:48

John 19:31

48. When all the people who had gathered to witness this sight saw what took place, they beat their breasts and went away.49. But all those who knew him,

55. Many were there, watching from a distance. 56. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of Zebedee’s sons. 55b. They had followed Jesus from Galilee to care for his needs.

40. Some women were watching a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and Joses, and Salome. 41. In Galilee, these women had followed him and cared for his needs. Many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem were also there.

including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.

Study 10

THE ONE WHO JESUS LOVED

Acknowledgment: “A Harmony of the Four Gospels” (NIV) Orville E. Daniel.

Matthew 27:57

Mark 15:42

Luke 23:50

John 19:31

31. Now it was the day of Preparation, and the next day was to be a special Sabbath. Because the Jews did not want the bodies left on the crosses during the Sabbath, they asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken down. 32. The soldiers therefore came and broke the legs of the first man who had been crucified with Jesus, and then those of the other. 33. But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water. 35. The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe. 36. These things happened so that the Scripture would be fulfilled: “Not one of his bones will be broke,” and, as another Scripture says, They will look on the one they have pierced.” [Psalm 34:20; Zechariah 12:10]

DISCUSSION

18. Continuing on from the last assignment, turn the parallel passages above into one complete Scripture narrative.

THE SEVEN SAYINGS OF JESUS

We have come to the most sacred part in all of the sacred Scriptures.

It is with a sense of deep humility and inadequacy that I put in writing my thoughts about the words our Lord uttered in his darkest moment – the darkest moment in all history.

When Jesus was hanging on that cruel cross – he spoke seven times.

At least, Matthew Mark Luke and John have together recorded just seven utterances.

But I do not believe there were any more.

All four Gospel writers gave much space to the events leading up to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ and of the event itself.

Not all four reported everything Jesus said or did during his lifetime.

In fact, except for Luke, the Gospel writers wrote nothing about him until he was thirty years of age and began his ministry of three short years.

And even through these three vital years they did not record everything.

Sometimes two or three of the Gospel writers wrote about the same miracle or teaching.

Sometimes just one of the Gospel writers – Mathew, Mark, Luke or John – would report exclusively on an event or teaching the others do not mention.

But of the crucifixion, and events leading up to it, all four give a detailed account.

And where any Gospel writer gives information the others do not give, this adds to the extensive, detailed and multi-witness account we have.

No event in all history is better substantiated by these four reliable eye-witnesses – each giving an accurate account of what happened on that dark but triumphant day.

I know what it is like to lose a much-loved wife through a long cancerous illness.

I know what it is like to lose a loved daughter-in-law by suicide.

I know what it is like to watch my children go through the pain of their personal losses.

As a pastor I have shared the darkest moments with others - either departing this world or watching their loved ones depart this world.

A few months after my wife died, I was given compassionate leave to visit her family homeland. I visited her relatives in England and Wales.

My daughter Christine accompanied me and we supported each other.

In my grief, the reality of the suffering, the death, the final moments of the life of Jesus were revealed to me in a new and strong way.

During my three months in Wales it was my privilege to preach in various churches.

My preaching focussed on the cross of Christ and the victory Jesus Christ achieved.

It was my privilege to go up into the valleys of south Wales – where revival had once changed the hearts of thousands – and there proclaim the message of Jesus to small congregations in large churches once built to cater for the hundreds of converts.

Out of the Welsh Revival a hundred years ago was founded the Elim City Temple in the Welsh capital city of Cardiff. I was invited to preach there.

To a congregation of six hundred in that historic church I gave the following message:

INTRODUCTION

After thirty years of life on earth, having been sent from heaven by the Father, Jesus was ready for ministry. But what a brief ministry it was to be. Three and a half years of intensive walking, teaching, healing, delivering from evil. Finally, as a common criminal, he was nailed on a Roman cross to die a drawn-out, excruciating death. Battling the twin pressures of Satan's evil and physical pain, Jesus suffered on the cross.

*From time to time he spoke. Over the six-hour period on the cross, until he died, **Jesus spoke seven times. The first three were on behalf of others. The last three were on his own behalf. The one in the middle – splitting history in two, splitting heaven and hell, splitting life and death, splitting between those going on to eternal life and those going to an eternal absence from God were the words, “My God! My God! Why have you abandoned me?”** At that point the sin of all the world was laid upon him.*

No.1

“FATHER, FORGIVE THEM”

Luke 23:34

“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

Isaiah 53:12 says, “He bore the sins of many and prayed for those who sinned.”

Did Jesus utter these words from Isaiah when the Roman soldiers drove the nails in?

But the prayer was not only uttered for the Roman soldiers, who were merely the instruments of the executors, but for all of his enemies. When Jesus said, “Father forgive them – for they know not what they do.” he was expressing in his darkest moment what he had taught his followers. Remember his words to the crowd as he sat on the gentle slope of a grassy hill:

“You have heard it said ‘You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy’. But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you.” (Matthew 5:43-44)

And his followers remembered what he had taught them. Luke records in the Acts of the Apostles (7:59-60) the final moments of Stephen: And they stoned Stephen as he was calling upon God and saying, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not charge them with this sin.”

*Jesus said, **“Forgive them for they know not what they do.”** Stephen asked the risen Lord Jesus not to ‘charge’ his killers with their sin. The forgiveness of God the Father. Did the Father action the plea of Jesus? When Jesus asked the Father to ‘Forgive them’ it meant the soldiers who carried out the execution. It meant their superiors who authorised his death. It meant the Jewish leaders who contrived to achieve the killing. Jesus forgave them all whilst receiving the greatest miscarriage of justice in all history.*

What does this word forgive mean? Stephen caught its import. He asked Jesus to forgive his killers with the expectation that Jesus could and would do so. This raises questions. How far does God's forgiveness go? Can we ask God to forgive somebody and change

the judgment of God upon the person for whom we plead? And when Jesus said, “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.” How did that alter the father’s mind? Where does the sinner’s change of heart, remorse, seeking forgiveness fit in? Or does it? It seems to me that upon genuine repentance, God’s forgiveness is readily and rapidly forthcoming. There is only one sin against God that can never be forgiven and that is the sin against the Holy Spirit (Matthew 12:32, Mark 3:29, Luke 12:10). We are not told what this sin actually is but if the primary function of the Holy Spirit is to enter us and bring us to birth in Jesus Christ, the sin must be to reject that entering and birthing with eternal consequences. If God’s forgiveness is readily available to the genuinely remorseful, the question remains: What about those of whom Jesus said, “They know not what they do.”?

DISCUSSION POINTS

1. When Jesus said, “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.” What did these words mean for those who were part of his crucifying?
2. Discuss the following: ‘There is no sin against God that is outside God’s forgiveness. Except for the sin against the Holy Spirit he forgives all sin.’

No.2 “TODAY YOU WILL BE WITH ME IN PARADISE” Luke 23:43

“I tell you the truth: Today you will be with me in paradise.”

PARADISE *Originally a Persian city of incredible design and beauty with canals, trees, parks and having intelligent housing for its inhabitants. Buried under the sands of time it has in recent years been located, excavated and portrayed by computer graphics.*

Once the city had gone, its name became used to describe many places of beauty. The word ‘Paradise’ is used 46 times in the Greek translation of the Old Testament (called the Septuagint or LXX for short). For example, Adam’s Eden (Genesis 2:15; 3:23), and the well-watered plains of the Jordan (Genesis 13:10). In the Book of Ecclesiasticus (44:16) paradise is identified with heaven into which Enoch was translated.

In the New Testament the word ‘paradise’ (Gk. paradeisos) occurs three times – and each time it refers to heaven. In Luke 23:43 Jesus says, “Today you will be with me in Paradise.” NIV Paul, writing to the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 12:3-4) speaks out of his own experience saying, “I know a man – whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows – how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words...” NKJV In the Book of the Revelation (2:7) , Jesus speaks to John and says: “To the person who overcomes, I will provide from the tree of life that is in the middle of the Paradise of God.” BWH

The thief who received the words of Jesus (“This day you will be with me in paradise.”) would know the meaning of the word ‘paradise’. But his acceptance didn’t come easily. His conversion is that of a person who faced his dying moments as an unbeliever but

changed his mind within a short space of time. When those two men were crucified with Jesus this is what they saw and heard: (Matthew 27:39-44; Mark 15:29-32; Luke 23:38)

- *Passers-by hurling insults at Jesus; shaking their heads and saying, “You, who are going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross if you are the Son of God! If you are the chosen one.”*
- *The chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocking him with, “He saved others, but he can’t save himself!” “This Christ – this Messiah – this King of Israel – let him come down now* from the cross and we will believe in him. He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said ‘I AM THE SON OF GOD.’” (*note: indicates they spoke to the people – to incite them.)*
- *Matthew says: **“In the same way the robbers who were crucified with him also heaped insults on him. NIV***
- *Mark says: **“Those crucified with him also heaped insults on him.” NIV***

It was common for crucified men to harangue their executioners so the silence of Jesus amid the mob, priests, soldiers and fellow-sufferers would have been a powerful witness. Luke, for some reason, does not record that the priests, teachers, elders and robbers spoke against Jesus. What Luke does record, is the change of heart by one of the robbers. He does clearly note that one robber discovers who Jesus really is. From the initial outburst by both men one begins to change his mind. Does he hear what the priests and teachers are saying and realise that they are mistaken – very mistaken? Had he heard of Jesus – a man of miracles who went about healing people and teaching? Had he been present on one or more of those occasions? We do not know. But what we do know is that he changed his mind. And came to Jesus with a plea.

The robber Jesus spoke to was one of the many ‘revolutionists’ (See John 10:8; 18:40) – a member of one of those bands of irregulars who harassed the Roman legions as they marched along the depressions of Galilee, swooping down from the hills on their rear, doing as much damage as possible and then scattering. Ancient records tell us that this robber was named Dysmas who had been caught and condemned to the cross. Luke (23:39) records:

*One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: “Are you or are you not the Messiah (Christ)? Save yourself and us!” But the other criminal rebuked him. **“Don’t you fear God since you are under the same sentence. We are punished justly for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.”** Then he said, **“Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”***

- *He called Jesus by name. When did he discover the name of his death-mate? Was it very recently – or did he know about Jesus from some past encounter?*
- *He stated that Jesus had done nothing wrong. How did he know this? This robber acknowledged innocence in Jesus – and he declared it.*
- *He acknowledged that Jesus was the Messiah and asked to be remembered favourably when Jesus returned to his kingdom – or came back to claim it. As a Jewish child he would have heard that the King who came would be rejected, killed by the wicked rich and also come in glory. (Isaiah 53,*

Zechariah 12:10). Like most Jews of the day he would not have understood these contradictory passages. Nevertheless, he had found the Messiah.

- Jesus assured the robber of eternal life. Yes – Jesus would remember him. **“I tell you the truth. Today you will be with me in paradise.”**

No.3

“JOHN - HERE IS YOUR MOTHER”

John 19:25-27

*Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala. When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing by, he said to his mother, “Dear woman, here is your son. (And to John: **Here is your mother.**”*

Mary. *What a wealth of interesting family information lies beneath these words. There was Mary, the distraught mother of Jesus. When her little baby was presented to Simeon in the temple, he said to her, “And a sword shall pierce your own soul too.” (Luke 2:35). There was an auntie of Jesus – simply referred to as ‘his mother’s sister’. Sister often meant ‘sister-in-law’ so the un-named sister of Mary was either Mary’s sister or Joseph’s. There was Mary the wife of Clopas (or Cleopas). This solves the mystery of the two travellers on the Emmaus Road who were the subject of a visitation by the risen Jesus Christ. Luke (24:18) names one traveller as Cleopas. The name Cleopas only occurs twice in the New Testament. John (19:25) refers to ‘Mary, the wife of Cleopas’ and Luke (24:18) refers to a traveller called ‘Cleopas’. John, the writer of the Gospel, did not quote his own name but simply referred to himself as ‘the disciple that Jesus loved’. John is not saying that he is the only one loved by Jesus. He was just deeply conscious that Jesus loved him. The lesson for us is to realise that Jesus loves each one of us just as intensely and individually. Only John records these words of Jesus. They were very personal to him from the lips of Jesus. They were a tender expression of love towards his mother and of caring for her future welfare. Joseph, her husband had died. Now Jesus was going to depart this world. As the eldest son, it was his responsibility to arrange for the care of his mother. And what a tremendous expression of confidence Jesus conveyed to John. We are blessed and enriched because John has recorded this personal word.*

John. *We wonder why John was chosen by Jesus to look after the mother of Jesus. Perhaps none of Mary’s other sons were there – or perhaps they were not in a position to care for her. Their lives would be in danger as brothers to Jesus so perhaps Jesus did not wish to put his mother into danger. The moment Jesus said to John, “your mother” John escorted Mary from the scene at once and took her to his home in Jerusalem.*

DISCUSSION POINTS

3. Cleopas was not present at the cross with his wife Mary (John 19:25)). Can you suggest why Jesus made a special visit to the couple on the Emmaus Road.
4. It is thought that when Mary married Joseph she could have been 14-17 years of age – perhaps approaching 50 years old at the time of the cross.
How do you think Mary felt about being entrusted to John.
5. Have you any further thoughts regarding Jesus giving to John the special task of looking after his mother?

“Dear woman, here is your son.” “(John) Here is your mother.”

No. 4 “MY GOD! MY GOD! WHY HAVE YOU ABANDONED ME?” Matthew 27:46

*This heart cry from the Son of God is the cry of all eternity.
Upon this anguished scream of abandonment hangs the destiny of the whole human race.
For if the Son of God was abandoned - we are all abandoned.
No, he felt abandoned.
For one terrible moment, intimacy with his Father was severed.
We don't know for how long,
When the sin of the world was laid upon the Son of God, the Father looked away.
For the first time in eternity past, the Son of God felt estrangement.
The Son of God paid for the sin of the world.
Then fellowship and union with the Father was restored.*

No. 5 “I THIRST” John 19:28

“I am thirsty. A jar of wine vinegar was there so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips. When he had received the drink, Jesus said ***“It is finished.”*** With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.” (John 19:28-30)

*John has but three verses to describe the final moments of Jesus.
The long hours of suffering on the cross had taken their toll. Jesus was suffering thirst.
The prophetic words of Psalm 22:15 say, “My tongue cleaves to my jaws and in my thirst they gave me vinegar.” John's Gospel says that nearby was a pot of vinegar or sour wine. A mixture of vinegar and water was the common drink of Roman soldiers and perhaps the vessel was sitting there for their use. The soldiers filled a sponge with the mixture and putting it on a long stick from a hyssop tree poked it up to Jesus. Before he was nailed on the cross he had been offered a drink. (Matthew 27:34) That drink was a pain-deadening drink, especially prepared by compassionate people who offered it to crucifixion victims. Jesus had refused that earlier drink because he was not going to lessen – or dull - his physical ability to receive the full weight of the world's sin.*

The sacrifice for sins by the Lamb of God had been fulfilled. Jesus was free to take a drink of a different kind – not one to numb the senses – but a watery vinegar to moisten a parched throat. He was now exhausted in the flesh and required liquid. He was thirsty because his mission in both the flesh and Spirit was done.

Hebrews 2:16-17 says: “He did not come to earth to help the angels. He came to help Abraham’s descendents. He did this by becoming a merciful and faithful high priest in Service to God – and also that he might die for the sins of all people.”

No. 6

“IT IS FINISHED.”

John 19:30

*Matthew (27:50) and Mark (15:3) say that Jesus ‘gave a loud cry’ and ‘gave up his spirit’ / ‘breathed his last’. The loud cry was probably **“It is finished.”** Perhaps almost immediately after this cry Jesus again cried out with a loud voice, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” (Luke 23:46). What a triumphant ending to his time on the cross. The last two cries of Jesus were more than a low-level utterance of victory! Jesus let heaven and earth know with a loud triumphant cry that that he had defeated sin, death and Satan. Scholars tell us that the perfect tense is used for ‘it is finished’ (tetelestai). It means the task is done, finished, completed. There is no more to do. ‘He had discharged perfectly the Father’s purpose and he could now leave the scene of his earthly struggle.’*

*What kind of a cry was **‘It is finished.’**?’*

*Firstly, it was a cry of **relief** – the dreadful physical suffering was now at an end. The spiritual suffering was over – and this meant the physical suffering was over too.*

*Secondly, it was a cry of **success** – sin and evil had been defeated.*

*Thirdly, it was a cry of **victory** – because the purpose of God had triumphed in his death.*

*Fourthly, it was a cry of **contact** – of contact with his Father. It was his final report to the Father who would now exalt him to glory.*

John used a Greek word (tetelestai) for ‘finished’ that meant ‘fulfilling’ or ‘paying a debt’. A closely related Greek word (teleo) was often stamped on receipts meaning ‘paid in full’. Jesus paid in full the debt owed by the human race to God.’

No. 7

“FATHER, INTO YOUR HANDS I COMMIT MY SPIRIT” Luke 23:46

*Almost immediately following his loud cry of **“It is finished”** Jesus gave a further loud cry – **“Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!”***

***Psalm 31:5** has these words: “Into your hands I commit my spirit. You have redeemed me O Lord God of truth.” NKJ Jesus didn’t quote them to make them prophetic. When Jesus cried, **“Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!”** the sacred Scripture embedded in his heart became a cry of commitment from his heart. Psalm 31 is graphically prophetic of Jesus:*

Verse 2 (Lord) “Deliver me speedily”
 Verse 4 “Pull me out of the net which they have secretly laid for me.”
 Verse 5 **“Into your hands I commit my spirit.”**
 Verse 5 “You have redeemed me, O Lord.”
 Verse 8 “You have not shut me up into the hand of the enemy.”
 Verse 11 “I am a reproach among all my enemies”
 Verse 12 “I am like a broken vessel!”
 Verse 13 “I hear the slander of many. ...they take counsel together against me.
 They scheme to take away my life”
 Verse 15 “My times are in your hands.”
 Verse 22 “I am cut off before your eyes; nevertheless, you heard me when I cried
 out to you.”.

Acts chapter 7 tells of Stephen and of his stoning to death. He cried out (verse 59) “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” Also, he said, “Lord, do not charge them with this sin.” The words, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit,” have been the dying utterances of many historic believers. Polycarp, Augustine, Bernard, John Huss, Jerome of Prague, Martin Luther, Melancthon (Martin Luther’s friend) and Christopher Columbus.

CONCLUSION

What happened the moment Jesus died?

The temple curtain.

Matthew (27:51) and Mark (15:38) and Luke (23:45) tell us that “the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.” An early Christian historian called Jerome writes that a great lintel over the temple fell and was shattered. The temple curtain – or veil – was called the PAROCHETH – or inner veil that hung between the holy place and the holy-of-holies. It was very heavy and beautifully embroidered. (See Hebrews 6:19; 9:3; 10:19-20.)

What did the tearing of the curtain signify?

Firstly, tearing from top to bottom – and not from bottom upwards – signified that God’s salvation was resident in sending Jesus down from heaven to earth. The action also declared that salvation was not by our upward efforts to reach God.

Secondly, it signified the departure of the Shechinah or Presence of God from his now-deserted temple.

Thirdly, it made the Holy-of-Holies accessible to all. All could look in and access the presence of God. No longer was the Holy-of-Holies the secret of the temple priest

Fourthly, it demonstrated that Jesus had fulfilled the Law – and was the new access way to the Father.

The earthquake and other happenings.

Matthew goes on to say that the “earth shook and the rocks split. The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of

the tombs, and after Jesus' resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people."

An earthquake occurring at the very moment Jesus cried and died was somewhat more than a coincidence. Matthew, Mark and Luke record that those who were there at the end witness the earthquake and its effects. Luke mentions that the centurion, standing in front of the Lord and after observing how he died said: "Surely this man was the Son of God."

What happened after Jesus died?

The spirit of Jesus did not go immediately to the Father, but was committed to the Father. It went to the Father in the sense that the Father is present everywhere – because Jesus and the Father had an intimacy of relationship quite apart from geographical location.

However, for forty days after the resurrection, Jesus stayed on earth preparing his followers for his departure and the coming of the Holy Spirit in power.