

Tried *and* Crucified



SABBATH AFTERNOON

ALL ROADS LEAD TO CALVARY. We have traced the footsteps of Jesus of Nazareth from Galilee to Jerusalem, and they inevitably lead to Calvary, His place of rejection, shame, suffering, and death; but to our place of victory, hope, and eternal life.

Calvary, and what followed, sets Jesus of Nazareth apart from all other religious teachers the world has known. Others left wise teachings, did kind deeds, gathered a band of followers, and became the center of movements that persisted and grew after their deaths, some into world religions. But only Jesus, after His death, was resurrected and reigns as a living Savior. And that difference makes all the difference in the world.

The Week at a Glance: What reasons did the high priests think they had for putting Jesus to death? How did they influence Pilate? What was the significance of Jesus' being crucified between two thieves? How central is the idea of substitution in understanding the death of Jesus? What happened to the Godhead at the Cross?

Scripture Passage for the Week: *Mark 14:53-65, 15:1-41.*

Memory Verse: "And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? which is, being interpreted, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (*Mark 15:34*).

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 18.*

Before the Sanhedrin *(Mark 14:53-65)*.

The trials of Jesus were a farce. They were not intended to impartially examine the evidence but to trump up charges that would result in Jesus' condemnation and death. The religious leaders had reached their decision before any trial began: They wanted Jesus dead. While they attempted to maintain the appearance of legality, the whole process—a hastily called “court” in the middle of the night—made a mockery of justice.

By piecing together the accounts of Jesus' trials in the four Gospels and additional comments by Ellen G. White, *The SDA Bible Commentary* concludes the following: Jesus was given two preliminary hearings, one before Annas alone and another before Annas and Caiaphas. He was arraigned twice before the Sanhedrin, first by night and then by day. Jesus appeared twice before Pilate and once before Herod, between the two appearances before Pilate (see vol. 5, p. 528).

AS you read this account in Mark, put yourself in the place of the high priest. Why would he want Jesus dead? How could he have “justified” his own course? After the texts, write out what “justification” he believed that he had.

Matthew 12:2

Matthew 12:24

Mark 14:62-64

Luke 4:22

John 2:19

John 7:41, 42

John 10:33

John 11:48

We're often astonished, and rightly so, at the blindness of the leaders in their attitude toward Jesus. Yet, after summarizing in your own mind their rationale from the above texts, can you see how easy it was, even despite the evidence, for them to do what they did? What lessons might there be here for us, we who also have a capacity for justifying whatever we do, as well?

Key Text: *Mark 14:62*

Teachers Aims:

1. To stress that our own sense of religiosity can deceive us.
2. To emphasize that Christ, a sinless Being, died as our Substitute.
3. To show that Christ experienced what we, as sinners, would otherwise experience.

Lesson Outline:

I. Trial (*Mark 14:56-61*).

- A. Jesus' trial was unfair and illegal.
- B. Jesus' divinity was an offense to the priests' religion.
- C. Only Pilate, a pagan known for his cruelty, was interested in saving Jesus.

II. Suffering (*Mark 15:16-32*).

- A. Christ on the cross became sin and experienced eternal separation from God—the second death.
- B. Only the reality of Christ's spiritual suffering enabled Him to be our Substitute.
- C. Human attempts to understand the atonement are inadequate.

III. Death (*Mark 15:33-39*).

- A. The crucified Jesus experienced real despair. He could not see the successful end.
- B. This despair is identical to what unsaved sinners will feel when they realize they are doomed.
- C. At the moment of His physical death, Jesus knew He had victory over Satan.

Summary: To accomplish our salvation, Jesus had to experience what we, as condemned sinners, were meant to experience—despair and hopelessness. As our Substitute, He became one of us.

COMMENTARY

“It would be well for us to spend a thoughtful hour each day in contemplation of the life of Christ. We should take it point by point, and let the imagination grasp each scene, especially the closing ones. As we thus dwell upon His great sacrifice for us, our confidence in Him will be more constant, our love will be quickened, and we shall be more deeply imbued with His spirit.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 83.

This week let us contemplate three of those closing scenes in Jesus' life: before the Sanhedrin, before Pilate, and on the cross.

Pilate and the Religious Leaders (*Mark 15:1-19*).

Study the accounts of Jesus before Pilate in Mark 15:1-15 and the other Gospels (*Matt. 27:11-26, Luke 22:66–23:25, John 18:28–19:1-16*). How incredible that a pagan ruler was trying to save Jesus while the religious leaders, supposedly the guardians of the faith, wanted Him dead. How incredible that Jesus would be called “King of the Jews” by a pagan ruler and his soldiers while His own people, who long professed to be waiting for Him, shouted, “Crucify Him!” How incredible that Pilate offered to release Jesus, the Life-Giver, and the crowd wanted Barabbas, a murderer, instead. What a frightening testimony to the power of Satan to deceive hearts that are not surrendered completely to the Lord.

Who was more guilty in the eyes of God, Pilate or the religious leaders? What justification do you have for your answer? See *John 19:11*.

Religion can be a powerful tool either for good or evil. In this account, we see it used for a terribly evil purpose. When people, like the religious leaders here, do things under the idea that they are doing it for God, what can stop them? The notion that one’s actions are being done under a divine impetus can lead one to do a whole host of things that, otherwise, would not be done. After all, if God is leading someone, who or what should be allowed to stand in the way?

We never sin in a vacuum, do we? That is, our sins never just impact ourselves. Reread the account for today. Who else was impacted in a very negative way because of what the religious leaders did? What’s the message for us here? What other examples can you find in the Bible of how quickly the influence of sin can spread to hurt others?

Put yourself in the place of Pilate during the final judgment (*Eccles. 12:14, Rom. 3:6*). What kind of arguments might he try to use to justify his actions? How many times in the last month or so have you used the same principle to justify your own wrong acts or words?

I. Jesus Before the Sanhedrin.

Jesus' trial before Jerusalem's religious leaders was a farce. They already had concluded He was guilty and must die (*Mark 14:1*), but even the unscrupulous needed the pretense of a trial. Moses had prescribed that no one can be convicted without evidence and without at least two witnesses whose testimonies agreed (*Deut. 19:15*). Finding no evidence, the religious leaders sought for witnesses. With money they bribed false witnesses "to accuse Jesus of inciting rebellion and seeking to establish a separate government. But their testimony proved to be vague and contradictory. Under examination they falsified their own statements."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 705. Some of the witnesses even twisted the words of Jesus and accused Him of saying " 'I will destroy this temple made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands' " (*Mark 14:58, NKJV*).

Seeing that the trial was getting nowhere, the high priest came to the central issue: " 'Are You the Christ?' " (*vs. 61*). The hitherto silent Jesus could no longer remain so. The hour demanded, and His mission expected, that He confront the high priest with the truth: " 'I am' " (*vs. 62, NKJV*). By saying this, Jesus was not only answering the chief priest's question regarding His Messianic status but also was asserting He was the One who revealed Himself to Moses by the name I Am. The testimony immediately brought forth the conviction of blasphemy, and "they all condemned Him to be deserving of death" (*vs. 64, NKJV*). Where there is no room for truth, truth becomes the first victim.

II. Jesus Before Pilate.

A religious court's order was not enough to convict a person to death. Roman law required that only a political authority could pass a death sentence. So, the priests rushed Jesus to Pilate to have him seal their verdict and command His death.

Mark skips the details other Gospel writers give: the identification of Caiaphas and Annas, the trial before Herod, Pilate's introduction " 'Behold the Man!' " (*John 19:5, NKJV*), the dream of Pilate's wife, and Pilot's moral failure to act. Instead, Mark comes to the core of the story. "The chief priests accused Him of many things" (*Mark 15:3*). Luke 23:1, 2 identifies these "many things": tax evasion, terrorism, and treason. But Pilate found Jesus faultless. Yet, wanting to please the mob, Pilate laid before them a choice: "Whom should I release, Jesus or Barabbas?" (*see Mark 15:6-12*). That chilling option is today's choice, as well. Jesus or Barabbas? The Prince of Peace, whose kingdom is love and grace, or the political rebel who paved his way with violence, plunder, and murder? The kingdom of God or the kingdom of evil? The mob made its choice, and Pilate agreed.

Golgotha (*Mark 15:16-37*).

Of all the scenes from the life of Jesus, this is the one that most demands our prayerful contemplation. See Him hanging on the cross, bruised, bowed, and bloody, God's only begotten Son. His back is lacerated, His hands and feet pierced with nails. All night He has been up; He has had neither food nor drink since the meal the night before. Now He hangs helpless, skewered between felons, exposed to sun and wind, flies and ants.

Read carefully **Mark 15:27, 28.** **What significance do you find in the fact that not only was Jesus crucified as a common criminal, but that he was placed there amid two criminals? How does the Old Testament text (*Isa. 53:12*) quoted there by Mark help answer that question? What point is being forced home here to us about what happened to Jesus on the cross?**

At the Cross, Christ became our Sin Bearer. That is, He became so closely associated with sin that, according to Paul, God “for our sake . . . made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (*2 Cor. 5:21, RSV*). Without quite saying that Jesus was a sinner, which would have, of course, been wrong, Paul came as close as he possibly could, instead bringing out the idea that God regarded Him as a sinner, a transgressor, and thus treated Him as such. In a way that we can barely understand, Jesus—the only One who never sinned—took the place of every sinner.

Read **John 1:29, Galatians 3:13, Hebrews 9:28, and 1 Peter 2:24.** **What are they saying that helps us understand the relationship between Jesus and sin at the Cross?**

How should the realization of what sin did to the Son of God motivate you to seek His power in overcoming sin?

III. Jesus on the Cross.

Christ on the Cross raises two questions: What? and Who?

What is the meaning of the Cross? The Cross was not a miscarriage of justice. It was not an unfortunate incident in the life of a good man. It was the final revelation of God's love to sinners (*Rom. 5:8*). It was God's only chosen way of salvation. Through the Cross, "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them" (*2 Cor. 5:19, NKJV*). On the cross, Christ was taking our place and experiencing death on our behalf. He "bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness" (*1 Pet. 2:24, NKJV*).

In choosing the death of the cross to vanquish sin, the Christ of

Inductive Bible Study

Texts for Discovery: *Isaiah 53, Mark 14:53-65, 15:1-41*

- ① "It would be well for us to spend a thoughtful hour each day in contemplation of the life of Christ," wrote Ellen White. "We should take it point by point, and let the imagination grasp each scene, especially the closing ones."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 83. What impresses you most about the closing scenes of Jesus' life? What do you find the most shocking? What do you find particularly heartbreaking?
- ② It's no secret that we resist change; yet, in this week's study we see the Jewish religious leaders go to ridiculous extremes to maintain the status quo. Shouldn't they have welcomed new revelations from God? What did they stand to lose? In what ways does our resistance to change put us at risk of being spiritually blind? What means might God use to break us out of the rut of complacency?
- ③ To most Christians, Pilate is a character reviled and scorned for his unwillingness to stand up to the pressure of those who wanted to do away with Jesus. Imagine a setting in which you would find it difficult, if not impossible, to resist the power of public opinion. What spiritual reserves would you fall back on?
- ④ Christ's humiliation and death show the incredible extent to which God will go to save His erring creatures. It also offers a preview of the fate of those who persist in rebelling against God and His will. What tangible expressions of gratitude from us would Jesus consider most gratifying? What Bible text would you use to sum up your loyalty to Him?

The Meaning of Calvary (*Isaiah 53*).

In the texts we looked at yesterday, Mark quoted from *Isaiah 53*. Read that chapter and list the phrases that explicitly suggest that “Christ died for our sins”—that is, in our place (*see Isa. 53:4-12*).

In what ways can you see the idea of “substitution,” that Jesus died in our stead? Why is this so important for understanding the plan of salvation?

Christians have tried to explain just how God in Christ provides the way of salvation. They have set forth the various theories of the atonement. Some explanations or suggestions are as follows. How do they work, or not work, for you?

1. The Father was reluctant to save humanity, but Christ’s love provided the answer.
2. Christ’s death was a ransom price paid for the devil to free humanity from his clutches.
3. God’s honor was offended by sin, and Christ had to die to satisfy that offended honor.
4. Christ had to die as an example to the rest of the universe of the effects of sin.
5. Christ died in order to manifest God’s love so that we might be softened and won to Him.
6. On the cross the Father was punishing the Son.

No one theory is sufficient to explain how God provides a way of salvation in Jesus Christ. Many of the various “explanations” worked out—sometimes in great detail—by Christian thinkers over the centuries contain elements of truth, but the full story is much greater. The answer lies in God, who Himself provides the atonement. Note the following truths set forth in the Bible.

1. In the plan of salvation, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are One in love and action. We must avoid portraying the Father as cruel or merciless and the Son as merciful by contrast. (*See John 3:16.*)
2. God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself (*2 Cor. 5:19*).
3. The death was necessary (*Rom. 3:24-26, Heb. 9:22*).
4. Christ died in our place (*2 Cor. 5:21, 1 Cor. 15:3*).
5. The Cross is the supreme evidence of divine love (*Rom. 5:7, 8*).

the cross both defied death and defeated Satan. Through Him, eternal life becomes possible.

Who killed Jesus on the cross? The Romans? The Jews? The Jewish leaders? A senseless mob? Pilate? The question touches a sensitive nerve of history, because people bearing the name of Christ have inflicted suffering and death upon millions who they thought were responsible. But we have only to look in the mirror to discover the answer. Who killed Jesus? You did. I did. With our sins. “God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (*Rom. 5:8, NKJV*). Our “sins . . . weighed heavily upon Christ, and the sense of God’s wrath against sin was crushing out His life.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 687.

Witnessing

The ultimate sacrifice one can give to another—laying down one’s life—Christ gave on the cross to all of humankind. He tells us to follow His example: “This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (*John 15:12, 13*).

Every day, men, women, and children receive the gift of life from someone who cared enough to make provisions for helping others should they lose their own life. Transplants make sight possible for a child who never has seen his puppy; a young woman receives a heart transplant and is able to continue being a mother to her young children; a new kidney makes it possible for a grandfather to travel to see his new grandchild; and the stories go on and on. One story, however, catches the spirit of Christ’s admonition in a way few others do.

A family of four was traveling through Italy on vacation. One evening, for no apparent reason, someone in a passing car began shooting at the car carrying the family. The young son was shot and killed. Though devastated and grieving, the parents reached out to others in an astonishing way. They donated their son’s organs to numerous needy recipients of the country in which their beloved son lost his life. What an example of extraordinary love and compassion! Rather than lashing out at the senseless act of violence, these parents brought untold blessings to the families who received the gift of sight and of life itself. This is Christianity in action; this is love begetting love; this is humanity reaching out to humanity, using, as an example, God the Father sharing His Beloved Son with the sinners of earth.

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (*John 3:16*).

The Death of Jesus *(Mark 15:33-41)*.

“My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” *(Mark 15:34)*.

“Satan with his fierce temptations wrung the heart of Jesus. The Saviour could not see through the portals of the tomb. Hope did not present to Him His coming forth from the grave a conqueror, or tell Him of the Father’s acceptance of the sacrifice. He feared that sin was so offensive to God that Their separation was to be eternal. Christ felt the anguish which the sinner will feel when mercy shall no longer plead for the guilty race. It was the sense of sin, bringing the Father’s wrath upon Him as man’s substitute, that made the cup He drank so bitter, and broke the heart of the Son of God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 753.

Dwell on this Ellen White quote. How does it help us understand what happened at the Cross? What does it tell us about the character of sin? Of God? How does it help us understand what our salvation cost God?

Although Jesus tapped the depths of despair in His cry of woe—“My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?”—His final words, “It is finished” *(John 19:30)*, expressed confidence, hope, and trust anyway. He declared that He had won the last decisive battle with Satan; the outcome of the great controversy with evil was assured. The war isn’t over yet, but we know how it will end, because Jesus won the victory on Calvary. Finally, commending Himself into the Father’s keeping, Jesus bowed His head and died.

Think about it. Jesus was One with the Father from eternity *(John 1:1, 2)*; He and the Father were One in unity, action, and purpose *(Gen. 1:26, 3:22, John 10:30)*; and yet, there, at the cross, Jesus felt this overwhelming sense of separation because of sin! There was a sundering of the Godhead itself there at Calvary! Have you ever been separated from someone that you love and feel very close to? How did that separation make you feel? How could those experiences, in a small way, not only help you appreciate what Jesus did for us but also help you live in loving obedience to the God who went through all this for you?

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: “Dwight L. Moody told of the young man who did not want to serve in Napoleon Bonaparte’s army. When he was drafted, a friend volunteered to go in his place. The substitution was made, and some time later the surrogate was killed in battle. The same young man was, through a clerical error, drafted again. ‘You can’t take me’ he told the startled officers. ‘I’m dead. I died on the battlefield.’ . . . Sure enough, there on the roll was the man’s name, with another name written beside it. The case finally went to the emperor himself. After examining the evidence, Napoleon said, ‘Through a surrogate, this man has not only fought, but has died in his country’s service. No man can die more than once, therefore the law has no claim on him.’ ”—*Bible Illustrator* (Parson’s Technology, 1997).

Thought Questions:

- ❶ As payment for our sins, Jesus died on the cross. But was the cross really an integral part of the plan of salvation? Or would the death of Christ by any means have been sufficient? How about natural death or suicide? Explain.
- ❷ The religious-political leaders held the fate of Jesus in their hands. Church leaders have certain powers to squelch or promote people and ideas. What are the roles of the Holy Spirit, the Word of God, church policies, and organizational infrastructure in making the right decisions?

Application Questions:

- ❶ Even after living side by side with Jesus, the disciples had doubts about His identity. Put yourself in the disciples’ place. How would you have responded to Jesus’ death? Would you have continued to believe He was the Messiah? What more would you have needed to witness to be 100 percent sure of who Jesus was? What do you need in your life today to be absolutely content in your relationship with Jesus?
- ❷ Jesus was offered wine mixed with a substance to lessen His suffering. But He refused it. He wanted to be fully aware of what was happening and in total control of His senses. He wanted to be absolutely ready for the final round with Satan. In what areas of your life can this example of Jesus be your model to follow?

FURTHER STUDY: Compare the parallel accounts in Matthew 26:57-68; 27:1-56; Luke 22:66-23:49; John 18:12-14, 19-19:37. Read Ellen G. White's "Before Annas and the Court of Caiaphas," "In Pilate's Judgment Hall," "Calvary," and "It is Finished," in *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 698-715, 723-764.

"The Captain of our salvation was perfected through suffering. His soul was made an offering for sin. It was necessary for the awful darkness to gather about His soul because of the withdrawal of the Father's love and favor; for He was standing in the sinner's place, and this darkness every sinner must experience. The righteous One must suffer the condemnation and wrath of God, not in vindictiveness; for the heart of God yearned with greatest sorrow when His Son, the guiltless, was suffering the penalty of sin. This sundering of the divine powers will never again occur throughout the eternal ages."—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 924.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Write out a small narrative, putting yourself in the place of Caiaphas. Justify why you had to have Jesus put to death. Bring it to class and have members read their accounts and then discuss whatever you can learn from this exercise.
- 2 Why did Jesus have to die in order to save us?
- 3 As a class, discuss the implication of the statement: "The whole purpose of the Cross was merely to help us learn to trust God." Why do you agree or disagree with it?
- 4 What could you do, as a church, to be more Cross-centered? How can you make sure that when people think of your church, they first and foremost think of a community whose individual lives have been changed by Christ's death on the cross?

Summary: Christ died for our sins. Only as we see ourselves at Calvary—see and confess that Jesus died for me, in my place—does the Cross reach us with its full import. "If we would be saved at last, we must learn the lesson of penitence and humiliation at the foot of the cross."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 83.