

## SERMON NOTES

Great Friday  
The Crucifixion of our Lord

Syntaxes Gospel  
Matthew 27:1-61

### THE CRUCIFIXION: THE INNOCENT FOR THE GUILTY

#### INTRODUCTION

It had been a long night of inquisition in the court of the former High Priest and his successor, Caiaphas. But now, the religious council for the Jewish people was ready to deliver Jesus to the Roman civil authorities for execution. They had a strong case for two reasons. They could accuse Jesus of claiming to be the King of the Jews, which would place Him in opposition to the Roman rulers. Pontius Pilate was a cruel and harsh governor, and had executed countless others to put down insurrection. Moreover, Pilate was on shaky ground with the new Emperor in Rome. He would be in the mood to placate the Jewish authorities, just to keep the peace, until his position was more secure.

#### SYNTAXIS READING

Matthew 27:1-61

*"Now when morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people conferred together against Jesus to put Him to death; and they bound Him, and led Him away and delivered Him to Pilate the governor.*

*Then when Judas, who had Betrayed Him, saw that He had been condemned, he felt remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood."*

*But they said, "What is that to us? See to that yourself!" And he threw the pieces of silver into the temple sanctuary and departed; and he went away and hanged himself.*

*The chief priests took the pieces of silver and said, "It is not lawful to put them into the temple treasury, since it is the price of blood." And they conferred together and with the money bought the Potter's Field as a burial place for strangers. For this reason*

*that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day.*

*Then that which was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled: "AND THEY TOOK THE THIRTY PIECES OF SILVER, THE PRICE OF THE ONE WHOSE PRICE HAD BEEN SET by the sons of Israel; AND THEY GAVE THEM FOR THE POTTER'S FIELD, AS THE LORD DIRECTED ME."*

*Now Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor questioned Him, saying, "Are You the King of the Jews?" And Jesus said to him, "It is as you say."*

*And while He was being accused by the chief priests and elders, He did not answer. Then Pilate said to Him, "Do You not hear how many things they testify against You?" And He did not answer Him with regard to even a single charge, so the governor was quite amazed.*

*Now at the feast the governor was accustomed to release for the people any one prisoner whom they wanted. At that time they were holding a notorious prisoner, called Barabbas. So when the people gathered together, Pilate said to them, "Whom do you want me to release for you? Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?" For he knew that because of envy they had handed Him over.*

*While he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent him a message, saying, "Have nothing to do with that righteous Man; for last night I suffered greatly in a dream because of Him."*

*But the chief priests and elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and to put Jesus to death. But the governor said to them, "Which of the two do you want me to release for you?" And they said, "Barabbas." Pilate said to them, "Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?"*

*They all said, "Crucify Him!" And he said, "Why, what evil has He done?" But they kept shouting all the more, saying, "Crucify Him!"*

*When Pilate saw that he was accomplishing nothing, but rather that a riot was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this Man's blood; see to that yourselves."*

*And all the people said. "His blood shall be upon us and on our children!"*

*Then he released Barabbas for them; but after having Jesus scourged, he handed Him over to be crucified. Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole roman cohort around Him. They stripped Him and put a scarlet robe on Him. And after twisting a crown of thorns, they put it on His head, and a reed in His right hand; and they knelt down before Him and mocked Him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!"*

*They spat on Him, and took the reed and began to beat Him on the head. After they had mocked Him, they took the scarlet robe off Him and put His own garments back on Him, and led Him away to crucify Him.*

*As they were coming out, they found a man of Cyrene named Simon, whom they pressed into service to bear His cross, And when they came to a place called Golgotha, which means Place of a Skull, they gave Him wine to drink mixed with gall; and after tasting it, He was unwilling to drink.*

*And when that had crucified Him, they divided up His garments among themselves by casting lots. And sitting down, they began to keep watch over Him there. And above His head they put up the charge against Him which read, "THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS."*

*At that time two robbers were crucified with Him, one on the right and one on the left. And those passing by were hurling abuse at Him, wagging their heads and saying, "You who are going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross."*

*In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking Him and saying,*

*"He saved others; He cannot save Himself. He is the King of Israel; let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe in Him. HE TRUSTS IN GOD; LET GOD RESCUE HIM now, IF HE DELIGHTS IN HIM; for He said, 'I am the Son of God.'"*

*The robbers who had been crucified with Him were also insulting Him with the same words.*

*Now from the sixth hour darkness fell upon all the land until the ninth hour. About the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "ELI, ELI, LAMA SABACHTHANI?" that is, "MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAST THOU FORSAKEN ME?"*

*And some of those who were standing there, when they heard it, began saying, "This man is calling for Elijah." Immediately one of them ran, and taking a sponge, he filled it with sour wine and put it on a reed, and gave Him a drink. But the rest of them said, "Let us see whether Elijah will come and save Him."*

*And Jesus cried out with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit. And behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth shook and the rocks were split. The tombs were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the tombs after His resurrection they entered the holy city and appeared to many.*

*Now the centurion, and those who were with him keeping guard over Jesus, when they saw the earthquake and the things that were happening, became very frightened and said, "Truly this was the Son of God!"*

*Many woman were there looking on from a distance, who had followed Jesus from Galilee while ministering to Him. Among them was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.*

*When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who himself had also*

*become a follower of Jesus. This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate ordered it to be given to him.*

*And Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock; and he rolled a large stone against the entrance of the tomb and went away.*

*And Mary Magdalene was there, and the other Mary, sitting opposite the grave.*

## NOTES

### 1. The Remorse of Judas

“Now when morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people conferred together against Jesus to put Him to death; and they bound Him, and led Him away and delivered Him to Pilate the governor.

Friday morning of the Preparation Day, the day the Passover lambs were to be slaughtered, the religious council of the Jews officially condemned Jesus to death. However, the Romans did not allow the right of capital punishment to their subjects—only a Roman governor had the prerogative to execute criminals. Pontius Pilate was the Roman Governor of Judea.

Then when Judas, who had Betrayed Him, saw that He had been condemned, he felt remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, “I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.”

It is possible that when Jesus’ disciple, Judas, agreed to betray Jesus, he did not expect Jesus to be executed. Why he might have had that idea is strange, for we are told by John that the disciples had witnessed earlier attempts by the religious authorities on Jesus’ life by the Jewish method of stoning<sup>1</sup>—which of course would have been illegal under Roman law.

Judas knew that his master had not committed any crime. Judas knew his own action had brought about this innocent man’s condemnation to death. Suddenly, the money was no longer important to Judas in light of the heinous sin he realized that he had committed. He confessed his sin to the priests because he needed to find forgiveness and return his ill-gotten money.

But they said, “What is that to us? See to that yourself!” And he threw the pieces of silver into the temple sanctuary and departed; and he went away and hanged himself.

But under the Law of Moses, there was no sacrifice for deliberate murder.<sup>2</sup> There was only the death penalty. The priests placed the responsibility for Judas’ crime back on his own shoulders.

---

<sup>1</sup> John 11 :8

<sup>2</sup> Exodus 23:7, 20:13; Deuteronomy 27:25; Exodus 21:12; Leviticus 23:17; Numbers 35:30-31

Since the priests would not take back the money, Judas threw it into the temple. The penalty for his crime, since the Law offered no forgiveness, was death. Like Ahithophel in the days of David, who had betrayed his king,<sup>3</sup> Judas hanged himself.

The tragedy was: Jesus' death provided what the Law of Moses could never do, it provided for the forgiveness that Judas so desperately needed. Jesus died in Judas' place as well as in the place of all other sinners. Jesus' death paid the penalty for all sins. If Judas had only appealed to Jesus, he would have found forgiveness. But Judas had not accepted Who Jesus really is and so had not understood our Lord's mission to die for sinners like him.

The chief priests took the pieces of silver and said, "It is not lawful to put them into the temple treasury, since it is the price of blood." And they conferred together and with the money bought the Potter's Field as a burial place for strangers. For this reason that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day.

Money earned by doing things prohibited by the Law of Moses, such as harlotry, could not be donated to the temple. God called such things abominations to Him.<sup>4</sup> The money Judas had earned fell into this category; it was money earned by conspiring to have an innocent man put to death. *Blood* here is a metaphor for *death*.

Proper Jews did not associate with Gentiles—strangers to the Jews—who were considered the same as sinners. Thus, if a Gentile died, he could not be buried in the same area as the Jews. Since the burial place of such people would not be considered a sacred place, the earnings of Judas could be used for this purpose. It is probably located on the south side of the valley of Hinnom near Jerusalem. In ancient days, pagan sacrifices were performed in this place.

The name of the field is known as Hakeldama—in Aramaic, the Field of Blood.<sup>5</sup>

Then that which was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled:  
**“AND THEY TOOK THE THIRTY PIECES OF SILVER, THE PRICE OF THE ONE WHOSE PRICE HAD BEEN SET by the sons of Israel;**

This quotation is a conflation of two prophets, Jeremiah<sup>6</sup> and Zechariah,<sup>7</sup> the name of the greater (in volume) given the title.

The Zechariah passage "So I said to them, 'If it is good in your sight, give me my wages; but if not, never mind.' So they weighed out thirty shekels of silver as my wages. Then the LORD said to me, 'Throw it to the potter, that magnificent price at which I was valued by them.' So I took the thirty shekels of silver and threw them to the potter in the house of the LORD."

**AND THEY GAVE THEM FOR THE POTTER'S FIELD, AS THE LORD DIRECTED ME.”**

This part of the quotation cannot be found in either prophet's writings as they have been transmitted to us. But apparently it comes from the idea presented in the Jeremiah passage,

In the Jeremiah passage, the LORD had commanded the prophet to gather some of the elders of the people and some of the elder priests and go to the Valley of Hinnom and there break before

---

<sup>3</sup> 2 Samuel 17:23

<sup>4</sup> Deuteronomy 23:18

<sup>5</sup> Acts 1:18-19

<sup>6</sup> Jeremiah 19:1-15

<sup>7</sup> Zechariah 11:12-13

them a vessel purchased from the potter. It was a sign to them of the coming judgment of God upon the people; for, the broken pottery could not be repaired. The prophecy foretold that the field would become the place of burial, because of the massive deaths in Jerusalem from the famine and judgment. About forty years after the Crucifixion, the Romans besieged Jerusalem and the foretold famine occurred.

## 2. The Roman Trial: Verdict—Innocent

Now Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor questioned Him, saying, “Are You the King of the Jews?” And Jesus said to him, “It is as you say.”

While Jesus refused to respond to false accusations, He confessed to His true identity. The Son of God is a title for the King of the Jews. Pilate did not see this confession as any indication of guilt on the part of Jesus. In fact, below we see that Pilate pronounced Him innocent of charges. In John, we have a fuller report of their discussion. Jesus explained to Pilate that His Kingdom was not an earthly kingdom. Thus, the charge that the religious leaders had hoped would seal Jesus’ doom with the Romans had no effect whatsoever.

And while He was being accused by the chief priests and elders, He did not answer. Then Pilate said to Him, “Do You not hear how many things they testify against You?” And He did not answer Him with regard to even a single charge, so the governor was quite amazed.

Because the governor was convinced of Jesus’ innocence on the major charge, Pilate could not understand why Jesus did not respond to the lesser charges trumped up by the Jewish leaders.

Matthew could have quoted the prophecy: “Like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent before its shearer, so He did not open His mouth.”<sup>8</sup> But this verse from the great Isaiah prophecy of the passion of our Lord is not quoted by any of the Gospels.

Now at the feast the governor was accustomed to release for the people any one prisoner whom they wanted. At that time they were holding a notorious prisoner, called Barabbas. So when the people gathered together, Pilate said to them, “Whom do you want me to release for you? Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?” For he knew that because of envy they had handed Him over.

Pilate tried several maneuvers to have Jesus released, one of which was this Passover custom of the Romans to release a prisoner. It was a gesture of good will at this high religious festival and symbolic of what the Jews celebrated—their release from Egyptian bondage.

That Barabbas’s full name was Jesus Barabbas, or Jesus *son of Father*, has been taken by some as a defense for the Jews. The argument is that there were not two, but only one prisoner and the crowd had asked for the release of Jesus of Nazareth. However, all four Gospels witness to the fact that Barabbas was not our Lord, but another Jesus. Barabbas was being held prisoner by the Romans for insurrection and murder, according to Mark and Luke.<sup>9</sup> John states that Barabbas was a robber.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> Isaiah 53:7. While they all noted His silence, none of the Gospel writers quoted this verse. See Mark 14:61; 15:5; Luke 23:9; John 19:9.

<sup>9</sup> Mark 15:7, Luke 23:19

<sup>10</sup> John 18:40

Pilate was astute and recognized the real reason why they had brought Jesus before his judgment seat: envy.

While he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent him a message, saying, “Have nothing to do with that righteous Man; for last night I suffered greatly in a dream because of Him.”

Pilate’s wife’s testimony was added to Pilate’s own conviction that Jesus was innocent; she refers to our Lord as “that righteous Man.”

But the chief priests and elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and to put Jesus to death. But the governor said to them, “Which of the two do you want me to release for you?” And they said, “Barabbas.” Pilate said to them, “Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?”

Pilate was being pressured from two sides, his conscience and his wife on the one hand, and the Jewish religious leaders on the other.

This is the contrast between Palm Sunday’s crowd and the Passover crowd at the Roman court. One enthusiastically hailed Jesus as King, the other—at the persuasion of their religious leaders—vehemently rejected Him as their King.

They all said, “Crucify Him!” And he said, “Why, what evil has He done?” But they kept shouting all the more, saying, “Crucify Him!”

The Jewish crowd became an unreasonable and bloodthirsty mob. They could not report a single instance of evil, yet they demanded Jesus die the horrible death of crucifixion.

When Pilate saw that he was accomplishing nothing, but rather that a riot was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd, saying, “I am innocent of this Man’s blood; see to that yourselves.”

A riot was the last thing that Pilate wanted. He had put riots down in the past, but his inability to control the populace under his rule was bad for his reputation in Rome, which was not as firm as it once was.

Unwilling to pronounce a verdict he knew was wrong, and yet unwilling to oppose the will of the crowd, Pilate tried to shirk responsibility.

After washing his hands of the matter, Pilate told the crowds exactly the same thing the priests had told Judas: “See to that yourselves.” Judas had to take responsibility for his act of treason, now the Jewish crowd must take responsibility for their own treason: for the crucifixion of their King.

And all the people said. “His blood shall be upon us and on our children!” Then he released Barabbas for them; but after having Jesus scourged, he handed Him over to be crucified.

The people understood that they must accept responsibility, and they did so. The responsibility for the death of Christ was accepted by them; moreover, they made their children responsible as well. However, washing his hands did not clear Pilate; in the end it was the Roman governor who handed over Jesus to the Roman soldiers to be crucified.

Pilate had Jesus scourged—beaten by a whip, whose multiple cords had pieces of sharp bone and iron imbedded in them, until the skin’s flesh was ripped into shreds and the underlying muscles



were exposed and torn. An innocent man should never have been scourged; it often killed the one so beaten. In the Gospel of John, the scourging was another maneuver that failed to pacify the Jews and have Jesus released.<sup>11</sup>

That the Savior would be scourged was prophesied by Isaiah.<sup>12</sup>

### **3. The Crucifixion**

Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole roman cohort around Him. They stripped Him and put a scarlet robe on Him. And after twisting a crown of thorns, they put it on His head, and a reed in His right hand; and they knelt down before Him and mocked Him, saying, “Hail, King of the Jews!”

According to John, after the scourging and the mocking by the Roman soldiers, our Lord was led again before the people dressed in the scarlet robe and crown of thorns; they once again rejected Him. This was followed by another interview with a very frightened Pilate after the people said Jesus claimed to be the Son of God. After speaking with Jesus, Pilate again tried to convince the crowd that Jesus should be released, but to no avail.

The mocking by the Roman soldiers consisted of dressing Jesus as a fake king and pretending to be His subjects. According to prophecy, the day will come when all nations will truly kneel in allegiance to the Messiah, the King of the Jews.<sup>13</sup>

The crown, made of twisted branches with long thick thorns, was another act of cruelty. The thorns remind one of the first punishment for sins, when Adam and Eve had to leave the Garden and work the cursed earth that produced thorns and thistles.<sup>14</sup> From first to last, our Lord bore all the curses of sin.

They spat on Him, and took the reed and began to beat Him on the head.  
After they had mocked Him,

This disgusting act of disrespect to the Savior was also prophesied by Isaiah.<sup>15</sup> The beating on the head must have driven the long thorns deeper into his skull.

they took the scarlet robe off Him and put His own garments back on Him,  
and led Him away to crucify Him.

This changing of garments that stuck to his wounds must have been extremely painful and caused them to bleed afresh.

As they were coming out, they found a man of Cyrene named Simon, whom they pressed into service to bear His cross, and when they came to a place called Golgotha, which means Place of a Skull, they gave Him wine to drink mixed with gall; and after tasting it, He was unwilling to drink.

Cyrene was a seaport city of Cyrenaica in North Africa, located to the west of Egypt. At this point in time, it was a Roman province and many Jews had settled there. Simon could have come to

---

<sup>11</sup> John 19:1-16

<sup>12</sup> Isaiah 50:6 “I gave my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who plucked my beard.”

<sup>13</sup> Genesis 27:29; Isaiah 39: 23; 60:14 etc.

<sup>14</sup> Genesis 3:18

<sup>15</sup> Isaiah 50:6 “My face I did not shield from buffets and spitting.”

Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover, as was commanded of pious Jews, or he may have been a Gentile in the city for other reasons. Mark notes that this Simon was the father of Alexander and Rufus,<sup>16</sup> as if these two men were well known among his Christian readers.

The scourging had left Jesus weak from loss of blood, too weak to carry the heavy crossbeam. The Romans forced Simon, who happened to be in the street, to carry it instead of Jesus.

The wine offered to Jesus was mixed with *gall*, according to Matthew because of its bitter taste. But Mark notes that it was myrrh, a dulling drug. Jesus refused to drink anything that would have reduced the suffering He needed to endure for our sakes.

Golgotha was the name of the hill, outside the walls of Jerusalem, which had the appearance of a skull.

And when that had crucified Him, they divided up His garments among themselves by casting lots. And sitting down, they began to keep watch over Him there. And above His head they put up the charge against Him which read, “THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS.”

The Psalmist, 1000 years before this event, wrote in Psalm 22, which Jesus quoted on the Cross:

“A band of evildoers has encompassed me; they pierced my hands and my feet. I can count all my bones. They look; they stare at me; they divide my garments among them and for my clothing they cast lots.”<sup>17</sup>

John reports that the soldiers divided Jesus’ outer garments in four parts; but the tunic, which was seamless and, thus, very unusual, they did not want to tear; so they cast lots to see whose it should be, unknowingly fulfilling the prophecy.

The superscription, nailed to the cross above Jesus’ head, containing the charge for which Jesus was crucified was, according to John, written in Hebrew (Aramaic), Latin, and Greek. It read: Jesus the Nazarene King of the Jews. *If* the word *and* was inserted before “the King of the Jews in the Aramaic.” the Hebrew acronym is the Tetragrammaton (the four consonants of the Holy NAME). We only have the Greek, but it is probable that the single letter meaning *and* was there.

According to John, the Jewish authorities did not like the sign and wanted Pilate to write: “**He said** I am King of the Jews.” But Pilate refused to change the superscription.<sup>18</sup>

At that time two robbers were crucified with Him, one on the right and one on the left. And those passing by were hurling abuse at Him, wagging their heads and saying, “You who are going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross.”

All four Gospels mention the two criminals crucified with Jesus.<sup>19</sup>

The place of crucifixion was near the road leading into the city; it was seen by many passers-by.

---

<sup>16</sup>Mark 15:21

<sup>17</sup>Psalm 22:16-18

<sup>18</sup>John 19:19-21

<sup>19</sup>Mark notes that this circumstance fulfilled the Scriptures which foretold that He would “be numbered with transgressors.”Mark 15:28; cf. Isaiah 53:12. However, verse 28 of Mark 15 is not found in the earliest manuscripts.

The wording of the abuse flung at Jesus seems to come from the accusations at the trial. This information was probably fed by the religious leaders to those entering the city.

As was noted, in the Vigil reading, Jesus never said that He would destroy the temple. He had said to the Jews: “Destroy this temple [meaning His body] and in three days I will raise it up.”<sup>20</sup>

Those verbally abusing our Lord do seem to believe that the Christ, the Son of God, would have the ability to come down from the Cross; thus, they believed that He would have supernatural powers. So, if Jesus *were* the Son of God as He *claimed*, He would be able to miraculously come down from the cross. And of course they were right. However, Jesus chose to stay.

In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking Him and saying, “He saved others; He cannot save Himself. He is the King of Israel; let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe in Him. HE TRUSTS IN GOD; LET GOD RESCUE HIM now, IF HE DELIGHTS IN HIM; for He said, ‘I am the Son of God.’”

Here we see that it was the chief priests, the scribes, and the Pharisees who were the ones leading the mockers. It is noteworthy that they recognized the good works that Jesus had done on behalf of others and were not ashamed to mock such a man.

It should be considered that if Jesus had indeed saved Himself, He would not have saved others—all of us sinners—for in order to save others, He could not save Himself.

The religious leaders quoted from Psalm 23,<sup>21</sup> a psalm that graphically pictures crucifixion hundreds of years before that means of execution was created.<sup>22</sup> It is the same psalm that Jesus quoted in His last moments. The psalm pictures the King, surrounded by jeering beasts, being crucified. It is amazing that the religious leaders could quote the psalm in that setting and not see the part they themselves were playing.

*The Son of God* was the title given to the legitimate King by the Hebrew people. Psalm 2, in which the new king was recognized by God, as His Son was used as a coronation hymn for their kings.

The robbers who had been crucified with Him were also insulting Him with the same words.

But, according to Luke, at some point, one of the robbers said to the other who was hurling abuse at Jesus, “Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed are suffering justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.” And then to Jesus, “Jesus remember me, when you come into your kingdom.” To which Jesus replied, “Today you will be with Me in Paradise.”<sup>23</sup>

Now from the sixth hour darkness fell upon all the land until the ninth hour. About the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, “ELI, ELI, LAMA SABACHTHANI?” that is, “MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAST THOU FORSAKEN ME?”

The sixth hour (of daylight) was around noon and the ninth before 3:00 P.M. The Passover lambs were being slaughtered during these hours.

---

<sup>20</sup> John 2:19

<sup>21</sup> Psalm 23:8

<sup>22</sup> It was probably invented by the Persians

<sup>23</sup> Luke 23:40-43

According to John, Jesus was still in Pilate's court at the sixth hour.<sup>24</sup> According to all four Gospels, Jesus died at the ninth hour.<sup>25</sup>

It was at, or near, 3:00 Friday afternoon, that our Lord shouted out the first verse of Psalm 22, written almost a thousand years earlier. The Davidic psalm, as mentioned above, pictured the King crucified, surrounded by those who jeered and mocked Him. His physical<sup>26</sup> and emotional<sup>27</sup> torments are graphically described.

But the point came that was far greater than the physical and emotional suffering. This was the moment of abandonment, the separation from God which is the penalty for sin. This is the moment our Lord had dreaded in the Garden of Gethsemane. What happened in that moment cannot be described, we only hear the loud cry of forsakenness.

And some of those who were standing there, when they heard it, began saying, "This man is calling for Elijah." Immediately one of them ran, and taking a sponge, he filled it with sour wine and put it on a reed, and gave Him a drink. But the rest of them said, "Let us see whether Elijah will come and save Him."

Those standing by misunderstood His words. The fact that they thought He was calling for Elijah, shows that they were either not the Roman soldiers, or that these Romans were familiar with the Hebrew Scriptures or the Jewish custom of expecting the return of the prophet at the Feast of Passover to announce the Messiah.<sup>28</sup> They wanted to hear more, so they gave Him a drink.

Did our Lord drink the vinegar? A better translation might be: "and offered Him to drink." We are not told if he drank it or refused it. Probably, He refused it.

And Jesus cried out with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit. And behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth shook and the rocks were split. The tombs were opened, and many bodies of

---

<sup>24</sup> John 19:14 But Mark notes that Jesus was crucified the third hour. He also notes that darkness covered the land between the sixth and the ninth hours. Mark likes to arrange in groups of three. Possibly, the third hour represents the hour our Lord's death was determined by the Jewish council or the hour they delivered Him up for crucifixion to Pilate.

<sup>25</sup> Mark 33-37

<sup>26</sup> He suffered the physical effects of the scourging and crucifixion: "I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax, it is melted within me. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue cleaves to my jaws; and You lay me in the dust of death. A band of evil doers has encompassed me; they pierced my hands and my feet. I can count all my bones."

<sup>27</sup> He suffered rejection and ridicule: "But I am a worm and not a man, a reproach of men and despised by the people. All who see me sneer at me; they separate with the lip, they wag the head, saying, 'Commit yourself to the LORD; let Him deliver him; let Him rescue him, because He delights in him.'" And those watching eagerly desire His death: "Many bulls have surrounded me; strong bulls of Bashan have encircled me. They open wide their mouth at me, as a ravening and a roaring lion." And there is the humiliation of complete exposure, public nakedness, "they look, they stare at me; they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots."

<sup>28</sup> Innovations, such as the four cups of wine, to the traditional Passover celebration were made by the Pharisees sometime before the destruction of the second Temple. The last cup was for Elijah, at which point a child opens the door to see if Elijah has arrived. If not the cup of wine is poured out.

the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the tombs after His resurrection they entered the holy city and appeared to many.

His work of salvation for sinners completed, Jesus released His spirit.

Three events marked the significance of the Lord's completed work: 1) the separation of men from God was removed—symbolized by the tearing of the thick curtain that had barred the way to the Holy of Holies in the Temple— 2) the Holy Spirit was provided for this life—symbolized by the earthquake and split rocks,<sup>29</sup> and 3) man's resurrection from the dead was assured—symbolized by the opening of the tombs.

*Saints*, *αγιοι*, in Holy Scripture, refers simply to those who trust in God, no matter how much they may have stumbled in their attempts to follow Him. They are people like us. *Saint* comes from the word, *αγιαζω*, which means “to set apart.” Because of their trust in Him, God has set them apart as His own—for His own use. Thus, used as an adjective, the word is translated as *holy*.

Now the centurion, and those who were with him keeping guard over Jesus, when they saw the earthquake and the things that were happening, became very frightened and said, “Truly this was the Son of God!”

The hardened Roman soldiers were convinced by the physical phenomena that they had crucified the Son of God. They were probably using the term as a reference to Deity in human form. Therefore, they were very frightened.

Many woman were there looking on from a distance, who had followed Jesus from Galilee while ministering to Him. Among them was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.

The women who had ministered to the needs of Jesus and His disciples—with their money and food, or with whatever they saw that was needed—were faithful to the end. They did not desert their Lord even at this terrible time.

Mary Magdalene, a faithful disciple, was the women who had had seven demons cast out by Jesus.<sup>30</sup>

Mary the mother of another Disciple, James [the less]<sup>31</sup> and his brother Joseph, was the wife of Alphaeus, or Cleopas. From John 19:25, it appears that she may have been the sister of the mother of our Lord.

The mother of the sons of Zebedee was the mother of the Disciples James and John.

These women would be at the tomb on Sunday morning.<sup>32</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> St. Paul tells us that the rock, which was smitten by Moses at God's command, and from which poured the life-giving water in the desert during the forty year trek of the Israelites, was Christ [1 Corinthians 10:4]. St. John tells us that our Lord used water as a metaphor for the Holy Spirit [John 7:38-39]. So, *perhaps*, the split rocks symbolize the broken body of our Lord, Whose death provided for the gift of His Holy Spirit. The opened entry into God's Presence, the gift of the Holy Spirit, and our future resurrection from the dead are the three most important results of Christ's work on the Cross on our behalf.

<sup>30</sup> Luke 8:2-3

<sup>31</sup> Matthew 10:3

<sup>32</sup> Luke 24:10

## 4. The Burial

When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who himself had also become a follower of Jesus. This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate ordered it to be given to him.

Just before sundown, Joseph came. He was wealthy and prominent and, probably, Pilate knew him, or of him. Thus, Pilate relinquished the body that would normally have been thrown into the common grave. Since the High Sabbath was approaching, bodies could not remain on the crosses<sup>33</sup> as was the usual Roman custom.

And Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock; and he rolled a large stone against the entrance of the tomb and went away.

Joseph had to hurriedly bury the body, because sundown approached, and the Sabbath was about to begin, when no work was allowed.

Joseph was a prominent member of the Sanhedrin, the Council of the religious Jewish authorities. He, like Nicodemus—who helped him bury our Lord’s body—was a secret disciple. Nicodemus was also a member of the Sanhedrin and had not agreed to the death of Jesus.

That Jesus was buried in a rich man’s tomb fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah 53:9

The large rock would be a cause of concern to the women on Sunday morning—who would move it for them?

And Mary Magdalene was there, and the other Mary, sitting opposite the grave.

The two Marys observed the burial by Joseph. Apparently they were not satisfied and planned to come back after the Sabbath to do it properly. The *other* Mary was probably Mary, the mother of James the less.

## APPLICATION

On Great Friday, Armenian churches, around the world, take on the appearance of a burial site. Before the altar, near the front of the church a draped form covered with flowers is placed. Candles are lit at the head and at the foot of this replica of the buried Christ. The readings are from the Gospel of Matthew and recount the death and burial of our Lord.

Many sermons can be preached, and indeed have been preached, from these verses. Some focus on the necessity of our Lord’s death. His death in our stead, the innocent in the place of the guilty, paid in full the penalty due us for our sins. This was a price the guilty

---

<sup>33</sup> John 19:31. The two others, crucified with Jesus, died after Jesus, when their legs were broken to hasten their deaths so that they could be removed from their crosses. Since Jesus was already dead, a soldier pierced His side with a spear to make sure. As John notes [John 19:36], that His legs were not broken fulfilled another prophecy and the requirement that Passover lambs should not have a bone broken [Exodus 12:46].

could never have paid, for it would require their separation from God for all eternity. Only an innocent One could pay the price for the guilty and return to God. That God became that innocent One as the baby born in Bethlehem, is the theme of the Good News, the Gospel, or as we say in Armenian, the Avedis. The good news that God so loved the world, He was willing to pay the price Himself, a price horrible in physical terms, but unimaginable in the cost to Him spiritually.

Another sermon might underscore that no one could kill Christ, no one could scourge Him or humiliate Him, and no one could crucify Him unless He allowed it. And He not only allowed it, He planned and foretold that it should happen in just that way. Because only in that way could He save us. Contemplating His sacrifice for us should cause us to fall down before Him in humble and eternal gratitude.

One could consider the human reaction to the crucifixion. Matthew seems to underscore that all—except the religious authorities, and the mob that they persuaded—admitted that Jesus was innocent of any crime. Even Judas, the disciple who betrayed our Lord, when he saw that Jesus was condemned to death, confessed that he had betrayed innocent blood.

The civil authorities found no guilt in Him. The Roman governor determined quickly that Jesus was an innocent man; and that it was only out of envy that the chief priests and Pharisees had delivered Him over for death. Agreeing with Pilate, Herod, the King who ruled over the area of Galilee, confirmed that Jesus was innocent.

The two thieves on the crosses to His right and to His left knew that Jesus was innocent. The hardened Roman soldiers, who had mocked and tortured our Lord, in the end recognized, “Truly this was the Son of God.” There were also those at the cross who loved Him and knew He was guilty of no crime: His mother and His disciple John, and the women who ministered to Him in life and were determined to minister to Him even in death.

Finally, there were those even among the religious leaders who knew that He was innocent. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus threw all caution to the wind, knowing that it meant the loss of their prestigious positions and even their right to be a part of the Jewish community if their identification with Jesus became known. In spite of this, they came forward so that they might give the body of Jesus a decent and reverent burial.

However, none understood that the Crucifixion was not the end. None understood that He would rise again on Sunday morning. Neither in their regret—on the part of Judas and the civil authorities, nor in their fear—on the part of the Roman soldiers, nor in their grief—on the part of those who loved Him, did the possibility of the Resurrection even enter the minds of those who believed that He was innocent.

While there were those who knew He was innocent of any crime, there was one group who clamored for His death. Perhaps even, in their heart of hearts, they knew He was innocent too. Yet their hatred of Him was intense. He had exposed their hypocrisy. They,

who prided themselves on their observance and authority with respect to the Law of their religion, who demanded respect and reverence for themselves from the people, had been shown to be further from God than common sinners, harlots and the hated tax-collectors.

It was too much, He had to die. He had to die the most horrible and shameful of deaths; He had to be crucified. They demanded this death from the civil authorities or they would embarrass them with a riot that would have repercussions with the Emperor in Rome. Even when darkness covered the land at high noon, when the earth shook, the rocks split, the tombs were opened, and the great heavy curtain that barred the way to the Holy of Holies was rent from top to bottom, even then, they clung to their hatred, and refused to believe.

However, this group remembered what the others did not: Jesus promised to rise from the dead in three days. They demanded that the Romans post a guard at the tomb to prevent the body from being stolen by the disciples for a fake resurrection announcement.<sup>34</sup> Those who *steadfastly* will not believe, cannot believe and find the forgiveness provided on the Cross. Like Judas they must assume responsibility for their own payment of sins—eternal death and separation from the Living God.

How do we react to the account of our Lord's death and burial? Our reading ends with the faithful women watching in sorrow as the two once secret followers of Christ, sadly bury the body of their beloved Lord. We know that He did this for us, and we too are grieved at the pain He suffered; but we do not sorrow as these sorrowed--hopelessly, for we know that Sunday is coming. We know that these faithful disciples will experience what we, 2000 years later, long to see—the glorious resurrected Lord Jesus Christ. May this reminder of the death of our Savior—the Innocent for the guilty—cause us to pause in absolute wonder and thankfulness, and respond, on our knees, with total love and worship.

---

<sup>34</sup> Matthew 27:62-66