

# CONCERNING THE WAY

June 26, 2012

## LESSON 141: THE GOSPEL OF LUKE



**Luke 22:66-71** As soon as day came, the elders of the people, the high priests, and the scribes assembled and brought him before their Council. (67) They said, "If you are the Christ, tell us." But he said to them, "If I tell you, you won't believe me, (68) and if I ask you a question, you won't answer me. (69) But from now on the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the mighty God." (70) Then they all asked, "Are you, then, the Son of God?" He answered them, "You say that I am." (71) Then they said, "Why do we need any more testimony? We have heard it ourselves from his own mouth!"

### Chapter 23

**Luke 23:1-3** Then the whole crowd got up and took him to Pilate. (2) They began to accuse him, "We found this man corrupting our nation, forbidding us to pay taxes to Caesar, and saying that he is the Christ, a king." (3) Then Pilate asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" He answered him, "You say so."

- It is Friday morning and the Jewish leaders leave the place where they put Jesus on trial. The Jews did not have the power to sentence Jesus to death, they had to get approval from the Romans to do that, so they take Him to Pilate, who was the current Roman governor of Judea.
- Pontius Pilate had been the Roman governor throughout the ministry of John the Baptist and Jesus. He had full military and judicial authority in Judea. His headquarters was in Caesarea on the coast, but at times he would come to Jerusalem if there was fear of trouble breaking out. Passover was one of those times – with so many people in Jerusalem, there was an increased chance of riots and violence. Pilate was said to be a typical Roman, but was pleasure-loving, imperious, and corrupt. He hated the Jews and hated being assigned to Judea, and the Jews hated him right back, accusing him of every crime, mismanagement, cruelty, and robbery, all of which he was guilty of at one time or another.
- The Sanhedrin had charged Jesus with blasphemy, that He had called Himself the Son of God. Of course they didn't even mention that charge to Pilate, who could have cared less about any religious charges against Jesus. So they had to frame their complaints in a political way so that Pilate would think He was a threat to Rome. Every one of the three charges was an outright lie, and they knew it.

**Luke 23:4-7** Then Pilate said to the high priests and crowds, "I do not find anything blameworthy in this man." (5) But they kept insisting, "He is stirring up the people by teaching all over Judea, beginning in Galilee even to this place." (6) When Pilate heard this, he asked whether the man was a Galilean. (7) When he learned with certainty that Jesus came from Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him off to Herod, who was in Jerusalem at that time.

- Pilate, who was an experienced Roman official, saw right through these people and knew they were lying. Pilate said more than he knew when he said that "I do not find anything blameworthy in this man." Not only had Jesus committed no political crime, He had never committed any kind of sin at all. If any man ever deserved not to die, it was he! Do you think the Holy Spirit led Pilate to say this?

John gives us some detail about the conversation between Pilate and Jesus:

**John 18:33-38** So Pilate went back into the governor's headquarters, summoned Jesus, and said to him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" (34) Jesus replied, "Are you asking this on your own initiative, or did others tell you about me?" (35) Pilate replied, "I am not a Jew, am I? It is your own nation and high priests who have handed you over to me. What have you done?" (36) Jesus answered, "My kingdom does not belong to this world. If my kingdom belonged to this world, my servants would fight to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But for now my kingdom is not from here." (37) Pilate said to him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. I was born for this, and I came into the world for this: to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice." (38) Pilate said to him, "What is 'truth'?" After he said this, he went out to the Jews again and told them, "I find no basis for a charge against him."

- Pilate thought that the kind of king Jesus was claiming to be was no threat to the Roman Empire, and declared Jesus innocent.
- Pilate didn't really want to give the Jews what they wanted, but He also didn't want to offend them and give them more reasons for rebellion. So, when he found out that Jesus was from Galilee, he saw a way to avoid the decision altogether. Herod Antipas was in charge of Galilee, and also happened to be in Jerusalem at the time, so he sent Jesus to Herod.
- Herod Antipas, a son of Herod the Great by his Samaritan wife Malthace, was tetrarch of Galilee and Perea during the whole period of Jesus' life on earth. He was a "frivolous and vain prince", and was guilty of many infamous crimes (Mark 8:15; Luke 3:19; Luke 13:31, Luke 13:32). He beheaded John the Baptist (Matthew 14:1-12) at the urging of Herodias, the wife of his half-brother Herod-Philip, whom he had married.

**Luke 23:8-12** Now Herod was very glad to see Jesus, because he had been wanting to see him for a long time on account of what he had heard about him. He was also hoping to see some sign done by him. (9) So he continued to question him for a long time, but Jesus gave him no answer at all. (10) Meanwhile, the high priests and the scribes stood by and continued to accuse him vehemently. (11) Even Herod and his soldiers treated him with contempt and made fun of him. Then he put a magnificent robe on him and sent him back to Pilate. (12) So Herod and Pilate became friends with each other that very day. Before this they had been enemies.

- Herod was one of the very few people that Jesus refused to speak to. Why did he have nothing to say to Herod? Jesus' silence fulfilled Isaiah 53:7.
- Herod treated Jesus as a joke. The only interest he had in him is that he hoped He would do some miracle or trick for him. He put Him in a king's robe to make fun of Him. He refused to take Jesus seriously. The fact is that the vast majority of people still refuse to take Jesus seriously. If they did, they would pay more attention than they do to his words and his claims.
- The first part of verse 11 could be translated, "Herod and his soldiers thought that Jesus was of no importance." There are still those who, consciously or unconsciously, believe that Jesus does not matter, that he is someone they don't need to pay attention to, He has no importance in their lives. They give him no room in their hearts and no influence in their lives and believe they can easily do without him. To the Christian believer, Jesus is the most important person in the entire universe. And all these people who think like Herod will someday bow to Him before He sends them to an eternity without Him, as they wanted.

**Luke 23:13-16** Then Pilate called the high priests, the other leaders, and the people together (14) and said to them, "You brought this man to me as one who turns the people against the government. And here in your presence I have examined him and have found him "Not Guilty" of the charges you make against him. (15) Nor does Herod, for he sent him back to us. Indeed, he has done nothing to deserve death. (16) So I will punish him and let him go."

- This is pretty interesting – it is clear that Pilate did not want to condemn Jesus. Even though Pilate and the Romans could be cruel at times, they were proud of upholding justice in the Roman Empire. Do you think there was any other reason why Pilate was so reluctant to put Jesus to death (read Matthew 27:19, John 19:4-12)?

**Luke 23:17-25** Now he was obligated to release someone for them at the festival. (18) But they all shouted out together, "Away with this man! Release Barabbas for us!" (19) (This was a man who had been put in prison for a revolt that had taken place in the city and for murder.) (20) But Pilate wanted to let Jesus go, so he appealed to them again, (21) but they continued to shout, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" (22) Then he spoke to them a third time: "What has he done wrong? I have found nothing in him worthy of death. So I will punish him and let him go." (23) But they kept pressing him with loud shouts, demanding that Jesus be crucified, and their shouts began to prevail. (24) Then Pilate pronounced his sentence that their demand should be carried out. (25) So he released the man who had been put in prison for revolt and murder-the man they continued to demand-but he let them have their way with Jesus.

- Even though Jesus had been proven by the Roman authorities to have done nothing deserving of death, the Jews yelled out that Barabbas should be released in place of Jesus. Amazingly the people were willing to have a terrorist and a murderer walking around loose rather than the Messiah. They would rather have a well-known sinner around than with the One who could forgive their sins.
- Pilate was backed into a corner by the Jews. He was basically blackmailed by them into condemning Jesus. The fact is that the Romans weren't only tough on the people they had conquered; they were also tough on their governors. Any province had the right to report a governor to Rome for mismanagement, and that governor would be severely dealt with.
- Pilate couldn't afford any more mistakes with the Jews. He had already offended them many times.
  - According to the writings of King Agrippa, he was usually merciless in inflicting punishment on offenders, sometimes without a trial or hearing. He did this to keep people in constant fear of his rule.
  - He used the temple treasure to pay for an aqueduct.
  - He brought pagan Roman banners into Jerusalem. These banners were topped by a little bust of the reigning emperor, whom the Romans considered a god. Of course, this was a serious insult to the Jews, because the Law forbade any image of a false god. Previous governors had respected this law and removed the images before coming into Jerusalem, but Pilate refused to do so. Josephus tells a whole story about this in The Antiquities of the Jews, book 18, chapter 3.
  - Pilate placed Roman golden shields in the Jewish temple that were inscribed with images of Roman gods.
  - At one point he had a large number of Galileans killed and he mixed their blood with the animal blood of the temple sacrifices (Luke 13:1-2).
  - He hated to please the Jews, but, deep down, he was afraid of them. He was afraid they might use

their influence to hurt him. When he was threatened (John 19:12), he gave in. He was a coward.

- “I will punish Him” – Even though he did not let Jesus go he still had him whipped before he sent him to the cross (Mark 15:15). This was called scourging, which wasn’t a whipping like we think of today. It was done using a length of leather strips with pieces of metal and bone tied up in the ends. This whipping literally filleted the prisoner’s back, tearing the flesh to ribbons. Matthew gives us more details about the torture the Romans inflicted on Jesus before sending Him to the cross:

**Matthew 27:24-31** Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that a riot was about to break out instead. So he took some water and washed his hands in front of the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood. You must see to that yourselves." (25) All the people answered, "Let his blood be on us and our children!" (26) Then he released Barabbas for them, but he had Jesus whipped and handed over to be crucified. (27) Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus into the imperial headquarters and gathered the whole company of soldiers around him. (28) They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him. (29) Twisting some thorns into a victor's crown, they placed it on his head and put a stick in his right hand. They knelt down in front of him and began making fun of him, saying, "Long live the king of the Jews!" (30) Then they spit on him and took the stick and hit him repeatedly on his head. (31) When they had finished making fun of him, they stripped him of the robe, put his own clothes back on him, and led him away to crucify him.

- Along with the beating he received from the temple police (Luke 22:63-65), after this abuse Jesus “was so disfigured he no longer looked like a man; his form was so marred he no longer looked human” (Isaiah 52:14-15). It was amazing that He could even stand up, much less walk to Calvary.

**Luke 23:26-31** As they led him away, they took hold of Simon, a man from Cyrene, as he was coming in from the country, and they put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus. (27) A large crowd of people followed him, including some women who kept beating their breasts and wailing for him. (28) But Jesus turned to them and said, "**Women of Jerusalem, stop crying for me, but cry for yourselves and for your children. (29) For the days are surely coming when people will say, 'How blessed are the women who couldn't bear children and the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!' (30) Then they will begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall on us!'**, and to the hills, '**Cover us up!**' (31) **For if they do this when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?"**

- When a criminal was condemned to be crucified, he was taken from the judgment hall and put in the middle of a guard of four Roman soldiers. His own cross was then laid on his shoulders, and he was marched to the place of crucifixion by the longest possible route, while in front of him marched another soldier bearing a sign with his crime written on it, so that he might be a warning to anyone else who was thinking about committing a similar crime. That is what they did with Jesus.
- He started out carrying His own cross (John 19:17), but with the injuries He already had His strength gave out quickly and the soldiers had to recruit someone from the crowd to carry it for Him. You didn’t refuse when a Roman soldier asked you to do something, unless you wanted to get his sword in your belly.
- It says Simon was from Cyrene, which is modern day Tripoli in Libya. He was most likely a Jew who come on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem for Passover, and just happened to get caught up in the crowd. Imagine that! He had probably scrimped and saved to make this trip once in his life, and here he was walking to Calvary

carrying a cross! But there may be more to this story. I'll let William Barclay tell it:

- *"If we can read between the lines the story does not end there. J. A. Robertson saw in it one of the hidden romances of the New Testament. Mark describes Simon as the father of Alexander and Rufus. (Mk 15:21.) Now you do not identify a man by the name of his sons unless these sons are well-known people in the community to which you write. There is general agreement that Mark wrote his gospel to the Church at Rome. Turn to Paul's letter to the Church at Rome. Amongst the greetings at the end he writes, "Greet Rufus, eminent in the Lord, also his mother and mine." (Romans 16:13.) So in the Roman church there was Rufus, so choice a Christian that he could be called one of God's chosen ones, with a mother so dear to Paul that he could call her his mother in the faith. It may well be that this was the same Rufus who was the son of Simon of Cyrene, and his mother was Simon's wife."*
- *"It may well be that as he looked on Jesus, Simon's bitterness turned to wondering amazement and finally to faith; that he became a Christian; and that his family became some of the choicest souls in the Roman church. It may well be that Simon from Tripoli thought he was going to realize a life's ambition, to celebrate the Passover in Jerusalem at last; that he found himself sorely against his will carrying a criminal's cross; that, as he looked, his bitterness turned to wonder and to faith; and that in the thing that seemed to be his shame he found a Savior."*
- On the way Jesus turned to the women weeping and wailing behind Him and warned them of the coming disaster. Because Jesus was going to the cross, the kingdom was being postponed and times of tribulation would come on the nation (see Hosea 10:8; Revelation 6:15-17).
- "Fall on us" - this prophecy was fulfilled partly at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem in a.d. 70. Its ultimate fulfillment will be in the coming tribulation period (Revelation 6:15-17; see also Isaiah 2:19-21). Jesus was saying in those days it will be best not to bring children into the world.
- In verse 31, Jesus is saying, "If they do something like this when I am here, what will it be like in the years to come when I am not here and they continue to reject me?"
- "Green tree" - Jesus was comparing the Roman treatment of Himself to what they would later do to the Jews. He was like a live tree, offering life-giving fruit, whereas the Jewish nation had become a dead tree, producing nothing but trouble.

**Luke 23:32-34** **Two others, who were criminals, were also led away to be executed with him. (33) When they reached the place called The Skull, they crucified him there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. (34) Jesus kept saying, "Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they're doing." Then they divided his clothes among them by throwing dice.**

- Crucifixion was a common method of carrying out the death sentence in the Roman Empire. It was probably the cruelest and painful method of death the Romans knew. Crucifixion was reserved for the worst criminals; by law a Roman citizen could not be crucified. Crucifixion was usually a long slow process, but Jesus died in an unusually short period of time. In verse 46 it says He voluntarily "breathed His last".
- When a criminal reached the place of crucifixion, his cross was laid flat on the ground. Usually it was a cross shaped like a T with no top piece which they could rest their head against. It was usually pretty low, so that the criminal's feet were only two or three feet above the ground. There was a group of pious women in Jerusalem who made it their practice to go to crucifixions and to give the victim a drink of drugged wine

which would deaden the terrible pain. That drink was offered to Jesus and he refused it. (Matthew 27:34.) He was determined to face death with His mind clear and His senses sharp. The victim's arms were stretched out on the cross bar, and the nails were driven through his hands. I've heard conflicting reports of whether or not the feet were nailed. Some insist the feet were not nailed, but only loosely bound to the cross. Half way up the cross there was a projecting piece of wood, called the saddle, which held the weight of the criminal, otherwise the nails would have torn through his hands. Then the cross was lifted and set upright in its socket.

- As bad as the pain of the nails were, that wasn't what killed the criminal. They were left naked to die of hunger and thirst under the blazing sun of the day and the cold of the night. The criminal many times hung for a week upon their cross until he died, probably out of his mind by that point.
- Jesus said many wonderful things, and this is another one - "Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they're doing." Christian forgiveness is an amazing thing. When Stephen was being stoned to death he prayed, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them!" (Acts 7:60.) There is nothing so beautiful and so rare as Christian forgiveness. When the unforgiving spirit is threatening to turn our hearts to bitterness, let us remember our Lord Jesus asking forgiveness for those who crucified him and his servant Paul saying to his friends, "Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you." (Ephesians 4:32.)
- The idea that this terrible thing was done in ignorance runs through the New Testament. Peter said to the people in later days, "I know that you acted in ignorance." (Acts 3:17.) Paul said that they crucified Jesus because they did not know him. (Acts 13:27.) Marcus Aurelius, the famous Roman Emperor and Stoic, used to say to himself every morning, "Today you will meet all kinds of unpleasant people; they will hurt you, and injure you, and insult you; but you cannot live like that; you know better, for you are a man in whom the spirit of God dwells." Others may have an unforgiving spirit, others may sin in ignorance; but we know better. We are Christ's men and women; and we must forgive as he forgave.

John gives us a little more detail on the dividing of Jesus' clothes:

**John 19:23-24** When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier, and took his cloak as well. The cloak was seamless, woven in one piece from the top down. (24) So they said to each other, "Let's not tear it. Instead, let's throw dice to see who gets it." This was to fulfill the Scripture that says, "They divided my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they threw dice." So that is what the soldiers did.

- The clothes of the criminal were taken by the four soldiers who marched him to the cross. Most Jewish men wore five pieces of clothing--the inner tunic, the outer robe, a belt or sash, sandals and a turban. Four were divided among the four soldiers. But the outer robe was woven in one piece without a seam. Cutting it up and dividing it would have ruined it; and so the soldiers gambled for it right there in the shadow of the cross. It meant nothing to them that a human being was slowly dying in agony while they played their game. The prophecy mentioned in verse 24 that was fulfilled is from Psalm 22:18.

**Luke 23:35-38** Meanwhile, the people stood looking on. Even the leaders were mocking him and saying, "He saved others. Let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, whom he has chosen!" (36) The soldiers also made fun of him, coming up and offering him sour wine (37) and saying, "If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself!" (38) There was also an inscription over him written in Greek, Latin, and Hebrew: "This is the King

### of the Jews."

- Of course, He could have saved Himself if He had wanted to – He could have called “10,000 angels”, as the famous song says. But this is what He was there for, to voluntarily give up His life.
- The inscription they put on the cross was the same sign that was carried before the criminal as he marched through the streets to the place of crucifixion.

**Luke 23:39-43** Now one of the criminals hanging there kept insulting him, saying, "You are the Christ, aren't you? Save yourself and us!" (40) But the other one rebuked him, saying, "Aren't you afraid of God, since you are suffering the same penalty? (41) We have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong." (42) Then he went on to say, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom!" (43) Jesus said to him, **"Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise."**

- The leaders obviously had these two criminals crucified with Jesus on purpose, to humiliate Him in front of the crowd and make people think He was just a common criminal.
- This story tells us that it is never too late to turn to Christ. The invitation of Jesus to accept His free gift of salvation is always open as long as you're still alive and mentally able to respond to Him. This gives us hope for those we are praying for, though, as long as there is life, there is hope!
- But no one should wait until the last moment, like this man did, because none of us knows the second our heart will stop beating. Also, if you continue rebelling against God your whole life, it becomes so ingrained in your character that repentance can be almost impossible. We should never take advantage of God's patience, because someday it will run out.
- The thief that repented on the cross believed that Jesus was God and that he could be forgiven. He wasn't able to be baptized, change his lifestyle, join a church, recite a creed, or do any good works. He repented, believed on Christ, and confessed his faith (Romans 10:9). That is all that is necessary!
- "Paradise" is an old Persian word that means a "walled garden" or a "parklike place of peace". Over time the word came to be synonymous with heaven in Jewish theology. You can see it used that way in 2 Corinthians 12:2 and Revelation 2:7. That verse speaks of the "tree of life" being in Paradise, and Revelation 22:14,19 says that the Tree of Life is in the eternal heavenly New Jerusalem that comes down from glory. In the Old Testament before Jesus was resurrected Paradise was understood to be a place called "Abraham's Bosom", which we saw in the story of Lazarus and the rich man in chapter 16. It was where the righteous went to be comforted when they died.
- Jesus said that they would be in Paradise that day. So the unrepentant thief would die and descend into Hades, to wait for condemnation at the judgment day. The repentant thief would die, because of his trust in Christ, would go with Him to Abraham's Bosom. While Jesus was there, He would proclaim His victory to the imprisoned evil angels confined there in chains of darkness (2 Peter 2:4; 1 Peter 3:19). He would then set free the souls of those who had died in faith (Luke 4:18), taking them and their "paradise" with Him to the "third heaven" (Ephesians 4:8-10; 2 Corinthians 12:2-4), and carrying with Him "the keys of hell (hades) and of death" (Revelation 1:18).

**Luke 23:44-49** It was already about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon (45) because the sun had stopped shining. And the curtain in the sanctuary was torn in two. (46) Then Jesus cried out with a loud voice and said,

**"Father, into your hands I entrust my spirit." After he said this, he breathed his last. (47) When the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God and said, "This man certainly was righteous!" (48) When all the crowds who had come together for this spectacle saw what had taken place, they beat their breasts and turned back. (49) But all his acquaintances, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, were standing at a distance watching these things.**

- Luke tells about two symbolic events that took place while Jesus was on the cross. Darkness came over the whole land for three hours, from the sixth hour (noon) until the ninth hour (3:00 p.m.). Jesus had already told those who arrested Him that "this is your hour—when darkness reigns" (22:53). Darkness was reigning because of His crucifixion. It must have been very dark, because the "sun had stopped shining".
- The other symbolic event was the tearing in two of the curtain of the temple, which separated the holy of holies from the rest of the temple. This extremely thick curtain divided people from the place where God's presence was located on earth. The tearing from top to bottom (Matthew 27:51) symbolized the fact that now, because of Jesus' death, people had free access to God. They would not need to go through the sacrificial system any longer (see Romans 5:2; Ephesians 2:18; 3:12). Jesus was the only Sacrifice needed to enable people to have a proper relationship with God.
- Christ was technically not killed, and no one took His life from Him. He voluntarily gave it up Himself. The way Jesus gave up His life must have impressed the Roman centurion, because he realized that Jesus was a righteous Man, that is, not guilty (verse 47). He also praised God for this, and in Mark 15:39 he says, "This man certainly was the son of God! He must have become a believer right there on the spot!"
- Then, the people who just a little while before were heckling Him must have realized that He might have been who He said He was after all, because they started mourning His death (verse 48).
- "Entrust my spirit". This is Christ's seventh, and last, words from the cross (for the others, see Luke 23:34; John 19:26; Luke 23:43; Matthew 27:46; John 19:28, 30). And notice, Luke says he said this in a loud voice. He didn't go out with a whimper; He gave up His life with a shout of victory. John 19:30 says this is when He said "It is finished." which is from Psalm 31:5.
- Psalm 31:5 was a prayer that Jewish mothers taught their children to say at night before bedtime. Just like many of us were taught to say, "Tonight I lay me down to sleep," so the Jewish mother taught her child to say, before she put out the light, "Into your hands I commit my spirit." Jesus made it even better, because He began it with the word Father. Even on a cross Jesus died like a child falling asleep in his father's arms.
- After the three hours of darkness (Luke 23:44) when the Father had forsaken Him, and Christ could only call Him "My God" (Matthew 27:46), the work was finished (John 19:30) and Christ could again call Him "Father." Also, no human being could, on his own, eject His spirit from His own body. But Christ again was fully God as well as man, so He could and did do just that.
- What did Jesus' death really mean to us? See 2 Corinthians 5:21, Romans 5:6-10.