



Who Is Jesus?

LESSON FIVE

A Series of five
Bible Studies Exploring
*"The Gospel According
to Matthew"*

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LESSON FIVE

Introduction

We now reach the climax of our search for the answer to the question “Who is Jesus?” Everything we have read thus far in the “Gospel According to Matthew” has pointed us to this moment. In our fifth and final lesson we follow Jesus to His “official” trial before Pontius Pilate, His death and burial, His resurrection, and His ascension into heaven.

Read Matthew 27 and 28 before proceeding.

Trial and Torture

(Chapter 27:1-31)

Since the Jewish religious leaders could not put Jesus to death without approval from the Roman government, which ruled the land, Jesus was taken before Pilate, the Roman governor. Meanwhile Judas, Jesus’ betrayer, felt remorse for what he had done. He regretted his action and tried to undo it by returning the money he earned for the betrayal. The Jewish leaders didn’t care about his feelings of guilt. They told him he had to bear that himself. He could not. Nor could he believe that God would forgive him for such an act. Judas was wrong.

Read Paul's words in 1 Timothy 1:12-15 about the evil that he, himself, had done and about God's great love in Christ.

Matthew again takes up Jesus' trial before Pilate in chapter 27, verse 11. The Jews had told Pilate that Jesus was claiming to be their king. Pilate privately questioned Jesus about this and Jesus said that it was true—He was the King of the Jews. But when the false accusations were voiced yet again, Jesus would not respond.

As it turns out, there was a custom at this time of the year. Pilate could release a prisoner as a sign of Rome's good will toward the people. Pilate had Barabbas, a notorious criminal, brought in front of the people along with Jesus. He felt certain that the people would ask to have Jesus released instead of such a wicked criminal. Scripture tells us that the chief priests and the elders of the Jews convinced people to vote for Barabbas to be released and for Jesus to be crucified. Pilate knew Jesus had done nothing wrong, but when he tried to tell the people this they were provoked to shout even louder that Jesus should be killed.

Pilate and the Jews never got along very well and he began to fear a riot. He decided that, rather than take a stand for truth, he would wash his

hands of the whole matter, as if by so doing he would carry no guilt for the wrong. He was wrong. Jesus said, "*He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters*" (Matthew 12:30).

Jesus was led away by soldiers and taken into the governor's palace where He was again tortured and humiliated. His clothes were ripped from His already beaten body. The Roman soldiers (who were always verbally tormented by the Jews) put a scarlet robe on Jesus and painfully pressed a crown of thorns into His scalp as they took out years of frustration on this "King of the Jews." Finally, they had Him put on His own tattered clothes and led Him away to be crucified.

Review and Apply:

Choose either "T" or "F" for each of the following:

1. Judas was not forgiven because he betrayed Jesus. T or F
2. Pilate was forgiven because he washed his hands of the matter. T or F
3. Jewish people can never be saved because they said that Jesus' blood (guilt) was to be on them and their children. T or F

Things to Consider...

1. Judas betrayed Jesus, Peter denied Him. Judas was filled with remorse, Peter wept bitterly. Judas committed suicide, Peter went on to be a great Apostle and leader in the church. What made the difference?
2. Read Philippians 2:5-11. Compare and contrast it to Matthew 27:27-31.

"Truly This Was The Son of God!"

(Chapter 27:32-66)

Jesus was forced to carry the cross beam on His walk to the crucifixion site. He was very weak. A man named Simon had come into Jerusalem to sell goods to the Passover pilgrims and was standing on the side of the road when Jesus and the soldiers passed by. Jesus fell under the weight of the cross beam and Simon was forced to carry it for Him.

When Jesus came to the place where He was to die they offered Him a bitter drink that would act as a mild anesthetic. Jesus refused it. He knew He had to bear all of the pain to its full extent. The soldiers again stripped Him and nailed Him to the cross. Centuries before this, King David wrote Psalm 22, a psalm of great suffering in which David prophetically describes the events of Jesus' crucifixion. Read this psalm and look closely at verses 1–18.

It was common practice to put a sign on each cross detailing the crime the person had committed. Pilate had ordered the sign over Jesus to read: "THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS."

People who passed by Jesus as He hung on the cross mocked Him. They told

Him that He couldn't even save Himself, and He had promised to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days! They shouted to Him that if He truly was the Son of God, He should come down from the cross and they would believe Him. (Note how similar this was to Satan's temptation in the wilderness in Matthew 4:1-11!) Jesus knew it was God's plan for His Son to die on the cross and to bear the punishment for the sins of mankind.

Death on the cross was cruel, but common, at the time of Jesus. It was a very slow and torturous way to die. It is one of the most inhumane methods of execution ever used by men. And it was the form of death that God chose for His Son—the most humiliating, painful death possible. But the physical and mental agony was only part of what Jesus suffered!

A great darkness came over the land from the sixth hour (noon) until the ninth hour (3 p.m.). This was NOT an eclipse—the sun simply stopped giving its light! In the pitch-black gloom a voice rose: "*My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?*" (v. 46). The Son had been totally abandoned by the Father! Jesus suffered all the pain and anguish of HELL. No one can begin to imagine the experience of being totally abandoned by God. That is hell. And

because Jesus suffered it, no one ever need suffer it again! Jesus gasped one final time and it was over. He released His spirit in death.

The price for man's sins had been paid, once for all. As a sign of what had happened, the heavy, thick curtain hanging in the temple tore in two. This curtain separated sinful man from the Holy of Holies—the place of the perfect God. Jesus had removed forever that wall of separation. God also showed this with an earthquake. Many believers' graves were split open and people were raised from the dead. Isaiah 26:19 is an interesting passage to read in this context. A Roman soldier of high rank (a centurion) was on duty at Jesus' crucifixion. He had probably overseen many such deaths. After watching what took place as Jesus died he was filled with awe and fear and said, *"Surely He was the Son of God!"* (v. 54).

It was a Jewish rule that no body could hang on a cross on a Sabbath day. The Sabbath began at sunset on Friday night. Jesus died Friday at about 3 o'clock in the afternoon. As evening came, a man named Joseph (who was a disciple of Jesus) went to Pilate and asked if he could bury Jesus in his own tomb. Pilate allowed him to do so. Joseph wrapped the body in a clean cloth (or burial shroud) and put it in the new tomb.

Because it was nearing sunset, it was decided that the embalming spices would be added to the grave wrappings when the Sabbath day was over. A large stone was rolled in front of the tomb to close it.

The next day the chief priests and Pharisees, who were the enemies of Jesus, came to Pilate, and asked that the tomb of Jesus be made secure with soldiers so that the disciples of Jesus would not come and steal the body. These leaders were afraid a rumor would start that Jesus came back from the dead. Pilate placed soldiers at the tomb and the stone was sealed so that no one could enter the tomb secretly.

Review and Apply:

Choose the best answer:

1. Being put to death on the cross was a ...
 - a. Very cruel and harsh way to die.
 - b. Way to die with honor.
 - c. Much-less-painful way to die than any other method.
2. People who passed by Jesus as He was hanging on the cross were:
 - a. Too loud and noisy for the soldiers nearby.
 - b. Saying the same things to Him that the devil had said in the desert.
 - c. Asking Him to forgive them.
3. When Jesus cried with a loud voice, "*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani,*" (v. 46), He was:
 - a. Calling to God, asking why He had been forsaken.
 - b. Calling for Elijah to save Him.
 - c. Calling for the soldiers to bring Him a drink.

4. Pilate put soldiers by the tomb of Jesus in order to:
 - a. Make sure no one would steal the body.
 - b. Be the first to witness Jesus' resurrection.
 - c. Guard the body of Jesus from His enemies.

Things to Consider...

1. Read John 19:30. John, who was standing next to the cross, heard what Jesus said before He died: "*It is finished!*" What was finished? What do you think Jesus was talking about?
2. There are some people who say Jesus did not die on the cross, but rather He only fainted and was revived shortly thereafter. How does Pilate's action of setting the guard and sealing the tomb on the day after Christ's death testify to the fact that Jesus truly died?

Who is Jesus to YOU?

(Chapter 28:1-20)

On the third day of Christ's death, early on Sunday morning, at the very dawn of day, Mary Magdalene and the "other Mary," who were both followers of Jesus, came to His grave. Suddenly there was a great earthquake, and an angel came from heaven and rolled back the stone that had been placed in front of the tomb. His appearance was like lightning and his clothes were as white as new snow. The Roman guards were so afraid they could not move! The angel spoke to the women and told them not to be afraid, for Jesus who was crucified was not there. **HE HAD RISEN FROM THE DEAD!**

The women were invited to look into the empty tomb, and then told they should go and tell Jesus' disciples that He had risen and would meet them in Galilee—**AS HE HAD SAID!** The women could hardly believe it. They were filled with joy! They knew that all He had said was true. They ran and must have almost fallen over their own feet when suddenly Jesus was standing in front of them. They could hardly believe it—again! They fell at His feet and worshiped Him.

They knew He was the Son of God and

that He had succeeded in God's plan to save people from their sins. He had conquered the power of death, the power of sin, and the power of evil. Jesus stressed again that they should tell the disciples that He would meet with them in Galilee.

Some of the soldiers who had been at the tomb and witnessed the resurrection events went and told the chief priests all the things that had happened. They were witnesses, too! The Jewish leaders paid the soldiers to tell the people that the disciples of Jesus had taken His body away while they were sleeping on duty. The soldiers took the money and made the lie known.

The 11 disciples (remember, Judas, the twelfth, had committed suicide) went to Galilee and met Jesus on a mountain. Jesus appeared to them there and, although some of them had doubts, their shared reaction was to worship Him. Jesus had one final message for them and an assignment that His disciples carry on today. Jesus declared to them that He had taken back the power He had in heaven and as Ruler of all He was sending His disciples out into the world to baptize in the Name of the true God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—and to teach everyone the Truth about Jesus. His disciples would never go alone in this world for the last words

of Matthew's account are as true today as they were more than 2,000 years ago: *"And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age"* (v. 20).

Review and Apply:

Choose either "Y" or "N" for each of the following:

1. The guards rolled the stone away from the tomb so that Jesus could get out. Y or N
2. The guards ran off when they saw the angel and hid in fear. Y or N
3. Jesus told the disciples that He was now in charge and that they should set up a kingdom for Him here on earth. Y or N
4. Jesus is always with us. Y or N

Things to Consider...

In your own words, WHO IS JESUS?

(Please use the space on page 17 to write your answer to this question in your own words.)

Conclusion

Matthew witnessed the life of Jesus Christ. From the very beginning of his Gospel account, he tells us that Jesus came to save people from their sins. Through the wonderful acts of Jesus, through His miracles, His words of authority and truth, His living example, His death and resurrection, we can see God at work in a clear way.

In Matthew 16:15, Jesus asked: *“Who do YOU say I am?”* We pray that your answer will echo that of Peter: *“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”*

Who Is Jesus?

Answers to Questions

Trial and Torture

1. *Judas was not forgiven because he betrayed Jesus.* FALSE
2. *Pilate was forgiven because he washed his hands of the matter.* FALSE
3. *Jewish people can never be saved because they said that Jesus' blood (guilt) was to be on them and their children.* FALSE

"Truly This Was The Son of God!"

1. *Being put to death on the cross was a ...*
 - a. *Very cruel and harsh way to die.*
2. *People who passed by Jesus as He was hanging on the cross were:*
 - a. *Saying the same things to Him that the devil had said in the desert.*
3. *When Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani," (v. 46), He was:*
 - a. *Calling to God, asking why He had been forsaken.*
4. *Pilate put soldiers by the tomb of Jesus in order to:*
 - a. *Make sure no one would steal the body.*

Who is Jesus to YOU?

1. *The guards rolled the stone away from the tomb so that Jesus could get out.* NO
2. *The guards ran off when they saw the angel and hid in fear.* YES
3. *Jesus told the disciples that He was now in charge and that they should set up a kingdom for Him here on earth.* NO
4. *Jesus is always with us.* YES

Notes: