

SBCOD Bible Study Notes

6-11-25

Luke 23

The First Trial Before Pilate – Verses 1-7

Then the whole assembly rose and led him off to Pilate.² And they began to accuse him, saying, “We have found this man subverting our nation. He opposes payment of taxes to Caesar and claims to be Messiah, a king.”³ So Pilate asked Jesus, “Are you the king of the Jews?” “You have said so,” Jesus replied.⁴ Then Pilate announced to the chief priests and the crowd, “I find no basis for a charge against this man.”⁵ But they insisted, “He stirs up the people all over Judea by his teaching. He started in Galilee and has come all the way here.”⁶ On hearing this, Pilate asked if the man was a Galilean.⁷ When he learned that Jesus was under Herod’s jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who was also in Jerusalem at that time.

23:1-6 Pilate was the Roman governor of Judea, where Jerusalem was located. He had a reputation for seeming to take special pleasure in harassing the Jews. For example, Pilate had taken money from the temple treasury and had used it to build an aqueduct. And he had insulted the Jewish religion by bringing imperial images into the city. As Pilate well knew, such acts could backfire. If the people were to lodge a formal complaint against his administration, Rome might remove him from his post. Pilate was already beginning to feel insecure in his position when the Jewish leaders brought Jesus to trial. Would he continue to badger the Jews and risk his political future, or would he give in to their demands and condemn a man who, he was quite sure, was innocent? That was the question facing Pilate that springtime Friday morning nearly 2,000 years ago.

23:7 Herod, also called Herod Antipas, was in Jerusalem that weekend for the Passover celebration. (This was the Herod who had killed John the Baptist.) Pilate hoped to pass Jesus off on Herod because he knew that Jesus had lived and worked in Galilee. But Herod was not much help. He was curious about Jesus and enjoyed making fun of him. But when Herod sent Jesus back to Pilate, it was with the verdict of “not guilty.”

The Trial Before Herod Antipas, Son Of Herod The Great – Verses 8-12

⁸When Herod saw Jesus, he was greatly pleased, because for a long time he had been wanting to see him. From what he had heard about him, he hoped to see him perform a sign of some sort.⁹ He plied him with many questions, but Jesus gave him no answer.¹⁰ The chief priests and the teachers of the law were standing there, vehemently accusing him.¹¹ Then Herod and his soldiers ridiculed and mocked him. Dressing him in an elegant robe, they sent him back to Pilate.¹² That day Herod and Pilate became friends—before this they had been enemies.

23:8-12 Herod was the part-Jewish ruler of Galilee and Perea. Pilate was the Roman governor of Judea and Samaria. Those four provinces, together with several others, had been united under Herod the Great. But when Herod died in 4 B.C., the kingdom was divided among his sons, each of whom was called “tetrarch” (meaning “ruler of a fourth part of a region”). Archelaus, the son who had received Judea and Samaria, was removed from office within 10 years, and his provinces were then ruled by a succession of Roman governors, of whom Pilate was the fifth.

23:8-12 Herod Antipas had two advantages over Pilate: He came from a hereditary part-Jewish monarchy and he had held his position much longer. But Pilate had two advantages over Herod: He was a Roman citizen and an envoy of the emperor, and his position was created to replace that of Herod's ineffective half brother. It is not surprising that the two men were uneasy around each other. Jesus' trial, however, brought them together. Because Pilate recognized Herod's authority over Galilee, Herod stopped feeling threatened by the Roman politician. And because neither man knew what to do in this predicament, their common problem united them.

The Second Trial Before Pilate – Verses 13-17

¹³ Pilate called together the chief priests, the rulers and the people, ¹⁴ and said to them, “You brought me this man as one who was inciting the people to rebellion. I have examined him in your presence and have found no basis for your charges against him. ¹⁵ Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us; as you can see, he has done nothing to deserve death. ¹⁶ Therefore, I will punish him and then release him.” ^[17]

23:13-16 Pilate wanted to release Jesus, but the crowd loudly demanded his death; so Pilate sentenced Jesus to die. No doubt Pilate did not want to risk losing his position, which may already have been shaky, by allowing a riot to occur in his province. As a career politician, he knew the importance of compromise, and he saw Jesus more as a political threat than as a human being with rights and dignity.

23:13-16 When the stakes are high, it is difficult to stand up for what is right, and it is easy to see our opponents as problems to be solved rather than as people to be respected. Had Pilate been a man of real courage, he would have released Jesus no matter what the consequences. But the crowd roared, and Pilate buckled. We are like Pilate when we know what is right but decide not to do it. When you have a difficult decision to make, don't discount the effects of peer pressure. Realize beforehand that the right decision could have unpleasant consequences: social rejection, career derailment, public ridicule. Then think of Pilate and resolve to stand up for what is right no matter what other people pressure you to do.

23:15-17 Jesus was tried six times, by both Jewish and Roman authorities, but he was never convicted of a crime deserving death. Today, no one can find fault in Jesus. But just like Pilate, Herod, and the religious leaders, many still refuse to acknowledge him as Lord.

The Crowd Makes Its Choice – Verses 18-25

¹⁸ But the whole crowd shouted, “Away with this man! Release Barabbas to us!” ¹⁹ (Barabbas had been thrown into prison for an insurrection in the city, and for murder.) ²⁰ Wanting to release Jesus, Pilate appealed to them again. ²¹ But they kept shouting, “Crucify him! Crucify him!” ²² For the third time he spoke to them: “Why? What crime has this man committed? I have found in him no grounds for the death penalty. Therefore I will have him punished and then release him.” ²³ But with loud shouts they insistently demanded that he be crucified, and their shouts prevailed. ²⁴ So Pilate decided to grant their demand. ²⁵ He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, the one they asked for, and surrendered Jesus to their will.

23:18-19 Barabbas had been part of a rebellion against the Roman government (Mark 15:7). As a political insurgent, he was no doubt a hero among some of the Jews. How ironic it is that Barabbas, who was released, was guilty of the very crime Jesus was accused of (23:14).

23:18-19 Who was Barabbas? Jewish men had names that identified them with their fathers. Simon Peter, for example, is called Simon son of Jonah (Matthew 16:17). Barabbas is never identified by his given name, and this name is not much help either— bar-abbas means “son of Abba” (or “son of daddy”). He could have been anybody’s son— and that’s just the point. Barabbas, son of an unnamed father, committed a crime. Because Jesus died in his place, this man was set free. We, too, are sinners and criminals who have broken God’s holy law. Like Barabbas, we deserve to die. But Jesus has died in our place, for our sins, and we have been set free. We don’t have to be “very important people” to accept our freedom in Christ. In fact, thanks to Jesus, God adopts us all as his own sons and daughters and gives us the right to call him Abba—“ daddy” (see Galatians 4:4-6).

23:22 When Pilate said he would have Jesus “punished,” he was referring to flogging, a punishment that could have killed Jesus. The usual procedure was to bare the upper half of the victim’s body and tie his hands to a pillar before whipping him with a three-pronged whip. The number of lashes was determined by the severity of the crime; up to 40 were permitted under Jewish law. After being flogged, Jesus also endured other agonies as recorded in Matthew and Mark. He was slapped, struck with fists, and mocked. A crown of thorns was placed on his head, and he was beaten with a stick and stripped before being hung on the cross.

23:23-24 Pilate did not want to give Jesus the death sentence. He thought the Jewish leaders were simply jealous men who wanted to get rid of a rival. When they threatened to report Pilate to Caesar (John 19:12), however, Pilate became frightened. Historical records indicate that Pilate had already been warned by Roman authorities about tensions in this region. The last thing he needed was a riot in Jerusalem at Passover time, when the city was crowded with Jews from all over the empire. So Pilate turned Jesus over to the mob to do with as they pleased.

Simon Carries Jesus’ Cross – Verse 26

²⁶ As the soldiers led him away, they seized Simon from Cyrene, who was on his way in from the country, and put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus.

23:26 They laid hold of a certain man: The weakened condition of Jesus required this. The man’s name was Simon, and he was from Cyrene in North Africa (modern day Libya). No doubt, Simon was visiting Jerusalem as a Passover pilgrim from his native land (some 800 miles away). He knew little if anything about this Jesus and had no desire to be associated with this Man who was condemned to die as a criminal. Yet, the Romans were the law, and Simon was not given a choice — they laid hold of him, and on him they laid the cross that he might bear it. Perhaps he was chosen because he was an obvious foreigner and more conspicuous in the crowd. Wonderfully, we have reason to believe that Simon came to know what it really means to take up one’s cross and follow Jesus. There is some evidence to suggest that his sons became leaders among the early Christians (Mark 15:21 and Romans 16:13).

Jesus Speaks To The Daughters Of Jerusalem – Verse 27-31

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

23:27-29 Luke alone mentions the tears of the Jewish women while Jesus was being led through the streets to his execution. Jesus told them not to weep for him but for themselves. He knew that in only about 40 years, Jerusalem and the temple would be destroyed by the Romans.

23:31 This proverb is difficult to interpret. Some feel it means that if the innocent Jesus (green tree) suffered at the hands of the Romans, what would happen to the guilty Jews (dry tree)?

Jesus Is Crucified – Verses 32-33

³² Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. ³³ When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left.

23:32-33 When James and John asked Jesus for the places of honor next to him in his kingdom, he told them they didn't know what they were asking (Mark 10: 35-39). Here, as Jesus was preparing to inaugurate his kingdom through his death, the places on his right and on his left were taken by dying men— criminals. As Jesus explained to his two position-conscious disciples, a person who wants to be close to Jesus must be prepared to suffer and die. The way to the kingdom is the way of the cross.

Jesus On The Cross – Verses 34-38

³⁴ Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” And they divided up his clothes by casting lots. ³⁵ The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, “He saved others; let him save himself if he is God’s Messiah, the Chosen One.” ³⁶ The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar ³⁷ and said, “If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.” ³⁸ There was a written notice above him, which read: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.

23:34 Jesus asked God to forgive the people who were putting him to death— Jewish leaders, Roman politicians and soldiers, bystanders— and God answered that prayer by opening up the way of salvation even to Jesus' murderers. Jesus was suffering the most horrible, painful death ever devised by sinful man, and he looked at the people responsible for his suffering and prayed for their forgiveness. The Roman centurion and soldiers who witnessed the Crucifixion said, “Surely he was the Son of God!” (Matthew 27:54). Soon many priests were converted to the Christian faith (Acts 6: 7). Because we are all sinners, we all played a part in putting Jesus to death. The Good News is that God is gracious. He will forgive us and give us new life through his Son.

23:38 This sign was meant to be ironic. A king, stripped and executed in public view, had obviously lost his kingdom forever. But Jesus, who turns the world's wisdom upside down, was just coming into his kingdom. His death and resurrection would strike the deathblow to Satan's rule and establish Christ's eternal authority over the earth. Few people reading the sign that bleak afternoon understood its real meaning, but the sign was absolutely true. All was not lost. Jesus is King of the Jews— and of the Gentiles and the whole universe.

A Criminal On A Cross Finds Salvation – Verses 39-43

³⁹ One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: “Aren’t you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!” ⁴⁰ But the other criminal rebuked him. “Don’t you fear God,” he said, “since you are under the same sentence? ⁴¹ We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.” ⁴² Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” ⁴³ Jesus answered him, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

23:39-43 As this man was about to die, he turned to Christ for forgiveness, and Christ accepted him. This shows that our deeds don't save us— our faith in Christ does. It is never too late to turn to God. Even in his misery, Jesus had mercy on this criminal who decided to believe in him. Our lives will be much more useful and fulfilling if we turn to God early, but even those who repent at the very last moment will be with God in paradise.

23:42-43 The dying criminal had more faith than the rest of Jesus' followers put together. Although the disciples continued to love Jesus, their hopes for the kingdom were shattered. Most of them had gone into hiding. As one of his followers sadly said two days later, "We had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel" (24:21). By contrast, the criminal looked at the man who was dying next to him and said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." By all appearances, the kingdom was finished. How awe-inspiring is the faith of this man who alone saw beyond the present shame to the coming glory!

The Death of Jesus – Verses 44-46

⁴⁴It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon,⁴⁵ for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. ⁴⁶Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When he had said this, he breathed his last.

23:44-46 Darkness covered the entire land for about three hours in the middle of the day. All nature seemed to mourn over the stark tragedy of the death of God's Son. This significant event symbolized Christ's work on the cross. The temple had three parts: the courts for all the people; the Holy Place, where only priests could enter; and the Most Holy Place, where the high priest alone could enter once a year to atone for the sins of the people. It was in the Most Holy Place that the ark of the covenant, and God's presence with it, rested. The curtain that was torn was the one that closed off the Most Holy Place from view. At Christ's death, the barrier between God and humanity was split in two. Now all people can approach God directly through Christ (Hebrews 9:1-14; 10:19-22).

The Reaction Of Bystanders At Jesus' Death – Verses 47-49

⁴⁷The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, "Surely this was a righteous man." ⁴⁸When all the people who had gathered to witness this sight saw what took place, they beat their breasts and went away. ⁴⁹But all those who knew him, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.

When the centurion saw what had happened, he glorified God: At the expiration of Jesus on the cross, the Gentile centurion immediately gave glory to God and understood Jesus for who He was (Certainly this was a righteous man). Surely, this centurion had seen many people crucified before. Yet there was something so remarkable about Jesus that he said something about Him that he could say about no one else. This is a picture of all who come to Jesus through the cross, fulfilling Jesus' promise if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself (John 12:32).

The Burial of Jesus – Verses 50-56

⁵⁰Now there was a man named Joseph, a member of the Council, a good and upright man, ⁵¹who had not consented to their decision and action. He came from the Judean town of Arimathea, and he himself was waiting for the kingdom of God. ⁵²Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus' body. ⁵³Then he took it down, wrapped it in linen cloth and placed it in a tomb cut in the rock, one in which no one had yet been laid. ⁵⁴It was Preparation Day, and the Sabbath

was about to begin. ⁵⁵ The women who had come with Jesus from Galilee followed Joseph and saw the tomb and how his body was laid in it. ⁵⁶ Then they went home and prepared spices and perfumes. But they rested on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandment.

23:50-52 Joseph of Arimathea was a wealthy and honored member of the Jewish Council. He was also a secret disciple of Jesus (John 19: 38). The disciples who had publicly followed Jesus fled, but Joseph boldly took a stand that could have cost him dearly. He cared enough about Jesus to ask for his body so he could give it a proper burial.

23:53 The tomb was likely a man-made cave cut out of one of the many limestone hills in the area around Jerusalem. Such a tomb was large enough to walk into. After burial, a large stone would have been rolled across the entrance (John 20:1).

23:55 The Galilean women followed Joseph to the tomb, so they knew exactly where to find Jesus' body when they returned after the Sabbath with their spices and perfumes. These women could not do "great" things for Jesus— they were not permitted to stand up before the Jewish Council or the Roman governor and testify on his behalf— but they did what they could. They stayed at the cross when most of the disciples had fled, and they got ready to anoint their Lord's body. Because of their devotion, they were the first to know about the Resurrection. As believers, we may feel we can't do much for Jesus. But we are called to take advantage of the opportunities given us, doing what we can do and not worrying about what we cannot do.