

HOLY WEEK: LEADER
WEEK 7: WEEK OF APRIL 14
GOLGOTHA
Luke 23:26–56

OPENING

Tell me, ye who hear Him groaning,
Was there ever grief like His?
Friends through fear His cause disowning,
Foes insulting His distress
Many hands were raised to wound Him,
None would intervene to save;
But the deepest stroke that pierced Him
Was the stroke that justice gave.

—“Stricken, Smitten, and Afflicted” (*LSB* 451, v.21)

INTRODUCTION

In this section of the Passion Narrative (Luke 23:26-56), Luke relates the journey to Golgotha and the crucifixion, death and burial of Jesus. Golgotha (translated as “The Place of a Skull” was a place named either for the shape of a rock there or for how much death happened there. It was hard to miss this place of shame as you exited the city of Jerusalem so all could see the penalty for being a criminal in the Roman world.

As Luke details the response of the crowds that followed throughout the day to see Jesus die, the differences between the sinful human actions and Jesus’ final act of true love are shown in stark opposition. Yet despite the vile acts of the human heart, Jesus’ death is a pure sacrifice of atonement made for them and for us.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. As Jesus is being led to the cross, and a crowd of curious onlookers and mourners follow after Him, He prophesied by speaking to the “Daughters of Jerusalem”. What is He foretelling of here and how does it show His love shining through these intense moments leading up to His death?

This prophecy is spoken to the women around Him who are crying. There was weeping on both Jesus’ entry to and exit from Jerusalem. Jesus had pity on Jerusalem because He knew the destruction of Jerusalem was coming soon. He is foretelling of Jerusalem’s destruction by the Romans that would happen in 70AD. Even in comparison to the great shame it was for a woman to be barren, Jesus is saying it would be better to be barren than to go through this coming suffering which would make the people in Jerusalem call for the mountains to fall on them to end their suffering more quickly. Despite all of this upcoming suffering that is God’s judgment acted out on the city, Jesus still had sympathy for the city and love for those who were mocking Him and cheering on His painful walk to Golgotha.

2. The sinful people at Jesus’ crucifixion, both onlookers and soldiers, scoffed at Jesus. In what ways do verses 34-38 tell that they mocked him? Ironically, how is Jesus responding to their mocking?

The people who are looking on scoffed at Him saying “He saved others, let Him save Himself if He really is God”. Then the soldiers mocked him with their offer of cheap, sour wine that the soldiers would drink and by telling Him, like the onlookers did, to save Himself if He really is the King of the Jews. The inscription over a criminal being crucified normally labeled that person’s crime. Above Jesus on the cross, “This is the King of the Jews” was inscribed. To the mockers this would have been another joke but Pilate had Jesus’ true title inscribed there as a fact to mock the Jews who called for Jesus’ death.

Ironically, Jesus did not respond to their mocking or to their misunderstanding of His role as King of the Jews. As king he was saving His people rather than saving Himself from the suffering. Also, rather than give in to the mockers, Jesus prayed for them. His petition to God “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” was more loving than anyone present realized since He was asking they be forgiven for their mocking but also for all other trespasses. By His sacrifice on the cross all their sins and wicked words against Jesus would be paid for so that, as Jesus petitioned, they would be forgiven and holy in God’s eyes.

3. The moment of Jesus' death was known by many. Compare verses 44-47 with Matthew 27:45-54. What image of the city develops in your mind? What are some physical events that took place at the death of Jesus?

From the sixth hour to the ninth hour, noon to 3p.m., when Jesus was in His final moments, there was darkness as if it were night. This was not an eclipse because the Passover occurs during a full moon. While we don't know what blocked out the sun, we know that God's timing of the darkness is what's important.

The timing of the earthquake is another physical occurrence that is not random. Earthquakes were often associated with manifestations of God and a sign of the end or final judgment. The resurrection of the dead also pointed to the end times. These resurrections also demonstrated the purpose of Christ's death: to bring eternal life to those doomed to die. Just as those people were raised from the dead so those who believe in Jesus will be raised to eternal life with Him. (Scripture does not tell us any more about what happened to those who were raised or how much longer they lived before returning to the grave but resurrections surely brought more notice to the importance of the man Jesus that died at the moment of the Earthquake.)

The curtain that tore was the divider in the temple that separated the Holy Place in the Temple from the Most Holy Place where God dwelled. This symbolized the opened fellowship between God and people through Christ's payment on the cross. By the final sacrifice fulfilling all human transgressions, people now can go directly to God with their petitions rather than through priests or through sacrifices to atone for sins.

4. What irony do we see in the change of the people's actions at Golgotha after the death of Jesus?

These sinful people who called for Jesus' death and mocked Him are now remorseful (in verse 48 Luke says they beat their breasts, a sign of sorrow and repentance), the centurion who had watch all of the mocking turned instead to praising God (verse 47), and the darkness that covered that area turned back to daylight (it was around 3pm). Jesus dies bearing the darkness of God's judgment on the world's sins. Out of the darkness of judgment, Jesus ushers in the bright day of grace.

5. Read Deuteronomy 21:22-23. How is this good news for us and how does Luke 23:50-56 fulfill that passage from Deuteronomy.

The passage in Deuteronomy is a law to be followed by God's people but also tells of the curse that is on Jesus, on our behalf. It is good news that Jesus took on that curse and the curses of all sins of humanity so that they can be paid off for us. Jesus' death is simultaneously a harsh word, that our actions caused that pain for Him, but also is the best possible news since it means freedom from death for us.

Luke details how that passage is fulfilled because through Joseph of Arimathea's high position he is able to ask Pilate for the body so it doesn't remain on the hill all night and Jesus is buried on the same day as His death. Furthermore, just like Jesus rode an un-ridden donkey into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, he is laid in a tomb that has not yet been used so it was fitting for the King of the Jews.

Because the sun was setting and Sabbath was about to begin with nightfall the women could not properly anoint Jesus' body for His burial. Instead, they saw where He was laid so they could prepare the spices and ointments to correctly anoint Him in three days.

CONCLUSION

As sinful people Holy Week is a time of reflection and repentance. It is uncomfortable to be aware of how much suffering our sins caused Christ on the cross. Christ's payment on the cross was the one act in history strong enough that the temple curtain could be torn in two. Because of that sacrifice of the innocent lamb we now have a direct line to go to God with our petitions. Christ's death and rest in the tomb fulfilled the words of the Old Testament prophets that promised a savior: "But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed." – Isaiah 53:5.

CLOSING PRAYER

Almighty God, you put the weight of all of our sins on your Son so that He could bear the punishment we deserve. Instead of answering His prayer to remove Your cup of suffering You laid it all on Him because of Your love for us.

As we repent of our sins and acknowledge the cost that our sins had on Jesus, help us to be always reminded of Your love that put this plan of Salvation into motion. Thank you for making us holy through Jesus' payment on our behalf and help us to live in the joyful knowledge that we are holy to You.

Through Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior, who died on the cross for us. Amen.