

The Trial and Crucifixion of Jesus



Christ to the World Ministries

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Writer: Velma Darbo Stevens
Advisor: Dr. LeRoy Ford
Bible Editor: Dr. Lorin Cranford

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Read John 18:1-40; 19:1-42 in your Bible.

“Death bed statements” are always considered highly important. They are often saved and repeated, as they indicate the depth of a person’s life at the very end of it.

Important statements filled Jesus’ last few hours on Earth. He went through a humiliating and strenuous trial. His death was execution by crucifixion, a pain-wracked, exhausting ordeal that lasted for several hours. But even this type of death allowed Jesus time to make statements that have been recalled for two thousand years.

Jesus could not have stood up under the torment of those hours (from the early morning of Friday through mid-afternoon) without the help of his Heavenly Father. Jesus was a human being who suffered the pangs of uncertainty and fear like any other person. Before facing his final test he prayed this prayer to his Father: *“Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done”* (Luke 22:42). Jesus longed to be delivered from a horrible death. As a human being he could not see how such an end to his life would advance his mission. But as a child of God, he trusted that God’s way was best. And he followed it.

Jesus, the King

Judas, Jesus’ disciple, had told the high priests where they could find Jesus at night. They sent soldiers to arrest him in his place of retreat, the Garden of Gethsemane. His disciples, frightened for their lives, fled. Two disciples, Peter and most likely John, followed the soldiers at a distance. Later Peter, confronted by the high priest’s servants, denied he even knew Jesus. So the king of God’s kingdom was essentially alone in his ordeal. But he was not alone, for he knew God was with him.

The religious leaders were determined to see Jesus put to death. They brought Jesus first to Annas, who had been high priest and still retained that title, and then to Caiaphas, the current high priest. Because they were under control of the Romans, they could not execute anyone. So they took Jesus, their prisoner, to Pilate, the Roman governor, to be judged. Their accusation was that Jesus claimed to be a king. Such a claim was treason against the Roman emperor, punishable by death by execution.

Pilate questioned Jesus about this claim. Jesus never denied that he was a king. But he declared the kind of king he was: *“You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth”* (John 18:37). Pilate certainly saw no fault in the prisoner. But he was afraid to release someone whose enemies declared him to be a king if he did not deny it. So Pilate condemned Jesus to death by crucifixion.

Jesus, the King of Love

Jesus was led outside the city of Jerusalem to a prominent place, called Calvary or Golgotha, to be crucified. Pilate commanded that a sign be placed over his cross to indicate his crime: *“Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews”* (John 19:19). Ironically, although Jesus never claimed to be king of the Jews, the sign was truly correct: Jesus died as a king. Jesus’ final statements from the cross, or “seven last words,” showed him to be the king of love.

He prayed for forgiveness for those who nailed him to the cross: *“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing”* (Luke 23:34). He expressed forgiveness to a thief who was crucified with him: *“I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise”* (Luke 23:43).

He thought with love about his closest relative, his mother, who was watching by the cross. He entrusted her, not to his brothers, but to a beloved disciple: *“Dear woman, here is your son,” and to the disciple, “Here is your mother”* (John 19:26-27).

Jesus cried out, *“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”* (Matthew 27:46). Most likely, this cry of abandonment came in that moment when the burden of humankind’s sin separated Jesus from the Father. He did become sin for every person in that moment. During his agony he lost the sense of nearness to his Father that had been with him all of his life.

After this cry Jesus seemed again to be able to move on toward his death. He allowed himself some relief from the torment of thirst, after hanging on the cross for several hours. He cried out to the sentries: *“I am thirsty”* (John 19:28). They soaked a sponge in the sour wine the soldiers drank and lifted it up to his lips. He took it and then said, *“It is finished”* (John 19:30). In spite of his agony he realized that his labor of love in this world was truly completed. Now he felt in touch with God again. He could say, as he was breathing his last, *“Father into your hands I commit my spirit”* (Luke 23:46).

Conclusion

No one can truly understand the meaning of Jesus’ crucifixion: How could Jesus’ dying on the cross bring salvation to human beings? People through the two thousand years since Jesus’ life on Earth have tried to explain it. But the full meaning eludes us.

Perhaps Paul expressed the idea best: *“You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us”* (Romans 5:6-8).

We can be glad that we do not have to explain the death of Jesus Christ in order to be saved. God asks us to believe that Jesus died for our sins and to entrust our lives to him. God will forgive us of our sins and Jesus will be the King of love in our hearts. He will guide us into the way of love and make us part of his kingdom, the kingdom of God.

Pray this prayer: *“Dear God, I know that I’m a sinner. I believe that Jesus died for my sins and rose from the dead and is alive today. I now turn from my sins. I am placing my faith and trust in Jesus alone to be my Savior and to forgive me. I receive Jesus into my life as my Savior and Lord. From this day forward, I will follow Jesus. Thank you, Lord Jesus, for loving me and for coming Into my life. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.”*

Welcome into God’s family! Share with others that you have received Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord. Ask for baptism in a local church as a public expression of your faith. If there is no church near you, start a church by gathering a group of persons in your home and worship together on a regular basis. Read your Bible and pray each day. Tell others what Christ has done for you and what he can do for them.