

LIFE BIBLE STUDY

SESSION OBJECTIVE: MATTHEW 27:11-66

To understand some of the small but significant details in the crucifixion story.

Silence

Silence is such a strange thing. In some cases it is horrible. In conversation, when you have poured yourself out to the person you are speaking to, the last thing you want your vulnerability to be met with is silence. Yet, there are times as a parent of three small children, that silence is priceless. There are times, according to



Scripture, when silence is a virtue. Proverbs 17:28 tells us that even fools are counted as wise when they are silent. James admonishes us to be, “quick to hear, slow to speak” (Ja. 1:19). Silence demonstrates self-control, and self-control is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:23).

In Matthew 27, as Jesus is being mocked, falsely accused, beaten, and dishonored, the Lord demonstrates self-control powerfully. In the throes of condemnation and ultimately crucifixion, the Lord remains silent for much of it. Why? Because this was God’s divine plan, and He knew it (Matt. 26:42). As it turns out, we who follow Jesus learn from Him not only when He speaks, but also when He doesn’t.

Before the Courts

Beginning with verse 11, we are taken away from the Judas narrative and back to Jesus. Jesus is before several authoritative figures and is being questioned regarding some of the false accusations that are being

waged against Him. He is before the governor, Pilate, and the Sanhedrin, the Jewish courts that have brought Jesus to this Roman trial. There are a couple of interesting points in this exchange that are outlined below.

A DIFFERENT CHARGE (V.11)

The question that Pilate asks Jesus is notable. He says, “Are you the King of the Jews?” This is a departure from what Caiaphas and the Jews were accusing Jesus of just one chapter prior to this. Why all the sudden use royal terminology? The reason is actually pretty straight forward. Some of the claims that Jesus had made were enough for a Jewish court to find Him guilty of blasphemy. However, blasphemy was of no concern to a Roman court, since that was solely a Jewish matter. The chief priests and elders instead twisted His words to a more royal brand, in order to incite suspicion of an insurrection against Caesar. This type of charge was considered very serious and punishable by death.

A UNIQUE DREAM (V.19)

All four of the Gospels present details regarding the court and crucifixion of Jesus, and each of them offer up some unique details that none of the other three include. Matthew uniquely includes a dream of Pilate’s wife. While interrogating Jesus, Pilate receives a message from His wife concerning a dream she had of Jesus, and because of the dream was convinced that He was innocent. She refers to Jesus as, “the righteous Man.” She begs Him not to get mixed up in the matter. In Greco-Roman culture, dreams and visions were taken as a serious means by which the gods communicated. It is very possible and even probable that her dream actually came from God. At first it seems like Pilate might be swayed away from condemning Jesus, and even offers up a known criminal named Barabbas. The crowds of course, having been stirred up by the chief priests and elders, choose the wrong Jesus.

There is actually some irony here. While it is not included in the English translations, the Greek indicates that Barabbas’ name was actually, “Jesus Barabbas.” Beyond that, the name Barabbas has some irony to it. It is a Jewish name derived from, “Bar” meaning, “son,” and, “Abba,” meaning, “father.” Literally, the name means, “son of a father.” Jesus the Christ on the other hand is the Son of the Father in Heaven. Barabbas is not only a mere criminal. Mark’s account tells us he was involved in a rebellion in which he committed murder. While the names have some distinct similarity, they have very different character.

SCOURGED (V.26)

The idea of scourging is more developed in Roman culture than often understood by modern readers. There were three levels of scourging, each one being more severe.

Fustigatio: A less severe form for light offenses.

Flagellatio: A severe beating for hardened criminals.

Verberatio: The most severe of them all, and often performed by a multitude of soldiers with a scourge.

Jesus undoubtedly faced the third level, *verberatio*, and would have suffered tremendous wounds as a result.

This type of scourging even led some people to death, which indicates that Jesus’ physical condition was already pretty bad prior to the crucifixion.

The Crucifixion

After the choosing of Barabbas, Pilate leads Jesus back to the Praetorium. The Praetorium was the residence of the governor, but it also served as place where the Roman cohort or battalion stayed. Jesus is mocked here by the soldiers which is significant. Up to this point, it might be tempting to cast all of the blame on the Jews for everything that is happening to Jesus. Even Pilate doesn’t seem fully convinced. However, none of the Jews put the Roman soldiers up to this behavior. They strip Jesus naked, put a purple cloak over which was a

color for royalty, a crown of thorns, and give him reed for a staff and bow before Him as they yell, “Hail, King of the Jews.” They then spit on Him, take His reed and beat Him with it, and then undress Him and put Him back in His garments and lead Him out to be crucified. In this passage, the guilt of the Romans is very clear.

BITTER WINE (V.34)

Just before He is crucified, there is an exchange regarding bitter wine that has some Old Testament significance. He is at Golgotha, and verse 34 says, “They gave Him wine to drink mixed with gall; and after tasting it, He was unwilling to drink.” There is an echo here for Psalm 69:21 which reads, “They also gave me gall for my food and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.” Even here, Matthew is still establish the link between Jesus, “Son of David,” and King David in the Psalms.

To echo Ps. 69:21

DIVIDING THE GARMENTS (V.35)

After Jesus has been crucified, the Davidic connections continue. This time, there is particular wording found in verse 35 regarding the dividing of Jesus’ garments among the Roman soldiers. Matthew words this more than likely to echo the LXX version of Psalm 22:18, which reads, “They divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.” There is a continual connection to Davidic literature in the actions of Jesus and the actions against Him.

A PURPOSEFUL SIGN (V.37)

It should come as no surprise to read that Jesus is being once again referred to as, “King of the Jews.” This is the title, after all, that the chief priests used to convince Rome that Jesus was a revolutionary. It may come somewhat as a surprise that the soldiers take the time to make a sign in the first place. However, there is a very distinct reason for this. Crucifixion served more than one purpose. Crucifixion was meant to be a cruel punishment against the worst of the law-breakers (an irony considering Jesus never broke the law). However, crucifixion was also used to make a statement to other would-be criminals. The content of this sign that is hung above Him was likely meant to deter any other Jewish revolutionaries from getting any ideas about a revolt against Caesar. Anyone who opposes Rome, pays for it by the worst kind of death there is.

THE ROBBERS (VS.38-40)

The next detail Matthew gives us is regarding *who* Jesus is crucified with. The text merely tells us He was crucified with two robbers. This brings to mind the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53. In Isaiah 53, we learn a lot of things about this figure who is no doubt a prophecy regarding Jesus, but one of the details that is connected to this part of Matthew comes in Isaiah 53:12 which says, “He was numbered among the transgressors.”

There is also mention of the robbers, “wagging their heads,” at Him, which is likely a connection to Psalm 22:7, which says, “All who see me sneer at me; They separate with the lip, they wag the head.”

FORSAKEN (V.46)

Just before Jesus’ death, He cries out, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” This was said in Aramaic, and some of the bystanders thought He was calling for Elijah the prophet to come and save Him. However, this is almost certainly an Aramaic rendering of a Hebrew line from Psalm 22 which begins identically: “My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?” At first glance it seems like a cry of despair and defeat. Of course, Jesus was in great despair, but not defeated. Psalm 22 is actually a Psalm that ends with victory of the evildoers. It is likely not out of Jesus’ mind that this is the case, and it is also not out of His mind that He will conquer the grave.

THE TEMPLE VEIL

Immediately following the death of Jesus, Matthew records the tearing of the Temple veil. There were actually two veils, and the text doesn’t indicate which is in mind. The traditional view is that the inner veil that

separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place tore. The tearing signifies that a new point of access to God has opened up, and the old has passed away along with the entire sacrificial system, since Jesus was the final sacrifice (Heb. 10:1-18). There is also an outer veil that was installed at the entrance of the Temple that was 60 feet tall and 30 feet wide. Josephus as well as other historical sources mention this in their writings.

The early church connected both veils to the same event, indicating that both tore simultaneously, communicating two distinct messages. One is that, as mentioned above, the entire Temple sacrificial system had been done away with. Secondly, there is perhaps some foreshadowing to the destruction of the Temple that would follow in A.D. 70. This act was one of many supernatural things that took place when Jesus died, signifying the gravity of what has occurred. The death of Jesus was in and of itself, a supernatural event, and it would be followed by the supernatural undeath of Jesus in the resurrection.

EXTRA GUARDED

There was concern amongst Jewish leaders that the disciples of Jesus would return to steal away His body and claim He had risen. It's ironic, because while the Jewish leaders do not believe that Jesus will rise, they assume the followers will try and make it look like He did. However, the followers of Jesus are in such despair, they make no such attempt. While Jesus said over and over again that He would rise, the disciples somehow either didn't understand or didn't believe, but the opponents of Jesus very much had it in mind and prepared against such events from taking place.

Study Questions

Day One

1. Read Matthew 27:11-18. Who was questioning Jesus, and who was present while this was taking place? Why was He being accused of claiming to be, "King of the Jews" (Hint: See above)? What was the custom during the feast that was taking place? What was the name of the other individual Pilate brings out?
2. Read Matthew 27:19-26. What message does Pilate receive and from who? What is it in regards to? How does the crowd respond and who do they choose? What is Pilate's response to this?

Day Two

1. Read Matthew 27:27-32. Where is Jesus taken and what happens to Him? What are the things the Roman soldiers do to Him? What type of scourging did Jesus likely receive (Hint: See above)? Who was chosen to bear Jesus' cross for Him as they made their way to Golgotha?
2. Read Matthew 27:33-37. What does Golgotha mean? What did they give Jesus and what Old Testament significance does it have (Hint: See above)? What purpose did the sign above Jesus serve?

Day Three

1. Read Matthew 27:38-44. Who is Jesus crucified with? What was their response to Him? What is the Old Testament significance of this passage (Hint: See above)?
2. Read Matthew 27:45-54. What were Jesus' last word, and what did they mean? What did people think He was saying? What supernatural events took place when He died? Write them all down in a numbered list.

Day Four

1. Read Matthew 27:55-61. Who was present at the crucifixion? Who approached Pilate to bury Jesus' body? Who was He? Do you think he was a disciple? Why or why not?
2. Read Matthew 27:62-66. What instructions were given to the guards that guarded Jesus' tomb? Why were these instructions given?

Week 32 Discussion: Hold Your Tongue

Matthew 27 displays Jesus' ability to have total self-control over His tongue while horrible insults were being hurled at Him. Self-control is challenging when we feel like we are being unjustly accused or persecuted. Talk as a group about the challenges of remaining silent in the face of slander.

1. Icebreaker: Have you ever been slandered or attacked verbally? How did you respond? Were you silent, or did you feel the need to defend yourself.
2. When, if ever, is it appropriate to respond to unjust criticism?
3. When is it most beneficial to remain silent?
4. How do critics respond to silence?
5. How is silence beneficial in other contexts? How is it destructive?

Takeaways:

1. There is tremendous significance to seemingly small details in the crucifixion story that tie in to the Old Testament.
2. Jesus' death was a supernatural event that triggered supernatural effects.

PRAYER REQUESTS: