



THE GOSPEL OF  
**Luke**

**SESSION OBJECTIVE: LUKE 23:44-56**

To understand more about the death of Jesus.

## A Worthy Sacrifice

In 2001, a 1990 children's book by William Steig made its animated movie debut; it was called *Shrek*. The book was met mostly with success, but nothing to the levels of the Dreamwork's Animation series starring Mike Myers. In the first movie, we meet Lord Farquaad of Duloc, a small and ruthless ruler who exiles many of the fairy-tale creatures into the swamps where Shrek lives, thus creating conflict (and a story!) in Shrek's life. There is a great line from Farquaad that illustrates well the selfish heart of the movie's antagonist:

*"Brave knights, you are the best and brightest in all the land. Today one of you shall prove himself. That champion shall have the honor—no, no—the privilege to go forth and rescue the lovely Princess Fiona from the fiery keep of the dragon. If for any reason the winner is unsuccessful, the first runner-up will take his place and so on and so forth. Some of you will die, but it's a sacrifice I am willing to make."*

Farquaad has an ideal goal in mind, to win the princess from the fiery keep of the dragon, and yet he is unwilling to make the potential sacrifice himself to attain it. He is arrogant, selfish, and thinks of others as less worthy than himself. Sadly, Farquaad's actions and mindset are not too different from most rulers in the world today. In Luke 23:44-56, King Jesus, exemplifies the exact opposite characteristics of most rulers. He is humble. He sees others as *worth* dying for, and He is willing to meet death Himself, rather than send others in His place. And His death is one that is marked by several unique details.

## Jesus Dies

Luke gives several details concerning the death of the Lord Jesus Christ in verses 44 through 49. Below is a brief breakdown of some of them.

### **TIME OF DAY**

Luke writes in verse 44: “It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour.” The Jewish day was broken into two twelve-hour segments like our days today are measured, but the twelve-hour segments began at 6am and 6pm. With this in mind, that means that Luke records this segment took place between noon and 3pm.

### **DARKNESS**

In between this noon and 3pm timeframe, Luke records that “there was darkness over the whole land” (Lk. 23:44). Beyond that, “sun’s light failed” (Lk. 23:45). This time of darkness is an important detail. Darkness was seen in the ancient world as a portent for some kind of injustice or evil. This darkness can be connected to prophetic judgment and what the Old Testament calls *the day of the Lord*. Amos 8:9 says, “‘And on that day,’ declares the Lord GOD, ‘I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight.’” Zephaniah 1:15 says, “A day of wrath is that day, a day of distress and anguish, a day of ruin and devastation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness.” Joel 2:30-31, which Peter quotes in Acts 2:19-20, says, “And I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes.” Darkness is connected to a movement of God wherein He will send forth His Spirit, and thus Luke is implying that the death of Jesus marks the beginning of this movement.

### **THE VEIL IS TORN**

Beyond the darkness, verse 45 also records that “the curtain of the temple was torn in two.” According to rabbinic tradition there were thirteen curtains used throughout the temple. Several curtains have been suggested as the referent for Luke, but the most likely is almost certainly the curtain at the entrance of the holy of holies, the place where the atonement was made by the high priest for the so-called Day of Atonement.

Scholars have speculated as to the meaning of the tearing of the temple veil. Some have suggested that it was a further sign of the coming destruction upon Jerusalem, just as Jesus warned in Luke 23:28-29. Others have suggested that the temple curtain was torn to signify an opening of salvation to all who believe through the death of Jesus (Heb. 9:6-28; Matt. 27:51-53). Some have suggested the end of the ceremonial and ritual laws, but there are problems with this interpretation in that there is no real explicit division between ceremonial, ritual, judicial, and other laws in the Old Testament. Some have suggested that the tearing of the curtain could be seen as the tearing of clothing in Jewish culture as an expression of great displeasure from God. Others, still, have suggested that the tearing of the curtain symbolizes the death of Jesus Himself, as He is the One who ultimately stands between man and God as the eternal priest (Heb. 7:17).

The most likely interpretation are the first two mentioned above. It is likely a warning to Jerusalem of the coming destruction coming upon them and the opening of salvation to all who believe by faith. What was once needed to access God through the temple will no longer be necessary because the death of Jesus will be satisfactory to God once and for all (Heb. 10:1-18).

### **JESUS SPEAKS**

Verse 46 records Jesus final words: “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” Even in death, two things are notable. For one, even under divine judgment, Jesus still refers to God as His Father. The Son cannot deny the Father, nor can the Father deny the Son. Second, Jesus words are not necessarily His own; He is quoting Psalm 31:5: “Into your hand I commit my spirit; you have redeemed me, O LORD, faithful God.” While dying, the Son of God is quoting Scripture. This would not have been missed by at least some watching, as the Psalms were well-known and often memorized by the people of God.

These details, the darkness and the curtain veil tearing in conjunction with Jesus’ quotation of the Psalms, were enough to convince not only the centurion of Jesus’ innocence (Lk. 23:47), but also the crowds in attendance (Lk. 23:48). One might wonder while reading this account, “How does Luke come to obtain all of this information?” Remember, this is an eyewitness account (Lk. 1:1-4), and “all his acquaintances and the women who had followed him from Galilee stood at a distance watching these things” (Lk. 23:49).

## **Jesus is Buried**

Luke records the burial of Jesus as well. It was carried out by a man named Joseph, “from the Jewish town of Arimathea,” and who was “a member of the council” and “a good and righteous man who had not consented to their decision and action” (Lk. 23:50-51a). Most important, “he was looking for the kingdom of God” (Lk. 23:51b), meaning he was open to the message of Christ. The council he is connected to is none other than the Sanhedrin, as verse 51 clarifies; they are the ones behind the murder of Jesus. He is more than likely a Pharisee, given the sometimes positive comments towards the Pharisees in Luke and Acts, and the lack of positive comments concerning the Sadducees. That he was “upright” indicates a sense of righteousness, which implies he is a believer; Matthew 27:57 and John 19:38 confirm this.

Joseph, with the consent of Pilate, takes Jesus’ body and wraps it “in a linen shroud” which was common for burial procedure in the ancient world. He was placed in a “tomb cut in stone, where no one had ever yet been laid” (Lk. 23:53). Matthew 27:60 tells us that this tomb actually belonged to Joseph and was intended to be his own tomb, which is why it had not yet been used. The description of these details informs Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 15:4: “...that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.” How does Paul know of such a burial? It was well-documented!

Verse 54 indicates that it was “the day of Preparation,” or the day before the Sabbath. Since there was no work permitted on the Sabbath, the day before Sabbath was a day to prepare all that needed to be done so that the Sabbath could be enjoyed fully. The details concerning their preparation of “spices and ointments” is important. Because of the Sabbath, they could not fully prepare His body for burial and would thus need to return as soon as Sabbath was over to continue doing what they were doing, which is precisely when they will discover that the tomb that once held His body is now empty.

## **What About Now?**

The main takeaway is simply the historical trustworthiness of this detailed account of the death and burial of Jesus. This is a description of events that took place over two-thousand years ago, and it’s far more descriptive than many other ancient texts. It would have been easy to be nondescript concerning the various things that happened while Jesus was dying, but Luke has given us a clear and convincing picture of Jesus’ death in this account.

## Study Questions

### Day One

1. Read Luke 23:44-45. What hours were recorded in this account? What does that translate to in modern time? What other details does Luke give us that occurred during this time?

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2. Read Luke 23:46. What does Jesus cry out before He dies? What is significant about His words?

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### Day Two

1. Read Luke 23:47-48. Who saw these things unfold and declared His innocence? How did the crowd react?

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2. Read Luke 23:49. Who stood back at a distance watching?

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### Day Three

1. Read Luke 23:50-51. Who is Joseph? What does Luke tell us about him?

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2. Read Luke 23:52-53. Who did Joseph ask for permission to bury Jesus? What did Joseph do with Jesus' body? Where was Jesus to be buried?

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### Day Four

1. Read Luke 22:54. What day was it? Why is this detail significant?

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2. Read Luke 22:55-56. Who followed and saw where Jesus' body was laid, and what did they do when they returned home?

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## Week 85 Discussion: Doing the Next Right Thing

Luke 23:50-56 records the efforts of Joseph of Arimathea to give Jesus a proper burial after His wrongful execution. Joseph, being a member of the very council responsible for His crucifixion, sought to do the next right thing - forfeit his own grave and bury Jesus honorably. Talk as a group about the importance (and the difficulty) of doing the next right thing, especially in response to the wrong things.

1. Icebreaker: When was the last time you had to “do the next right thing?” Share with the group.
2. How often is the next right thing also the thing you want to do?
3. Have you ever neglected to do the next right thing? How did that decision work out?
4. If you could go back and do the next right thing in a past situation, how do you think that would change your current context?
5. Why is it hard to do the next right thing? Or is it hard?
6. How can the church better equip believers to take ownership for what they are able?

### Takeaways:

1. Darkness fills the land, the temple veil is torn, and Jesus cries out to God prior to His death between noon and 3pm.
2. Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Sanhedrin, takes Jesus’ body and buries it in order to do the honorable thing.