

**TUTORIAL**  
**1.53**

# Jesus was crucified

See Tutorial 1.6 notes for overall instructions.

The portions of Scripture referred to in this tutorial are: **Mark 15:21-26, Luke 23:39-43, Isaiah 53:12.**

## Last time

After the Passover meal, Jesus and His disciples went to a garden area on the Mount of Olives called Gethsemane. Although in spiritual, emotional and physical agony as He contemplated what was ahead, He prayed that the Father's will would be done, not His own. Judas brought armed men who arrested Jesus. A mock trial took place before the Jewish council that, without evidence, said He must die for blasphemy. The Roman governor found He had broken no law, but to pacify the Jews he handed Jesus over to be whipped and then crucified.

## Jesus was nailed to the cross

Before they leave the fortress that is the Roman governor's headquarters in Jerusalem and the regimental barracks, the timber for the cross is located. Jesus is forced to carry it as they leave and head out towards the area where the crucifixion is to take place. He shoulders it without complaint, but stumbling under the weight and near collapse after the terrible whipping, He clearly won't make it. The soldiers randomly grab someone passing by to carry the cross - his name is Simon, from Cyrene in modern day Libya - probably in Jerusalem for the Passover. By now a large crowd is trailing them. Some are Jesus' family and friends. They don't have to go too far to reach their destination: a place just outside the city walls called Golgotha - "place of the skull" in Aramaic - some say because it was a hill that resembled a skull (English translations in the past often used the Latin transliteration, *Calvary*). When they arrive, He's given wine mixed with myrrh...the aromatic ingredient in incense and ointments that also contains anesthetic properties.

History records that women of Jerusalem prepared this concoction as a mild sedative and to dull the pain, at least a little, for those being crucified. But Jesus has no intention of trying to escape this ordeal, either physically or mentally, and he refuses the offer. It's about 9 in the morning when a detail of

four soldiers proceed with the process of crucifixion that even in those brutal days was called “the most cruel and disgusting penalty” by the Roman philosopher and statesman, Cicero. First they strip His clothing off...which they divide between themselves, using some kind of dice to decide who gets what. Then they hammer long metal spikes through the flesh of His hands and feet, leaving Him hanging upright on the crossed timbers.

These callous soldiers have no idea that their actions are fulfilling what one of Jesus’ human ancestors, another King of the Jews, David, wrote prophetically centuries before, “My enemies surround me like a pack of dogs; an evil gang closes in on me. They have pierced my hands and feet...They divide my garments among themselves and throw dice for my clothing.”

It is customary for the criminal charges to be displayed above the head of the person being crucified. But Jesus, of course, has not been found guilty of anything under Roman law, so His sign simply says, “The King of the Jews”. In his account, John notes that the leading priests object to this, but Pilate refuses to change what he has written. No doubt he’s using it as an opportunity to insultingly press home to the Jews the futility of anyone trying to lead a rebellion against the might of Rome.

## **People’s response to seeing Jesus on the cross varies a lot**

And so Jesus is suspended there on the cross for all to see. This is exactly what He’d told the Pharisee, Nicodemus, would happen...that He’d be lifted up just like Moses lifted up the brass snake for the Israelites to look at if they’d been bitten by the deadly snakes infesting their camp. Now He is hanging high on a cross, visible to people in the area that day. But in a much broader and even more powerful way, because God has preserved this account in His Narrative - indeed it is the climax and what makes sense of the entire Narrative - millions of people down through history have been given the chance to *look* at Jesus, as it were, on the cross.

The way they see and respond to Him, however, varies hugely - that’s the case this particular morning just outside Jerusalem, as it has been ever since. This difference is nowhere more apparent than in the attitudes of two men who are being crucified at the same time, one on each side of Jesus. They are convicted criminals, possibly revolutionaries, which would explain why they’ve been sentenced to this terrible form of execution. One of them obviously rejects the possibility that Jesus is who He says He is. Luke records his mocking, “So you reckon you’re the Messiah do you? Prove it by saving yourself - and us, too, while you’re at it!” But the man on the other side has a totally different view. We don’t know if he’s met Jesus before, but as he turns now to look at Him it’s not the congealed blood, the grime, the humiliation he notices...what he sees is truth, holiness, and access to God for a sinner like himself. He can’t believe the other criminal’s attitude, “Man, you’re about to

die, aren't you afraid of God? We're guilty, we deserve it. But He has done nothing wrong."

Even in these, the most extreme of circumstances, Jesus demonstrates God's grace and mercy. Seeing the faith of this convicted criminal He forgives his sin, assuring him that that they'll meet again soon in God's presence. Yet again, some very specific things foretold by the prophet Isaiah are playing out here. He wrote (53:12), "He was counted among the rebels. He bore the sins of many and interceded for rebels."

Others too that morning are seeing Jesus and either coming to conclusions then or functioning according to their existing worldview commitments. Part of the reason for the Roman's choice of Golgotha as a place of crucifixion is because it is in a very public place. They are keen for as many people as possible to see the horrendous execution as a deterrence against crime. Mark describes people passing by on a road and shouting out abuse at Jesus, "Yeah, right. Look at you now. What was all that about you destroying the temple and rebuilding it in three days? If you're so great, save yourself and come down off that cross." This is in reference to something Jesus had said some time earlier that helped to build His notoriety. In the temple one day He vented His outrage at this place, that's supposed to be dedicated to the worship of His Father, also being used widely as an animal market and currency exchange. There is quite a scene as He drives the animals out and tips over tables stacked with coins. The leading priests, who have vested commercial interests, angrily demand some kind of miraculous sign as evidence for His authority to do this. He responds, "Okay, here's a sign for you. You destroy this temple, and in three days I'll raise it up again." The leaders, looking to discredit Him, have made sure this quote is passed around Jerusalem as a preposterous, even blasphemous, boast.

What they don't realise is that this is actually a prediction about something infinitely greater than the stones and timber of Herod's Temple. By "temple" He is referring to His own body which he knows will be brought back to life three days after they put Him to death. Now, at Golgotha, lifted up in view of everyone walking past, Jesus is an easy target for their mockery. They think they're superior and quite witty as they get a laugh from the crowd by throwing His own words in His face. In fact, what they're showing in this rather pathetic way is just how sinful and unbelieving they are. Because what they're unable or unwilling to recognise is that this is their Messiah. This is the Creator of the universe who's voluntarily submitting to the pain and humiliation of crucifixion.

And the irony - if that's what it is - is that He's doing it for *them*...dying to make a way of escape for His pathetically blind and lost race, so they have the opportunity to live in the relationship with God they were designed for. When they're brought to account, people like this might plead their ignorance, but the Jewish religious leaders there that morning certainly won't be able to. They

are very familiar with God's Story up to this point, but they don't recognise the One who it is all about. They know the words of their nation's storytellers appointed by God - Isaiah, David and all the rest - but they refuse to see that it was Jesus of Nazareth these prophets were pointing toward. Their prior worldview commitments blind them to the truth even when it's right in front of them. They join in the mockery "Look at Him. He saved others, but He can't save Himself. Let this Messiah, this King of Israel, come down from the cross so we can see it and believe Him!"

Even this was specifically echoed in the past by David, "I am scorned and despised by all! Everyone who sees me mocks me. They sneer and shake their heads, saying, 'Is this the one who relies on the LORD? Then let the LORD save Him! If the LORD loves Him so much, let the LORD rescue Him!'" God most certainly does love His Son completely. But there will be no rescue, no dramatic last moment escape from the cross. Because finally, the determining thing is not people's view of Jesus, or whether they recognise Him as Messiah and Saviour. It's not their response to Him, one way or the other, that shapes this Story.

Looking down through the pain He can see the Roman soldiers eager now to get back to their barracks. On the road people are walking by, some totally indifferent, others taking the chance to mock. In front, the self-righteous religious leaders, voicing their hatred, thinking that now they've shut Him up, that finally they'll be rid of Him. He can hear the groans of the criminals on either side. And over there, fearfully huddled to one side, a small group of His followers - His mother among them. Then, looking out beyond that time and place, He can see all the people who will live and die on this planet...and it's *His* view, His love and His Father's love for us all that keeps Him there.



## DISCUSSION POINTS

*Jesus was crucified*

1. What are your thoughts about different traditions and depictions of the crucifixion that focus graphically on the physical aspects of Jesus' suffering? (The movie "The Passion of the Christ" is a modern example, but a great deal of religious art and iconography from the past also demonstrates this.) What beliefs at a worldview level might

be involved? Does this seem to be consistent with what God is communicating through His Narrative?

2. If you were to meet these possible eyewitnesses to Jesus' crucifixion a day or two after in Jerusalem, how do you think they might each describe it?
  - (a) Simon from Cyrene who carried Jesus' cross
  - (b) The Pharisee, Nicodemus
  - (c) One of the four Roman soldiers who crucified Him
  - (d) A trader from a pagan community in Ephesus
  - (e) Lazarus, brother of Martha and Mary