



The Story Of Salvation

NCTM Tuesday Night Studies 2010

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24. The Arrest, Trial and Crucifixion of Jesus

In each of the Gospels, the events of one twenty-four hour period, the events of the arrest, trial and crucifixion of Jesus take a central place in the narrative. (Some one has even described Mark's Gospel as a passion narrative with an extended introduction!) What is quite remarkable is that especially in Matthew and Mark, the events of the resurrection seem to be overshadowed by these events, at least in the narrative space given to them. Clearly for each of the Gospel writers these events are enormously significant.

There are a number of events in this narrative:

1. The Prayer In Gethsemane

(Matt. 26: 36-46); Mark 14:32-42; Luke 22:39-46; John 18:1, but maybe also the prayer of consecration immediately before this in John 17 is his version of the Gethsemane prayer.)

1. Jesus experienced an overwhelming sorrow and trouble of soul – “to the point of death.”
2. He prayed to the Father, “If it is possible take this cup from me; but not as I will, but as you will.”
3. Angels strengthened him. And he continued to pray, yet more earnestly.
4. The three disciples, Peter, James and John fail in their needed praying (that they fall not into temptation.) Their future lies firmly in the hands of Christ, not their own faithfulness.
5. If John 17 is included in the Gethsemane prayer, it is a prayer of consecration because “the time” had come for the glorification of God's name by the Son. Eternal life is to be given to all people whom the Father will give to him: i.e. they will know the Father, the only God, and Jesus Christ whom He has sent. He wants those given to him to see his glory, to be with him where he is, i.e. reconciled to the Father and sharing in Christ's relationship with him. The whole thrust of what is coming is to make known the love of the Father.

The overwhelming sorrow and trouble must be related to his bearing the sins of the world, and the judgment of God on those sins. 1Pet. 2:24; 2Cor. 5:21. The experience of this was so intense it was “to the point of death.” It may be that Christ believed he was going to die in the garden. His prayer about the cup being taken away may not then have been about the death of the cross (which he had been moving towards resolutely for some weeks since the transfiguration) but about his sense he was about to die in the garden. Whatever the explanation, it is clear that he is obedient to the Father in it all, desiring the Father's will above all. He is in no way seeking to avoid the Father's will, but is obedient to death, even death on a cross.

In this obedience he stands apart from all of humanity throughout history. Human beings have lived in the fear of death. Fear of God that is true, not simply terror before him, can only exist when the fear of death has been driven out. We cannot serve two masters. Where the fear of death still exists, there will be a cutout point to obedience. Christ had no fear of death, for he was without sin.

2. The Arrest

(Matt. 26:47-56; Mark 14:43-52; Luke 22:47-53; John 18:2-11)

1. The arresting mob had come cowardly and illegitimately: all Christ had done had been in public and they never moved on him then.
2. “The hour had come” – “This is your hour – when darkness reigns.” (Matt. 18:56) Sin and evil were being given room to come to full expression, for then they will come to full judgment. But it was also God’s hour, the set time for the fulfilment of prophecy.
3. Judas was confronted with the irrationality of his betrayal: Jesus spoke to him as friend.
4. “Shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?” (John 18:11)
5. “Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him...” (John 18:4)
6. “This has all taken place that the writings of the prophets might be fulfilled.” (Matt. 26:56)
7. The attempt of the disciples to fight these events was reproved by Jesus.
8. The disciples fled, as Jesus predicted, and in fulfilment of Scripture. (Matt. 26:31)

While the events are evil, in fact the purpose of God is being worked out. Prophecy has led to this day. Christ enters into this obediently and in full command, not simply as victim of a tragic conspiracy (see John 18:4-6 esp.)

3. The Trial before the Sanhedrin

(Matt. 26:57-27:10; Mark 14:53-72; Luke 22:54-71; John 18:12-27)

1. Around the account of the trial before the Sanhedrin is the account of Peter’s three-fold denial of Christ. Jesus went through these events entirely unsupported by his disciples, from Gethsemane onwards.
2. Attempts were made to find evidence against Christ, and false witnesses were brought in. The decision to put Jesus to death preceded the trial: it is a “kangaroo court.” But even these attempts were flimsy, and testimony was in disagreement.
3. The clinching accusation was Jesus’ claim that he would destroy the temple and in three days raise another. This was linked to whether he is the Christ, the Son of God. In fact, by the killing of Christ, and then his being raised to life three days later, this saying about the Temple was fulfilled.
4. Jesus said, in answer to this, that this conclusion (that he is the Christ, the Son of God) was correct, and that in due time he would be seen seated at the right hand of God, coming on the clouds (i.e. as victorious Lord of all, the judge of the

earth). It was this that is taken as blasphemy and becomes the basis for Jesus' condemnation. (It is only blasphemy if it is not a true claim!)

5. Judas was shocked by the outcome of his treachery and suicided.

4. Before Pilate

(Matt. 27:11-31; Mark 15:1-20; Luke 23:1-25; John 18:28-19:16)

1. The charges against Jesus were "spun" by his accusers so as to sound more convincing to Pilate. He was accused of being a rebel, stirring up trouble and encouraging the non-payment of taxes.
2. Pilate was convinced that there was no case against Jesus (John 18:38). He knew that the charges had come because of envy on the part of the accusers (Mark 15:10). His wife warned him about getting involved in the case because of Jesus' innocence (Matt. 27:19). Pilate's words are clear:

"You brought me this man as one who was inciting the people to rebellion. I have examined him in your presence and have found no basis for your charges against him. Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us; as you can see, he has done nothing to deserve death." (Luke 23:14-15)
3. It was essential that Pilate find him guilty, as the Jewish leaders knew that they had "no right to execute anyone" (John 18:31), but that was precisely the desired outcome.
4. Pilate's weakness was shown in his succumbing to the pressure of the mob, who chanted for Christ's execution and the liberation of a notorious criminal, a murderer, Barabbas instead of him.
5. The soldiers led Jesus away and mocked the idea of his being king (cf. Psalm 2). The mockery of the soldiers actually points to the most remarkable fact about the authority of Jesus Christ: it is grounded in his willing suffering and death (Php. 2:5-11)

The Crucifixion, Death and Burial

(Matt. 27:32-66; Mark 15:33-47; Luke 23:26-56; John 19:17-42)

1. A number of events are recorded which indicate that the crucifixion, even in its small details, had been prophesied: so, the dividing of his clothes (John 19:24), the thirsting of Christ (John 19:28), and the piercing of Christ's side after his death, but not the breaking of his legs (John 19:36-37).
2. Again, the innocence of Jesus is stressed, both in the verdict of the thief (Luke 23:41) and the centurion guard (Luke 19:47, Mark 15:39, Matt. 27:54), and in the lamenting response of the crowds when they saw what had taken place (Luke 19:48).
3. Satan's attempts to deflect Jesus and to mock God came in sharp focus as the crowds taunt him to "save himself" (Luke 23:35, 37, 39). The steadfastness of Jesus Christ was that he knows he had come not to save himself, but rather to give his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45). He did trust in God, and God did delight in him and will rescue him (cf. Matt. 27:43), but it would be rescue when the work was complete, only after the triumphal cry, "It is finished."
4. Before he was nailed to the cross, Jesus was offered, and refused, wine mixed with myrrh, which acted as a pain-killer (Matt. 27:34, Mark 15:23.) The greatest

suffering of the cross was not the physical pain, but the unseeable and untellable anguish of bearing the sins of the world, his bearing of our griefs and sorrows, his being crushed for our iniquities and bearing the punishment that brought us peace. No sedative or opiate can touch that pain; atonement only can heal those wounds. Later when the work was complete and he thirsted, he received the drink of wine vinegar, but there was no pain-killer in this (John 19:28-30, Mark 15:36).

5. At the moment of his death, the curtain in the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom, a sign from God about the effect of his death (Matt. 27:51; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45). The old separation of humanity from God, in place since the terrible events of the Fall and the eviction from Eden, which had only been partially ameliorated in God's covenant gift of His presence to Israel, was now completely abolished. Reconciliation between God and humanity was complete in and through Jesus Christ. His death, by dealing with sin and judgment, had bridged the gap.
6. Each of the things Jesus said from the cross should be explored in connection to the saving purposes of God, to God's salvation history. What is notable is that Jesus does all before the Father; the action of the cross is God-ward:
 - a. "Father, forgive them."
 - b. "Today you will be with me in Paradise."
 - c. "Woman, see your son. Son, here is your mother."
 - d. "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"
 - e. "I thirst"
 - f. "It is finished."
 - g. "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit."
7. There is a stress on the certainty of the death of Jesus, and the sealing of the tomb. Also, in the burial scenes we see that the women following Jesus remain faithful even where the disciples have all fled.