

The Synoptic Gospels

Week 6

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Outline

The Cross

- Why Did Jesus Die?

- Four Ironies of the Cross

Resurrection

- Harmonized Time Line

- Minimal Facts Argument

- Resurrection Theology

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Efficient Cause

Each of these played some role in Jesus ending up on the cross:

1. Pilate—The final call was on Pilate and he gave in for **political expediency**. Here are four attempts to evade sentencing Christ:
 - 1.1 He sent him to Herod, discovering Jesus fell outside of his own jurisdiction
 - 1.2 He flogged Jesus as a half-measure: “He hoped the crowd would might be satisfied by something less than the supreme penalty. . . It was despicable. For if Jesus was innocent, he should have been immediately released, not flogged first.” (Stott, 55)
 - 1.3 He attempted to release him as part of the festival. Again, if Jesus was innocent, then there is no need to go through this charade.
 - 1.4 He protested his own innocence by washing his hands. This “noble” display is frankly absurd when an innocent person’s life is at stake.
2. Sanhedrin—The Jewish leaders appear to be following the law (Deut 13:1-5; Lev 24:10-16), yet even Pilate can see that they are acting mostly from **envy** (Mt 27:18). Ironically, and contrary to the law, his trial started by assuming he was guilty (Cf. Lev 19:15).

Efficient Cause

Each of these played some role in Jesus ending up on the cross:

3. Judas—There is some speculation about Judas' political motives. Nevertheless, the biblical text reveals that Judas' had motive enough: he did it **for money**. The juxtaposition of Jesus' anointing with Judas' betrayal can't be accidental.

Clearly, humanity as a whole played a part here, but these three examples exemplify ways that we resist or reject Christ:

1. Like Pilate, pressures from others and life intimidate us into compromise.
2. Like the Sanhedrin, we resent Jesus' right to lead us and the interference this will create in our privately managed fiefdom(s).
3. Like Judas, material wealth holds a higher place in our hearts than Christ.

With which of these do you find yourself identifying and why?

Final Cause

From a divine standpoint, Jesus didn't die on accident. Why then?

1. *Jesus died for us that he might bring us to God*

Colossians 1:19,20—For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven. (Col 1:19,20; See also Ephesians 3:10; I Peter 3:18,22)

2. *Jesus died for our sins*

II Corinthians 5:21—He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

3. *Jesus died our death*

I Thessalonians 5:9,10—For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we will live together with Him.

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Four Ironies

We will examine four ironies that surround the events of Jesus' crucifixion. After I show you the passage, see if you can pick out what's ironic. Afterwards we'll discuss the theological implications.

First Irony

Matthew 27:27-31—Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole Roman cohort around Him. They stripped Him and put a scarlet robe on Him. And after twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on His head, and a reed in His right hand; and they knelt down before Him and mocked Him, saying, “Hail, King of the Jews!” They spat on Him, and took the reed and began to beat Him on the head. After they had mocked Him, they took the scarlet robe off Him and put His own garments back on Him, and led Him away to crucify Him.

The Man Who's Mocked as King is King

He's not only king of the Jews, but the Lord of heavenly hosts!

Futher observations:

1. This exposes a two-fold wretchedness about humanity:
 - This would be barbarous, cruel treatment for even an ordinary criminal, a man created in God's image.
 - There is a suggestive parallel between the rebellion in the Garden (partially ignorant of the ramifications but ultimately culpable, lack of restraint undergirds the eerie display of confidence)
2. This episode says volumes about God's love for us.
 - He not only died for us (crazy!) but nothing about this is required by the work of substitution.
 - Jesus voluntarily surrendered his life to these men (Cf. Mt 26:30, 53).

Second Irony

Matthew 27:32; 39-40—As they were coming out, they found a man of Cyrene named Simon, whom they pressed into service to bear His cross.

And those passing by were hurling abuse at Him, wagging their heads and saying, “You who are going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross.”

The Man Who's Powerless is Powerful

Futher observations:

1. In the incarnation, Jesus laid aside the use of his divine attributes. The cross is the culmination of this humility, exhibiting his life of service in miniature.
2. Even in spite of the kenosis, Jesus' power is otherwise undeniable:
 - o Given the well-known miracles of feeding the 5000 and the many healings, his authority and power is evident.
 - o When Peter tries to violently rescue him in Gethsemane, Jesus' answer highlights both his power and his voluntary cooperation with the Father's will: "Or do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father, and He will at once put at My disposal more than twelve legions of angels?" (Mt 26:53)

Third Irony

Matthew 27:41,2—In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking Him and saying, “He saved others; He cannot save Himself. He is the King of Israel; let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe in Him.

The Man Who Can't Save Himself Saves Others

Futher observations:

1. He doesn't just save other incidentally; he saves others by *NOT* saving himself
2. There is something deeply ingenuous when they say, "...let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe in Him."
 - They've already ignored his blatant miracles. They might believe he was powerful or dangerous, but I suspect they'd try to kill him in another way.
 - The way people have historically responded to miracles makes it clear why this is not God's go-to method of authentication (Cf. Israel in the desert after having seen the plagues, parting of Re(e)d Sea, etc.)

Fourth Irony

Matthew 27:43-46 "... He trusts in God; let God rescue Him now, if He delights in Him; for He said, 'I am the Son of God.'" The robbers who had been crucified with Him were also insulting Him with the same words. . .

Now from the sixth hour darkness fell upon all the land until the ninth hour. About the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" that is, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"

The Man Who Cries in Despair Trusts God

Futher observations:

1. The Leaders walk straight into a prophetic trap:
Psalm 22:7,8—All who see me sneer at me; They separate with the lip, they wag the head, saying, “Commit yourself to the Lord; let Him deliver him; Let Him rescue him, because He delights in him.”
2. Jesus’ citation of Psalm 22:1 doubly signals trust:
 - To draw on a such a passage that is clearly being fulfilled signals an sensitivity to God’s involvement and plan in history
 - Later in the same Psalm, David indicates that this horrifying scene will be redeemed:
22:22 I will tell of Your name to my brethren; In the midst of the assembly I will praise You . . . 24 For He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; Nor has He hidden His face from him; But when he cried to Him for help, He heard.

Other Ironies

1. The Great Judge who will condemn sinners to death was condemned to death by sinners.
2. In ignoring Jesus' previous miracles, the leaders primed him for his greatest miracle in the resurrection.
3. Those who believed Jesus would destroy the temple were in the midst of destroying "One greater than the temple." (Mt 12:6) While Jesus never claimed he'd destroy the temple, he was now primed to fulfill what he *did* say, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." (Jn 2:19)
4. When he was beaten and asked, "Prophecy, who hit you," (Mt 26:68) prophecy was being fulfilled. (Isaiah 53:7-9)
5. By placing Jesus in a place of ultimate weakness, he's primed for greater power and more authority than ever. Somewhat mysteriously, his present authority is a *consequence* of his obedience and humility. (Phil 2:8-11)

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Friday, Burial

Here is the rough sequence of events using Matthew 27:51ff, Mark 15:38ff, Luke 23:47ff, John 19:31ff. The symbol '∇' means it is common to all gospels and 'Σ' for Synoptics only.

1. Joseph of Arimathea requests the body from Pilate who concedes (∇)
2. The guards note that Jesus is already dead, preventing them from breaking his legs. (Jn 19:33)
3. The centurion pierced his side. (Jn 19:34; Cf. JAMA 255: 1455-1463)
4. The body was prepared by Joseph (∇) and Nicodemus (Jn 19:39) using fresh linen and spices.*
5. The body is placed in Joseph's own (Mt 27:60), new tomb (Mt 27:60, Lk 23:53, Jn 19:41) cut from a rock (Σ) which was very close by (Jn 19:41-42)
6. Mary Magdalene and Mary mother of James and Joseph saw him buried so they could return with spices.* (Σ)

Sunday, Resurrection

Here is the rough sequence of events using Matthew 28:1-15, Mark 16:1-8, Luke 24:1-12, John 20:1-25. The symbols '∇,' 'Σ' are as before.

1. At the very beginning of the day (∇), some women visited the tomb (∇), including Mary Magdalene (∇), Mary the mother of James and Joseph (Josēs) (Σ), Salome (Mk 16:1), and Joanna (Lk 24:10).
2. Upon reaching the tomb, the large stone covering the entrance had already been rolled away (∇) by an angel (Mt 28:2).
3. The women entered the tomb (Mk 16:5, Jn 20:11) and spoke to angels (∇) who told them he rose from the dead (Σ).
4. The women reported what they saw to the disciples (Mt 28:8,11; Lk 24:9; Jn 20:2), saying nothing *on the way* (Mk 16:8).
5. Peter (Lk 24:12) and John (Jn 20:2) examined the empty tomb themselves but did not see Jesus.
6. Jesus appears to the women (Mt 28:9, Jn 20:14).
7. Jesus appears to the disciples (Mt 28:17; Lk 24:36; Jn 20:19).

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The Strategy

The Minimal Facts argument uses what's called an *inference to the best explanation* (IBE). Here are some examples of IBE:

- There is a kilometer sized circular indentation in the middle of a desert. The best explanation of this phenomenon is that there was a meteoric impact.
- The couch is torn to pieces, the dog is home and has stuffing in his mouth. The best explanation is that the dog tore the couch up.
- A man is face down in a pool of blood with a knife in his back. The best explanation is that he was murdered (Wallace, 36)

The advantage of the Minimal Facts argument is that it begins with historical facts that all but the most skeptical historians take for granted.

The Argument

What are these minimal facts of which we must give an account?

- Jesus of Nazareth was crucified by Pontius Pilate (Tacitus, *Annals* 15.44)
- The disciples *claim* to have seen the risen Christ, notably Saul/Paul of Tarsus (Scripture at least as personal report; Cf. 1 Cor 15:1-8)
- The sudden appearance of a religion of a “dead man” reaching even into Rome itself. (Tacitus, *op. cit.*; Cf. Pliny the Younger, *Letters*)

The claim is that the best explanation (not an absolute guarantee) is that Jesus rose from the dead.

Alternative Hypotheses

Hypothesis	Claim	Problems
Hallucination	People saw Christ: → in their grief? → “spiked” water?	No historical e.g.s of common hallucination; grief tends to draw on only one sense
“Swoon”	Jesus never died	Roman’s were torture experts (Cf. JAMA article)
Mystery	We will never know what happened	Despair of historical inquiry

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Resurrected? So what?

More to the point, the Resurrection has a number of absolutely central theological values.

1. The resurrection appears in some form or another in all 4 gospels (Good News) and is therefore essential to the “Good News” (Cf. 1 Cor 15:3-4)
2. The Resurrection is a certification that Jesus was sent from God.
Romans 1:3-4 [NASB] . . . His Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh, who was declared (appointed, NIV) the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead . . . (Cf. Deuteronomy 13)
3. The Resurrection is central to our faith in God's salvation (next slide).

The Resurrection in Salvation

The Resurrection plays an essential role in our personal faith in each phase of salvation:

1. **Justification** Romans 4:25—He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.
2. **Sanctification** Romans 8:11—And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you.
3. **Glorification** 1 Corinthians 15:49—And just as we have borne the image of the earthly man, so shall we bear the image of the heavenly man

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