

THE REAL JESUS: HIS CROSS

Week Five | September 16, 2018 | Hated

PREPARATION

GETTING READY

Before your group meets next time, spend some time alone in God's Word reading through this week's text, Luke 22:63–23:25. Pray that God, through His Spirit, would bring to life the truth of this text and how it applies to your life.

THIS WEEK

KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

Christ was hated, rejected, and treated unjustly.

THEOLOGY APPLIED

When you are hated, rejected, and treated unjustly for the sake of Christ, know that everything is not going wrong; it is going right.

MEDITATE

"Pilate addressed them once more, desiring to release Jesus, but they kept shouting, 'Crucify, crucify him!'" (Luke 23:20–21).

GETTING STARTED

+ Use this section to prepare your heart and mind for the truths of this week. This section will help to introduce the focus of this week's lesson.

In the early second century lived Ignatius, the bishop of Antioch. Ignatius experienced persecution alongside the early Church. On the way to his execution in Rome, he was chained and abused by the soldiers. He wrote letters to the churches begging them to pray for him. Like the apostle Paul, Ignatius desired that whatever happened to him would serve to advance the gospel (Philippians 1:12). “Yet,” he writes, “because of their mistreatment I am becoming more of a disciple.” Ignatius realized that being hated is a form of suffering that brought him closer to God, making him more like Christ. He continues, “The one near to the sword is near to God, and he who is in the midst of beasts is in the midst of God: only let it be in the name of Jesus Christ, so as to suffer together with him. I endure all things because he, the perfect man, empowers me.”

Ignatius counsels the Christians who face similar persecution to “allow [your persecutors] to be instructed by you, at least by your deeds. In response to their anger, be gentle; in response to their boasts, be humble; in response to their slander, offer prayers; in response to their errors, be steadfast in the faith; in response to their cruelty, be civilized; do not be eager to imitate them.” Ignatius reminds the Church that Christ is put on display in the face of persecution. “The work is not a matter of persuasive rhetoric; rather, Christianity is greatest when it is hated by the world,” he says.

We often think that the best way to spread Christianity is through bullet-proof apologetic arguments or winning culture wars. But Christ demonstrates that we win by losing. The world knows how to offer counter arguments or reject cultural movements. But they don’t know what to do with people who hold fast to Christ though they have lost everything and are beaten down emotionally, socially, economically, and even physically. They cannot make sense of a community that grows more the more it is killed. The more it suffers, the more it thrives. The more it is despised, the more Christ is seen. Poet Gerard Manley Hopkins beautifully captures this truth in his poem, “As Kingfishers Catch Fire.” He writes:

I say more: the just man justices;
Keeps grace: that keeps all his goings graces;
Acts in God’s eye what in God’s eye he is –
Christ – for Christ plays in ten thousand places,
Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his
To the Father through the features of men’s faces.

When children of God live out their identity as those “in Christ,” they present to the world a picture of Christ. This is what Hopkins means by his phrase “for Christ plays in ten thousand places.” Christ is seen over and over through the saints who endure. In their faces is the face of Christ. Paul says:

But as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; by purity, knowledge, patience,

kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love; by truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; through honor and dishonor, through slander and praise. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything. (2 Corinthians 6:4–10)

Suffering like Christ is the greatest and most powerful testimony you could ever have. It puts Christ on display in a way that your best arguments or greatest cultural victories never could. It confronts those who hate Christ in a way that silences their objections and brings them face-to-face with Christ Himself.

When you are hated, rejected, and treated unjustly for the sake of Christ, know that everything is not going wrong. It is going right.

■ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

In this lesson we will continue our review of Jesus' road to the cross. After being betrayed, He was delivered over to the officials. At their hands, He was the victim of cruelty, rejection, and injustice.

1. JESUS SUFFERED CRUELTY
2. JESUS SUFFERED REJECTION
3. JESUS SUFFERED INJUSTICE

GOING DEEPER

+ This next section will help show what God's Word says about this week's particular focus. Read through the Scripture passages and connect the text to this week's biblical truth.

JESUS SUFFERED CRUELTY

■ LUKE 22:63–65

Q: Describe how the men who were holding Jesus in custody treated Him.

Q: What were they making fun of when they asked Him to prophecy?

Jesus' captivity was not just physical, but psychological as well. They didn't just hold Him in a cell awaiting His trial; they beat Him and mocked Him. They poured out their hatred on Him.

They decided to play games with Him for the sole purpose of expressing their cruelty and mocking His character. They blindfolded and hit Him, then demanded He tell them who had struck Him. After all, if He were omniscient, He should know. If He were a prophet, He should be able to tell them who would strike before they swung. These scoffers will have quite an experience on the day of judgment when Christ lets them know that He knew exactly who struck Him.

In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, C.S. Lewis creates a similar scene when Aslan, the King of Narnia, surrenders himself to be put to death by the White Witch. She orders her people to shave his mane and tie him to the Stone Table. Susan and Lucy, the two girls watching from afar, fully expect Aslan to destroy everyone at any moment. Instead, he lays motionless as they tie him down, put a muzzle on him, and shave him. The creatures then taunt and mock him incessantly.

"Why, he's only a great cat after all!" cried one. "Is that what we were afraid of?" said another. And they surged round Aslan, jeering at him, saying things like "[How] many mice have you caught today, Cat? And "Would you like a saucer of milk?"

"Oh, how can they?" said Lucy, tears streaming down her cheeks. "The brutes, the brutes!" For now that the first shock was over the shorn face of Aslan looked to her braver, and more beautiful, and more patient than ever.

In verse 65, Luke spares us the detail, but tells us they said many other blasphemous things to Him. They slandered and degraded Him. We can only imagine the kind of horrific things they said.

It's easy for us, like Susan and Lucy, to be horrified by hearing such things spoken against our Lord. We must remember, however, that we too were once blasphemers. We didn't believe He was truly God, and some of us actively rejected Him as the Son of God. We have taken His name in vain and said ignorant things like, "If Jesus is really God then He should ..." Praise God that He allowed Himself to suffer blasphemy so He could forgive blasphemers! Through repentance and faith, even those who once blasphemed Christ can be called sons and daughters of God.

- Q: *What do the mockers' actions reveal about what they thought about Jesus and what they thought about themselves?*
- Q: *The book of Proverbs refers to scoffers as the opposite of the wise. And wisdom begins with the fear of the Lord. In what ways do you see that truth on display in this passage?*
- Q: *In what ways have you been a blasphemer? How can you grow in the fear of the Lord in your own life?*

JESUS SUFFERED REJECTION

■ LUKE 22:66-71

- Q: *When Jesus told the chief priests and scribes the truth about who He was, how did they respond?*
- Q: *What was the purpose of their question? Do you think they were genuinely seeking the truth?*

After all their scheming and attempts to trap Jesus, the religious leaders finally succeeded in putting Jesus on official trial. The issue at question was whether Jesus was the Messiah. They already knew their answer. There was nothing objective about this trial. Jesus was not innocent until proven guilty. These leaders cared far more about securing their positions of power than upholding the truth. No matter what Jesus said, they would find a way to reject it. But God can work despite the hardest of hearts. This is exactly what we see in verse 68 when Jesus says, "But from now on, the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the power of God." It doesn't matter who they say He is or what they do to Him. He is the Son of God and He will reign victoriously.

Many people refuse to believe in Christ and make the excuse that they need more evidence to be fully convinced

He is the Son of God. The religious leaders saw proof after proof of who He was. They saw Him perform miracles, commanding both the physical and the spiritual world, yet still said the evidence was not enough for a solid conclusion. The problem was not with the evidence, but with their bias. Their hearts were hardened. They didn't want to believe. They saw what they wanted to see and didn't see what they didn't want to see.

Skepticism pretends to be a neutral, objective position. In reality, it is based on a heavy bias against belief. In his gospel account, Luke is not against evidence. In fact, as we have learned, he wrote the book to present evidence for who the Real Jesus is! But in these verses, we see that skepticism does not help us be more sure of who Jesus really is. Instead, it prevents us from seeing Him rightly.

Q: *Can you think back to a time when you rejected the gospel? Before you became a Christian were you willfully blind to the truth?*

Q: *How does this passage change the way you approach unbelievers? How does it help you pray for them better?*

JESUS SUFFERED INJUSTICE

■ LUKE 23:1–25

Q: *How did Pilate treat Jesus? What was his opinion of Jesus?*

Q: *Whose opinion did Pilate care about the most?*

Jesus' trial continues. After meeting with the religious high court, Jesus was taken to Pilate's court, which was the state supreme court. The religious officials wanted to kill Him, but legally they couldn't. Israel had been conquered by Rome and was under their governance. Under Rome, they had no authority to carry out the death penalty, so they

planned to get Rome to do it for them.

In verse 2, you'll notice they changed the charges. Earlier, they had accused Jesus of claiming to be the Messiah. But such a charge wouldn't have meant much for the Romans, so they embellished it and changed it up. Now, they were accusing Him of "misleading our nation, opposing payment of taxes to Caesar, and saying that he himself is the Messiah, a king." They gave the charge a political spin to make Him seem like a threat to Rome. We know the first two charges are completely false. The last charge made Him sound like the kind of Messiah they wanted all along—a king who would overthrow Rome. They were gravely disappointed when Jesus was *not* the kind of Messiah they had pictured.

Pilate begins questioning Jesus, and after his interrogation, he finds Jesus not guilty of any of the charges against Him. But, in verse 5, the priests keep pressuring him, insisting that Jesus was a threat. They manipulated Pilate through fear and the pressure of public opinion.

When Pilate found out Jesus was actually from Galilee, he reassigned the case to that jurisdiction, all too happy to be able to pass it on! This now meant Herod was in charge of trying the case. Herod was known for being a corrupt leader and judge. When Jesus arrived at his court, Herod tried to get Jesus to perform for him, like a dog and pony show. Clearly, no one felt the burden of executing justice or revealing truth. The real clowns were those in the courts. After he finished mocking Jesus, Herod saw no reason to convict Him and sent Him back to Pilate.

Once again, Pilate told the Jewish leaders he found no fault in Jesus, especially one worthy of the death penalty. He offered to compromise by punishing Jesus before releasing Him, but that was not enough for the Jewish leaders. The religious leaders changed their story yet again. They accused Jesus of tainting people against the government. But now they were asking for Jesus to be arrested in exchange for Barabbas, a man "who had been thrown into prison for rebellion and murder."

Something was really fishy here. They were now accusing Jesus of a lesser crime, and yet they were willing to let a more dangerous criminal go in exchange. But Pilate did not seek out truth. He didn't want to get to the bottom of the false accusations. He wasn't interested in exposing the real criminals. He allowed their pressure and the voice of the mob to persuade him. Verse 23 says "And their voices prevailed." So Pilate released Barabbas and gave them permission to execute their "justice" on Jesus.

Thabiti Anyabwile explains,

The only way to have justice in any situation is to care more about truth than we do about ourselves. If we sacrifice truth, then we will miscarry justice. The only persons who can make sure our systems of justice actually deliver justice are those inside and outside who will be voices for truth. A judiciary with people

ruled by their own political interests will soon give the people what they want rather than what is right. A public ruled by their own selfish desires will soon twist the courts to serve their desires. Justice requires nobility of character and the courage of truth based conviction.

At the heart of the injustice Jesus faced was a willful rejection of truth.

And yet, Jesus suffered injustice so that He could be the justifier of those who “exchange the truth for a lie” (Romans 1:25). Jesus drank the cup of God’s wrath “revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth” (Romans 1:18). We can declare along with Paul that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus” (Romans 3:23–26). Jesus is the only truly just One who has ever lived. And He endured injustice so He could be the justifier of sinners.

Q: *Are there areas in your life in which you are covering up or turning a blind eye to truth? If so, does it lead to injustice of some kind?*

Q: *Do you find yourself pressured by the crowd? If so, does it lead to injustices of some kind?*

NEXT STEPS

+ *Connect the truths from God’s Word to your daily life. Process how what you’ve learned this week will impact the way you live beyond today and into the future.*

Q: *What kind of emotional and psychological damage do mocking and scorning do? In what way are they particularly dishonoring to God?*

Q: *Have you ever been the victim of injustice? Was it rooted in a suppression of the truth? How can Jesus be your comfort?*

Q: *Do you know someone who is actively suppressing the truth of Christ? Ask the group to be in prayer for them and discuss how you can work alongside the Spirit to help them see who the Real Jesus is.*

Q: *Look back at the way Jesus responded to those who mocked Him, rejected Him, and treated Him unjustly. If you are facing a trial, how can you suffer like Christ? How can you respond in such a way that when people see you they see Christ?*



PRAY

+ *Use these prayer points to connect your time in prayer to this week's focus.*

- Jesus, thank You for enduring cruelty, rejection, and injustice so that I—a former blasphemer and suppressor of truth—could be completely forgiven. Thank You for casting my sins as far as the east is from the west. Give me strength to endure suffering in a way that honors You. I pray the world would see Your beauty and Your glory in my weakness.

COMMENTARY

LUKE 23:1 Normally Pilate was in Caesarea, at the Judean seat of the Roman government. But, he was in Jerusalem during Passover to ensure no rebellious activity broke out during the religious holiday. Once again, we see Luke's attention to detail and accurate historical facts. Pilate's willingness to compromise with the Jewish officials, and eventually to do what they say, testifies to his greater desire to keep the peace in the unstable region than to promote justice and truth.



LUKE 23:6–16 Note, this Herod is the tetrarch who ruled Galilee and Perea from 4 BC to AD 39.

**All exegetical content and commentary resourcing for this lesson was provided by the ESV Study Bible Commentary Notes, the Christ Centered Exposition (Luke), and Preaching the Word (Luke).*