

Truth for Today

The Bible Explained

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A Comparison of the Gospels Death

*[Please note : sections in blue type are not broadcast on every radio station.
New King James Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]*

Can I welcome you all to another Truth for Today talk on the comparisons of the Gospels in relation to the life of the Lord Jesus while here on earth. So far, we have looked at the virgin birth, His baptism, temptation, and transfiguration. Today's talk is about the death of the Lord Jesus as seen in the four Gospels. Before we begin to look at the details of the subject it is important to remind ourselves as to why Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, the writers of the Gospels, bring out different points from the same subject or omit certain phrases or incidents that took place.

Matthew in his Gospel is looking at Jesus as the Messiah, the King of Israel who is coming to set up his kingdom. Mark presents the Lord Jesus as the faithful Servant, while Luke brings before us the Lord as the Son of Man and His perfect life. These three Gospels are often called the Synoptic Gospels due to their similarities in how they view the subject, the language they use, the material they include and the general order in which events and sayings are recorded. The word synoptic means seeing together and these three writers, while they tell us of the Lord's death in a similar way, they bring out certain things which when combined together, give us a view of the bigger picture. John in his Gospel brings out the divine aspect of the Lord Jesus as the Son of God and he reveals different sayings and details from the other three Gospel writers.

In comparing the subject of the Lord's death from the four Gospels I would like to look at the subject from three different aspects.

1. His death at the hands of mankind.
2. His sufferings at the hands of a righteous and holy God, and of all that Satan could inflict on Him.
3. His death in relation to you and me.

After His arrest in the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus was bound and taken before Annas where a preliminary trial took place that only John records in ch.18 vv.13-24. At this trial we see the wickedness of man start to come out as one of the officers struck Jesus in the face. He was then led to the house of Caiaphas where the chief priests, scribes, and elders of the Jews came together to condemn the Lord. This trial was illegal as it was held at night out-side of official hours.

It is noted from Matthew and Mark that the religious leaders went out of their way to get false witnesses to accuse Jesus but as Mark points out in chapter 14:59, their accusations broke down and they contradicted each other. They found some that misquote the Lord saying that,

“[He] would destroy this temple made with hands and within three days...will build another without hands.”

The words of the Lord in John 2:19,

“Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”

were referring to His body in that they would destroy it, but He would rise again in three days. He never answered against their lies, but when the chief priest asked if He was the Christ, the Son of God, He spoke to affirm that he was indeed the I AM, and the Son of Man who will come again in glory and power. The chief priest broke another law here by tearing his priestly garment in anger which contradicted the Law in Leviticus 21:10. The Sanhedrin condemned the Lord to death on His answer and the enraged crowd blindfolded Him then spat in His face and assaulted Him and mocked Him saying, “Prophecy who hit you.”

The third trial took place in the early morning and would seem to have been an attempt at formally establishing the verdict of the illegal trial during the previous night. All three of the synoptic Gospels tell us that it was done with some urgency, but only Luke gives the details of what took place. The question, “[Are you the Christ?]” and the answer of the Lord,

“If I tell you, you will [not] believe. ...Hereafter the Son of man will sit on the right hand of the power of God” (Luke 22:67, 69).

It is right that the Gospel of the perfect Man should include those details. A perfect Man, mistreated by men, will sit at God’s right hand. After this they took Jesus to the Roman governor called Pilate.

In the fourth trial we come to what is the first Roman trial which was conducted before Pilate. Matthew 27 vv.11-14; Mark 15 vv.1-5; Luke 23 vv.1-5. [Under Roman rule, the power to implement the death penalty had been removed from the Jewish state, so the Jewish leaders had to take the Lord before Pilate for his decision. In the previous trials the Jewish leaders had condemned Jesus because of His claim to be the Son of God as this was seen to be blasphemy. Here](#) in the political trial under Pilate, the focus was on His claim to be the King of the Jews, a charge of insurrection. The chief priests knew that Pilate would have no interest in a charge based on religion, so they brought this second charge. Pilate’s original summing up was that he could find no fault in Jesus. He then sent him to Herod to be tried. We only find this account in Luke’s Gospel 23:6-12. The Jewish leaders again forcibly accused Him and Herod questioned the Lord, but He answered nothing. Herod’s soldiers put a gorgeous robe on Jesus and mocked Him then sent Him back to Pilate.

When Pilate had gathered all the Jewish leaders, he again said to them that both he and Herod had found no fault in Jesus and therefore he would release Him. But the Jews wanted Barabbas released, one who was convicted of murder, of being a robber, and of insurrection, rather than Jesus who was without any sin. Pilate washed his hands, trying to free himself from the implication of condemning Jesus and gave in to the baying crowd who cried,

“His blood be on us and on our children” (Matthew 27:25).

Barabbas was released, and the Lord Jesus was condemned to death. Pilate went a step further and gave the order to have Him scourged which the Lord had prophesied in Luke 18 vv.31-33. With what follows at the hands of the soldiers, we see just how cruel mankind can be as they subject Him to brutal mistreatment and mockery. There were the taunts, the spitting, and the scarlet robe. The plucking of His facial hair, the crown of thorns, the mock sceptre, and the striking of the His head with the sceptre. The scourging was done with leathered thongs, weighted with jagged edges of bone and lead which tore at the flesh of the Saviour. [How true were the words in Isaiah 53:5,](#)

[“He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.”](#)

It is remarkable that Luke in chapter 3 lists all the relevant leaders both Jewish and Roman at the time when Jesus was a child, which leaves no excuse for any of these men who 'tried' and condemned the Lord Jesus but who did not really know the details of the case before them. They had been in power during the three-and-a-half years of the Lord's public ministry and would have known that there was never any insurrection against Rome in His preaching. All were guilty of condemning the Lord to death.

The Lord was led out of the city to the rock called Golgotha, the place of a skull. Luke uses the Greek word from which, via Latin, is the English Calvary. All the synoptic Gospels mention that Simon of Cyrene was compelled to help carry the cross, but John only mentions that Jesus carried His own cross. It is possible that the Lord carried his cross to the gate of the city, then Simon who was passing by was made to help the Lord.

The Lord was nailed to the cross between two thieves, one on his left and one on his right. The normal way of capital punishment for someone under the Jewish law was by stoning and then for their body to be hung up for all to see. In Psalm 22:16 it was prophesied,

"They pierced My hands and My feet."

And this was fulfilled with His body being nailed to a Roman cross.

Pilate wrote the superscription on the cross in three languages - Hebrew, Greek, and Latin which explains why each Gospel has a different emphasis on what was written, but it would have been, "This is Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." The crowds mocked Him and taunted Him while He hung on the cross. The soldiers gambled over his clothes and gave him vinegar to drink. Pilate's accusation, written in the three languages of those times, would mean that everyone knew who was hanging on that cross, and that He was the King.

Luke uses the word 'superscription' because he presents the Lord Jesus as the perfect Man. Four times in his Gospel we find that Pilate could say he found no fault in this Man, yet the imperfect man condemned the perfect Man to death.

We have seen how man can be blinded by sin to what is truth and the depravity to which he can reach in how the Lord Jesus was treated by his own people and by the Gentile nations. Psalm 22 vv.12-13 say,

"Many bulls have surrounded Me, strong bulls of Bashan have encircled Me. They gaped at Me with their mouths like a raging and roaring lion."

On the cross the Lord paid the punishment for our sin. He suffered all that Satan could throw at Him in his attempt at defeating the Lord Jesus. While Satan and mankind did their very worst to the Lord at the time of His death, we have to fully understand that the Lord Jesus willingly gave up his life, a voluntary sacrifice, in obedience to His Father and for His love for you and me.

"Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father" (John10 vv.17-18).

When we come to the garden of Gethsemane, we can get a glimpse of what it meant for the Lord Jesus as Son of Man to go to the cross, but we can never fully understand the agony of soul as the Lord contemplates what lies before Him.

The synoptic Gospels give us the detail of what took place in Gethsemane which means the place of the oil press. Matthew and Mark give us the detail of the disciples who Jesus chose to go further with Him and of the three prayers of the Lord to His Father. It is in Luke's Gospel that we see the Lord as the dependant Man praying to the Father where He asks Him if He was willing to remove the cup of wrath, but in obedience as the willing victim He says, "Not My will, but Yours be done."

Luke also tells us that an angel appeared to strengthen him. Hebrews tells us that for a time He was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death (Hebrews 2:9). As He prayed His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling to the ground. The intensity of the suffering that lay before Him produced sweat that looked like drops of blood as they fell to the earth. We read words from these Gospels,

"He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed" and "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death" (Matthew 26 vv.37-38).

These words can never portray what it meant to the Lord Jesus as He viewed what lay before Him, but they help us to understand a little of His love for His Father and of His love for us.

In the Gospel of John in which he views the Lord as Son of God, he only tells us in a single verse that He went over the brook 'Kidron' where there was a garden, but there is no mention of what happened there. John omits the events of the garden because the Son of God, the One who walked here as a lonely Stranger, is about to fulfil his purpose for coming into this world, that is, to lay down His life willingly, to pay the price of sin. While on the cross we have the seven statements that the Lord spoke recorded in the Gospels, these words give us a further insight to His love, His suffering and to His power. The first three statements were not connected with His suffering but about others.

Firstly,

"Father, forgive them for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34).

How wonderful that the love and mercy of the Lord Jesus meant He could pray to His Father that the sin of the people should not be known as murder, but as manslaughter. [Some 50 days later Peter was preaching in Jerusalem to the very people who had cried, "Away with Him, crucify Him" that there was salvation through the risen Christ, and we read that there were 3000 souls saved.](#)

The second words that were spoken by the Lord on the cross was to the repentant thief who was hanging there.

"Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in paradise" (Luke 23:43).

Matthew and Mark tell us that at first both the thieves on the cross mocked the Lord, but we find in Luke that one of the robbers realised the One who was hanging on the cross beside him was innocent of His crime and that He was indeed the Saviour. Jesus saw that he had genuine faith and in answer to his request to the Lord, He remembered him. He received the assurance from Jesus that that day he would be with Him in paradise. How wonderful to know that if we trust in the Lord, then when as believers we pass away from this scene, our spirits will immediately be with Christ.

The third statement shows the care of the Lord Jesus for his earthly people. To his mother He said,

“Woman behold your son!” and to the disciple John, “Behold your mother!” (John 19 vv.26 -27).

The One who is the Son of God, could take time to utter these words of love, four to his mother and three to his disciple. When Jesus said these words to John, He knew that there would be a response in John’s heart, and we find recorded in the Gospel of John that he took her into his own home.

The fourth cry was recorded by Matthew and Mark and they both tell us that it was about the ninth hour. Both of these Gospel writers record the cry in the language used by Jesus,

“Eli, Eli lama sabachthani.”

Then they both give its interpretation,

“My God, My God, why have You forsaken me” (Matthew 27:46 and Mark 15:34).

Darkness had covered the land from the sixth hour until the ninth hour. No man was able to see the suffering that the Lord endured at the hands of a Holy and righteous God, and it was at the end of this period of darkness that we can imagine the intensity of that suffering was bearing down hard on the Lord to which end He cried out these words. The cry was prophesied in the first verse of Psalm 22 about a thousand years before the crucifixion. [The answer to the question raised by that cry is found in Psalm 22:3,](#)

[“But You are holy, enthroned in the praises of Israel.”](#)

[It is not possible for God to live among a sinful people but the Lord Jesus, who knew no sin, was made sin for us so that full atonement could be made for sin and a way made possible for God to have fellowship with His people. Indeed the central cry of the cross can only fill the reader with love and thanksgiving for what the Saviour accomplished on the cross.](#)

[It is interesting to note that this is the only instance when the Lord Jesus does not address God as Father. While at the deepest point of His suffering for man’s sin He speaks of His relationship to God as a Man, not the relationship of Son to His Father. This was why He became a Man so that He could pay the penalty of sin.](#)

The fifth cry was “I thirst” which prompted the soldiers to dip a sponge of hyssop in vinegar and put it on His mouth. This time the Lord drank the vinegar. This fulfils the Scripture in Psalm 69:21 where David wrote,

“And for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.”

[The One who made the heavens and earth, the rivers and oceans, could on the cross say “I thirst” but through His death we can drink of the living water. We can think back to when the Lord met the Samaritan woman at the well and said to her,](#)

[“Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst” \(John 4:14\).](#)

Immediately after Jesus drinks the vinegar, John again tells us of the penultimate cry, “It is finished.” What a triumph, the work of redemption complete. In John 6:38 we read,

“For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.”

The Lord Jesus had fulfilled everything, so John then tells us that He bowed His head and give up His Spirit.

We have to turn back to Luke to find the final saying of the cross. We read in Luke 23:46 that,

“He cried out with a loud voice [saying], “Father, ‘into Your hands I commit my spirit.’” Having said this, He breathed His last.”

John 10:18,

“No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself.”

While we can know a little of what the Lord suffered during His crucifixion, we will never be able to plumb the depths of all that He went through to atone for our sins, but we can fix our hope on the triumph of the cross and sin and death being defeated.

There were signs given that the death of the Lord Jesus was not as other men but that He was the Son of God. There was the supernatural darkness that covered the land for three hours in the middle of the day from noon till 3 pm. The veil of the temple was rent from the top to the bottom. The veil which typifies His flesh, has now opened the way that through the death of Christ we have the basis of our approach to God. There was the earthquake when the rocks were torn asunder, and the graves opened. We do not read of anyone coming out of the graves at this time, but Matthew 27:53 tells us that after His resurrection there were those who had believed in Jesus who rose from the dead and appeared to many.

As with all crucifixions the legs of them that hung on the cross were broken so that their death would be speeded up, but we read that when the soldier came to Jesus and found Him dead already, he did not break His legs which again John 19:36 (Darby) states fulfilled the prophesy of Psalm 34:20,

“Not a bone of him shall be broken.”

The soldier then took his spear and plunged it into the Saviour’s side and out came blood and water. Surely the importance of this act of the soldier shows he had no idea what he was doing other than in an evil way. We can cling to the fact that without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin. Hallelujah, we can with confidence sing,

“Would you be free from your burden of sin,
there’s power in the blood.”

Lewis Ellis Jones (1865 – 1936).

because the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin.

What does the death of the Lord Jesus mean to each one of us? There are many different characters mentioned in these chapters of the Gospels, who portray the full sense of human emotions. Pilate, who after interrogating Jesus could say,

“I find no fault in Him” (John 19:6).

Yet was swayed by public opinion and by their evil nature, and still condemned Him to death. The crowd of Jewish people from various walks of life could turn their backs on their Messiah and shout,

“Away with Him, crucify Him” and “We have no king but Caesar” (John 19:15).

Forced with the question today, what will you do with Jesus? Are you with the crowd who would choose a robber and a murderer over the One who came to save you? Men and women today wonder why there is so much evil in the world, but we can look back at the trial of Jesus and see the choice both Jews and Gentiles made at that time. At the foot of the cross there were those who mocked, ridiculed, and scoffed the Lord while others passed by wagging their heads and others stood afar off gazing at the spectacle of Jesus on the cross. Many today scoff at the salvation offered by trusting in Jesus and many are indifferent to the Gospel message or not interested in the Saviour.

We see in the two thieves on the cross, that both had the same opportunity, one trusted in Jesus and received eternal life, the other rejected Him and will spend eternity in hell. We have a choice to make for by trusting in Jesus and on the finished work of His sacrifice for sin, we can have peace with God knowing that our sins are forgiven and our place in heaven is reserved. While there were some who loved the Lord who watched as He hung on the cross, there were also hundreds of onlookers at His death. Only one man, a Centurian, when he witnessed the events of the cross, could glorify God and say, “Truly this man was the Son of God!” There is only one way of salvation and that is through trusting in the finished work of the Lord Jesus upon Calvary’s cross where He paid the penalty of sin. If you are still in your sins and have not yet accepted Him as your Saviour, you have the opportunity to do so now before it is too late.

The Lord Jesus asked Christians to do one thing and that was to remember Him in His death. As believers it is a privilege that as often as we can, we come together with fellow believers to the breaking of bread service to remember Him and to praise and worship Him for who He is and all that He has done.

The words of Bryan and Sally Haworth’s hymn, ‘What kind of love is this’¹ sum up who and what the Lord Jesus did on Calvary.

Thank you for listening to the Truth for Today talk on “Christ’s death” in our “A comparison of the Gospels” series, talk number T1375.

Notes

1. © Bryan and Sally Haworth, No.750 Complete Mission Praise, 2009, Harper Collins Publishers, London

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