

November 17

Luke 23

Mark 15

Matthew 27

John 18 & 19

The morning has broken now on Friday -- the day of the crucifixion -- and events are moving extremely rapid. No one wants to "pull the trigger," but all of the key players agreed - a dead Messiah is much more desirable than a living threat to the security of the political and religious leaders.

Herod Antipas was no great friend of Pontius Pilate. In fact, they hated each other. Luke tells us about that in this chapter, but on the day that Jesus was tried and convicted, these two longtime enemies became friends. Pilate sends Jesus to Herod – Herod wants the magic show, but won't get it. However he appreciates the gesture and begins to be friends with Pilate.

The Sanhedrin and the Romans weren't likely to cooperate either. However, in this endeavor, they worked hand in hand. To each of these individuals and groups, Jesus Christ constituted an enormous threat, and they together would do anything at all to deal with that threat.

The charge they finally agreed upon was blasphemy, for in Jewish Law that was a capital offense. The only problem was that the Jews, about a generation before Christ, had lost the authority to carry out capital sentences. That rested with the Romans. It was necessary for Jesus to be tried and convicted by the Romans. That caused another problem. Blasphemy of the Jewish God was not a capital crime as far as Rome was concerned. So there had to be a different charge for Rome. Claiming to be a king, fomenting seditious riot, refusing to pay taxes to Caesar - all these were serious crimes. The Roman problem is that Jesus never did these things. Pilate is honest enough to admit that and try to release him. But when Pilate hears that Christ is a Galilean, he looks for a way out by pushing Jesus over to Herod.

The hearing before Herod accomplishes nothing, and Jesus is sent back again to Pilate who, like the Sanhedrin, is willing to violate the rule of law in dealing with this case. Though he finds no guilt in Christ, he is willing to flog Him and ultimately to turn him over to the Jews for crucifixion. He knew Christ was innocent. It is clear enough that Pilate had no great desire to kill Jesus. If you read carefully, you'll find he tried to release him five different ways. So, why would he have an innocent man killed?

We get a clue from the response of the crowd when Pilate signaled his clear intention of setting Jesus free. "If you are Caesar's friend you will not let this man go. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar." That was an unveiled

threat. Because of the ruthless manner in which Pilate had quelled a previous riot, the Jews had already sent a delegation to Rome to complain about Pontius Pilate. He was well aware they had seriously eroded his credibility at the Emperor's court in Rome and one more such lobbying effort would probably succeed in unseating him from the procurator's chair. So he sends Jesus to his death.

But really, he didn't send Jesus. Jesus went of his own free will. There is something here that I want you to notice. Nowhere in this account is there any indication at all as to why Jesus Christ had to die. That it was a voluntary act on His part is clear; that it was part of a definite plan is just as clear; even that the death would be followed by a resurrection is noted. But apart from the teaching of the Last Supper, which clearly shows that Jesus saw His death as one of substitution, the death is described but not explained in Luke's gospel.

So why did he die? Well the first reason is to fulfill prophecy.

In this instance, the crucifixion is prophesied. As far back as the time of King David, nearly 1000 years before Christ was born, and several hundred years before crucifixion was first introduced as a form of execution, the crucifixion is predicted - described in incredible detail - all by King David in Psalm 22, one of the most remarkable passages in the entire Old Testament. In Isaiah 53, the prophecy is repeated and clarified, climaxing in Christ's own words.

The second reason is that his death beat death. Now that may seem like an oxymoron, but it is a central truth. Death takes us all eventually. But death loses if there is a path to life beyond the grave. And there is. But the way of forgiveness is through the death of a perfect sacrifice. The perfect one dies to pay for the imperfect ones to have life. Blood takes out stains. Murder creates resurrection. It is the plan of God.

Finally, Jesus dies to change lives.

Even in death, Jesus Christ is changing people's lives: Simon of Cyrene; and then the criminal who was executed beside him, and whose sins were forgiven that day, and to whom the promise of Paradise was made; then the Roman centurion, whose life may well that day have been changed forever; and Joseph of Arimathea, who was forced to make a choice and publicly declare himself to be a follower. He went and took possession of the body and laid it in his own tomb. What a courageous act for a member of the Sanhedrin, the very body that had condemned Christ to death.

Jesus will change your life with his death. But only if you die too. Die to your selfish ways. Die to your willfulness. Give yourself to Jesus. Trust in his death and it will change you forever.