



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics)
Lesson 6.6.1.3 – The Doctrine of Jesus, Son of God, Messiah (Christology)

Jesus' Suffering, Death, and Burial

The four evangelists, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, devote many of their chapters to the last week of Jesus' life **"in the flesh."** This week is called Holy Week. It begins with Palm Sunday, when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a borrowed donkey. It continues with Jesus' last debates with the Pharisees and scribes in the temple courts on Monday and Tuesday. We are not told of any events that happened on Wednesday. We know what happened on Thursday and Friday which the *Apostles' Creed* summarizes with the statements: **"suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried."** The four evangelists tell us of Jesus' last Passover supper with His twelve disciples, His institution of the Lord's Supper, His last words to His disciples (John 14-16), His prayer to His Father (John 17), His agony in Gethsemane, His arrest, His trials before the Jewish Sanhedrin, His trial before the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, His condemnation, His journey to Calvary, His crucifixion, His seven words from the cross, His death, and His burial. Everyone who wants to be a witness for Christ should become thoroughly familiar with all of these events that represent the climax of Jesus' life in His state of humiliation. As it is written, **"He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross"** (Philippians 2:8).

There are two main Old Testament prophecies that show Jesus' suffering and death on the cross and its meaning for us. Psalm 22 begins with the cry: **"My God, My God, why Have You forsaken Me?"** (Psalm 22:1). It then describes Jesus' suffering on the cross a thousand years before it took place. Isaiah 53 not only describes Jesus' suffering, but tells us its cause and effect: **"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... And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all"** (Isaiah 53:5-6). The book of Lamentations, written by the prophet Jeremiah, describes how God poured out His righteous wrath on His chosen city of Jerusalem because of its sin. This description pictures the way God poured out His righteous wrath on His Son Jesus because He was bearing our sins.

Jesus was well aware of what He had to experience in order to carry out His assignment to redeem the world. At the very beginning of His ministry Jesus knew that He would suffer, die and rise again, for He gave the Jewish leaders this sign: **"Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up"** (John 2:19). Around this same time Jesus said to the Pharisee Nicodemus: **"As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life"** (John 3:14-15).

As the time for His suffering and death came closer, Jesus openly referred to what was going to happen to Him. He said: **"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep... 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"** (John 10:11, 18). More than once Jesus took His disciples aside **"and began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day"** (Matthew 16:21).

Although Jesus' entire life was a life of suffering, the full fury of God's wrath began to fall on Him on Thursday evening as He took Peter, James, and John with Him to a spot in the Garden of Gethsemane. Here Jesus prayed in great agony in anticipation of what was to befall Him on the next day. Luke tells us: **"He knelt down and prayed, saying, 'Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me;**

nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done.’ Then an angel appeared to Him from heaven, strengthening Him. And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground” (Luke 22:41-44).

The full punishment for all human sin fell on Jesus on Friday – in particular from noon until about 3:00 in the afternoon. Matthew reports: **“Now from the sixth hour until the ninth hour there was darkness over all the land. And 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?’”** (Matthew 27:45-46). What is the punishment for human sin? It is eternal death, that is, eternal separation from all the blessings of God. That is what Jesus experienced on the cross in our place. He was abandoned and forsaken and cursed by God as the One responsible for all the sin of the entire world of all ages. There is no way we can fully understand what kind of suffering this must have been for One who is in Himself holy and spotless. The apostle Paul wrote to the Galatian Christians: **“Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree’)”** (Galatians 3:13). Paul also wrote: **“For He (God) made Him (Jesus) to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him”** (2 Corinthians 5:21). Jesus took our sin on Himself so that we might become righteous by faith in Him.

Jesus’ suffering and death and their meaning for us was the main topic of the apostles’ preaching, teaching and writing. We can find reference to Jesus’ suffering and death in every one of Paul’s letters. Here are some examples: **“While we were still sinners, Christ died for us... We were reconciled to God through the death of His Son”** (Romans 5:8-10). **“Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and...He was buried, and...He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures”** (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). **“Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma”** (Ephesians 5:2). **“In whom (Christ) we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins”** (Colossians 1:14). **“For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him”** (1 Thessalonians 5:9-10). **“The Man Christ Jesus...gave Himself a ransom for all”** (1 Timothy 2:6). **“Our great God and Savior Jesus Christ...gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people”** (Titus 2:13-14).

The apostles Peter and John also emphasized Jesus’ suffering and death: Jesus **“Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree”** (1 Peter 2:24). **“The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin”** (1 John 1:7). **“He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world”** (1 John 2:2). **“To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, ... to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever”** (Revelation 1:5-6).

The burial of Jesus’ body proves that Jesus truly died, having been punished with the death we deserve because of our sins. **“In the place where He was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. So there they laid Jesus”** (John 19:41-42). The prophet Isaiah had foretold that the Messiah’s burial would be associated with the rich: **“And they made His grave with the wicked – but with the rich in His death”** (Isaiah 53:9). The two men who buried Jesus were rich men: Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea. The place where Jesus was buried was Joseph’s own tomb.

Jesus’ burial is the last phase of Jesus’ humiliation. Jesus’ enemies believed that Jesus’ burial was the end of Jesus forever, but they were concerned that Jesus’ disciples might take His body from the tomb and tell the people He had risen from the dead, as He had foretold. Jesus’ disciples, however, were not in any frame of mind to do such a thing because of their grief and sadness. But just to make sure, Jesus’ enemies asked Pilate for a guard for the tomb. **“Pilate said to them, ‘You have a guard; go your way, make it as secure as you know how’ So they went and made the tomb secure, sealing the stone and setting the guard”** (Matthew 27:65-66).

Questions

1. What events took place during Holy Week?
2. Which Old Testament prophecies foretold Jesus' suffering and death?
3. What is the similarity between the destruction of Jerusalem and Jesus' death?
4. How do we know that Jesus knew He was going to suffer and die from the very beginning of His ministry?
5. Why did Jesus go through such agony in the Garden of Gethsemane?
6. What was Jesus undergoing during the three hours of darkness on Friday?
7. Why was Jesus' suffering on the cross necessary for our salvation?
8. Besides the references listed above, what other references to Jesus' suffering and death can you find in the New Testament letters?
9. What is the last phase of Jesus' state of humiliation?