

Who Killed Jesus? Why Did He Die and Rise?

Preached by Pastor Phil Layton at GCBC on Resurrection Sunday, April 24, 2011

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Matthew 26:3 Then *the chief priests and the elders of the people* were gathered together in the court of *the high priest, named Caiaphas*; ⁴ and they plotted together to seize Jesus by stealth and kill Him. ⁵ But they were saying, “Not during the festival [Jewish Passover], otherwise a riot might occur among *the people*.”

Who Killed Jesus? Answer #1: The Religious Leaders of Israel

This is only part of the answer, and the most obvious answer. But there is a distinction between “the people” in v. 5 and the leaders in v. 3. The people of Israel, at least in large numbers, were fans of Jesus, flocking in masses to Him, following Him to some degree. For religious leaders to try to take Jesus away from those crowds could cause a riot. This is their dilemma: how can they capture and kill Jesus who is surrounded and swarmed by so many Jews who Jesus has drawn away from them and their false teaching? They have to figure out how to seize Him by stealth since His Jewish followers are growing, and *their* followers are shrinking. It seemed every man, woman, and child was chanting “Hosanna” on Palm Sunday. Messianic fervor is at a high, priests/Pharisees are at a low

Jesus publically embarrassed these leaders, silenced them by their own Scriptures that they were supposed to be the experts and the custodians of. He has ruined the business of their money-making extortionists in the temple. He has exposed them for who they are and the emptiness of the religion they had created and corrupted. But how can they get to this guy, this celebrity and sensation of the land, followed by thousands, mobbed constantly day and night, healing everybody and their family members from every possible disease, raising people from the dead, making free food for 5,000+ at a time? Israel’s religious leaders couldn’t compete with that!

And how can they capture a guy with that power and popularity? In comes Judas, in v. 14-16, to help them find Jesus away from the crowds. In v. 47-51, these leaders come secretly at night.

In v. 59, there’s a middle-of-the-night meeting of the chief priests and the Council (Sanhedrin, their Supreme Court). In v. 59-60 these false teachers set up false witnesses against Jesus. In 27:20, these apostate leaders of Israel had enough followers they could persuade a crowd to chant for the blood of Jesus (Mark says they stirred up the crowd). Even the governor could tell this was about envy, in 27:18. In 27:25 the crowd of unbelieving Jews shout “*His blood be on us and on our children!*” And several times Israelites, not just the leaders, but the crowd shouts “*crucify Him!*” There’s no question these Hebrew people called for Christ’s death.

There’s no question Jewish religious leaders were instrumental in the events leading up to Christ’s resurrection. In John 18:11, Jesus says these leaders who delivered Him were “*guilty of greater sin.*” But not all the Jews wanted Him dead, and not even all the leaders:

- Luke’s gospel tells us Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Sanhedrin, opposed this, didn’t vote for Christ’s death
- John’s gospel says Nicodemus the Pharisee trusted in Jesus

- Acts records the salvation of Rabbi Saul of Tarsus, Pharisee of Pharisees, and also that many priests converted to Christ
- Some in the crucifixion crowd would be saved very soon

But to answer the question, ‘Who killed Jesus?’ Answer #1 is that the religious leaders of Israel and some of their people instigated and initiated this trial and called for His death. But Jews didn’t crucify, and at this time in history had no legal power to execute criminals. Which leads to **Answer #2: The Rulers of the Gentiles**

Jewish Law executed by stoning. Jews wouldn’t and didn’t crucify people as far as I know, ever. And the Jewish rulers alone did not and could not kill Jesus. Gentile rulers had that power. 1 Cor. 2:8 says “*none of the rulers of this age has understood, for if they had understood they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.*”

The rulers of the Greco-Roman world, the governing authorities were the ones who enacted and exacted executions by crucifixion.

27:1 *Now when morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people conferred together against Jesus to put Him to death;² and they bound Him, and led Him away and delivered Him to Pilate the governor. [Luke’s gospel adds the detail that they sent Jesus also to the Herod, the Idumean King, then back to Pilate]*

...²² Pilate said to them, “Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?” They all said, “Crucify Him!”²³ And he said, “Why, what evil has He done?” But they kept shouting all the more, saying, “Crucify Him!”²⁴ When Pilate saw that he was accomplishing nothing, but rather that a riot was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd, saying, “I am innocent of this Man’s blood; see to that yourselves.” [symbolic action, but he still has to do it, v. 26b he hands over to be crucified] ...²⁷ Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole Roman cohort [or battalion] around Him.

Who Killed Jesus? Answer #3: The Roman Soldiers

From here the text tells how these Roman soldiers whipped Him, stripped Him, they were hitting on Him, spitting on Him, mocking Him while dropping to their knees and joking “Hail King of the Jews.” He was weakened and beaten to the point He was hardly able to be recognized, as Isaiah prophesied, they bruised Him, abused Him, scourged Him, cursed Him, punched Him, struck Him, spat on Him, laughed at Him, smacked Him down, stabbed a crown of thorns into His skull, brutalized Him, de-humanized Him.

And finally, in v. 35 they strip off His garments and gamble for them, and string Him up on poles like an animal, spikes driven into His hands and feet, to die a slow death by asphyxiation. Rome left criminals up for hours, sometimes days, beside the road so people going in and out of the city would see what Rome did to criminals. Try and imagine driving highway 50 from Sacramento to here and traffic is slow and as you come through El Dorado Hills off to the right they’ve hung up the butchered bloodied bodies of dying humans on telephone poles halfway up, naked or nearly so, dead or nearly so, and above each man is a sign saying what his crime was.

That's physical horror. What about the greater spiritual one? Who killed Jesus?

Answer #4: The Responsibility Includes Our Sin

It wasn't just religious leaders, rulers of Gentiles, Roman soldiers. The responsibility for the death of Christ includes us, our sin.

26:28 Jesus says "*this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins.*" Then goes out to His death...

Whose sins? Not just the few disciples at the meal we call the Last Supper. Christ poured out His blood for many for their forgiveness. In Acts 2, it's some 50 days later on the day of Pentecost, and OT believers of countries all over the Roman empire and beyond are in Jerusalem for the holy day. By a miracle of the Holy Spirit, the disciples can speak in all the language groups of all the people there, and they preach Jesus to all. Peter applies this point this way:

Acts 2:23 "... *this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, **you nailed to a cross** by the hands of godless men and put Him to death.* [in other words, it wasn't your hands that drove the nails in, it was "*by the hands of godless men,*" Romans, but "***you nailed Jesus to a cross and put Him to death***"]

Other hands may have hit the hammers and executed Jesus, but the truth is, in another sense, *you nailed Him to the cross. You put Him to death.* It was your sin, too. You are responsible as well. It was not just sin in general that Jesus bore on the cross. It's yours, Peter says, you nailed Him to the cross, put Him to death. It's your sin. Who is Peter talking to? Verse 9 lists his audience: "*Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia,* ¹⁰*Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya around Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and **proselytes**[Gentile converts],* ¹¹*Cretans and Arabs...*

Africans, Arabs, Assyrians, people visiting from the big country of Rome and little islands in the Mediterranean, non-Jews, people from areas called Iran and Iraq today, Gentiles embracing Judaism. The point is not that all of the thousands of people Peter's speaking to were physically present at the cross. None physically pounded spikes into Jesus, but again in v. 36b: "*Jesus whom **you crucified.***"

And because of your universal guilt, the gospel offer is universal:

³⁸*Peter said to them, "**Repent** [turn from your sin to Christ], and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ **for the forgiveness of your sins**; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.* ³⁹*"For the promise is **for you and your children and for all** who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself."*

Remember how some in the Passover mob had shouted "*His blood be on us and on our children...*"? Peter says his blood can be on us *for forgiveness of sin* for us and our children, all believers. If we see our responsibility in this, we can see our redemption in it. It was not just their sin Christ was dying for, it was my sin as well.

In Matthew 25, right before the text we began with, Jesus explains that whatever we do in this life, good or bad, we do to Him, even if and even though we don't realize it. He says whatever you have done, you have done unto me, and whatever you fail to do, is a sin against me, Jesus says. See, sin is fundamentally against the Lord, and Scripture says when we reject the Lord, we are crucifying Him

Hebrews 6:6, written decades after the historical crucifixion event, says when people turn away from Christ "*they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame.*" Obviously that's not physical, this is decades after the physical event, but the Scriptures say if you reject Christ you are crucifying Him today. If you walk out this room today and have not repented and trusted in Jesus alone, if you reject the gospel offered today, or think you can get to heaven some other way, by good works, being a good person ... if you aren't trusting in Jesus alone to get to heaven, it's as if you are crucifying Him today driving the spear into His heart now!

But His arms spread out on that cross are open to receive in grace if you repent, turn from your sin and trust Him alone as your Lord, as your Savior, as your Substitute, and as your supreme treasure.

Don't trade Jesus for anything! A poet says

"Like Judas, we sell Christ out ... Like the chief priests, we want Christ ... out the way when He doesn't fit our agenda

Like Peter, we have misplaced, fleshly confidence

But we'll deny the Lord when faced with deadly consequence

Like Herod, we're curious about Christ because He's famous

But we quickly get bored with Him when He doesn't entertain us

Like Pilate, we see Christ and find nothing wrong with Him

But when the world chooses the wicked, we go right along with them ... An angry mob who's yelling out 'crucify'

The way they treat the Lord of glory is debased and it's foul

But you miss the point if you don't see your face in the crowd"¹

John Stott: "If we were in their place, we would have done what they did. Indeed, we have done it [as Heb. 6:6 says] ... 'Were you there when they crucified my Lord?' the old negro spiritual asks. And we must answer, 'Yes, we were there.' Not as spectators only but as participants, guilty participants, plotting, scheming, betraying, bargaining, and handing him over to be crucified. We may try to wash our hands of responsibility like Pilate. But our attempt will be as futile as his. For there is blood on our hands. Before we can begin to see the cross as something done for us (leading us to faith and worship), we have to see it as something done by us (leading us to repentance). Indeed, 'only the man who is prepared to own his share in the guilt of the cross', wrote Canon Peter Green, 'may claim his share in its grace'."²

Horatius Bonar: I see the crowd in Pilate's hall, Their furious cries I hear;

Their shouts of "Crucify!" appall, Their curses fill mine ear.

And of that shouting multitude I feel that I am one;

And in that din of voices rude I recognize my own.

I see the scourgers rend the flesh Of God's beloved Son;
 And as they smite, I feel afresh That I of them am one.
 Around the cross the throng I see, That mocks the Sufferer's groan,
 Yet still my voice is seems to be, As if I mocked alone.

'Twas I that shed the sacred blood; I nailed him to the tree;
 I crucified the Christ of God; I joined the mockery.
 Yet not the less that blood avails To cleanse me from sin,
 And not the less that Cross prevails To give me peace within.

Once you realize your spiritual guilt in Christ's death, your share in this horrific scene, your sin is what drove Jesus there and kept Him there as your substitute, if you have trusted in Him alone for what He did for you on the cross, it's as if the sign above the cross reads your crimes that He is paying for in full so you don't have to. Then you can understand your forgiveness from your sin by a just judge because justice must be served and the wages must be paid. He paid the fine *for* sin, my sin. He died *because of* sin, my sin, me

Behold the Man upon the cross, **My sin upon His shoulders**
Ashamed I hear my mocking voice, Call out among the scoffers
 It was **my sin that held Him there** Until it was accomplished ...

While we were His enemies as much as anyone at the foot of the cross, as if we were there, Romans 5 says, Christ died in our place. *In my place condemned He stood*. I was responsible. I was guilty. Jesus was not responsible or guilty. But He stepped in and took my guilt, my place, my punishment so the judge of the universe can set me free.

Who killed Jesus? Historically and physically, it was the religious leaders of Israel, the rulers of the age, and the Roman soldiers, but spiritually, the responsibility included my sin. It goes even deeper.

Who Killed Jesus? Answer #5: The Real Cause is God

Jesus made clear no human could take His life from Him. In John 10:18 He said "*No one takes my life from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have the authority to lay it down ... This I have from the Father*" No mere man could take the life of the Lord, it had to be God the Son Himself laying down His own life, giving up His own life, in accord with God the Father's will and timing.

The leaders had tried to kill Him before, but they could not, it says, because His time had not yet come. This time had been set by God the Father and agreed to by God the Son long before creation. We read in Hebrews of "the blood of the eternal covenant" and in Titus that God's covenant plan of redemption was promised within the Trinity before time began, and in Revelation that Jesus was the lamb slain from before the foundation of the world. Look at v. 23.

Acts 2:23: *Jesus was handed over by God's predetermined plan*. It was not ultimately man, it was God's plan for His Son Jesus to die. And in v. 24, God raised Him from the dead. *God kills and raises*.

Larry King (who is Jewish) asked John MacArthur on his program “Who Killed Jesus?” John quoted from this passage in Acts 2, and said ‘If you ask ultimately, who killed Jesus? God killed Jesus, because He had to put Him on the cross for our sins. But that doesn’t relieve the people involved of culpability. God overrules all of that for his own end ... [and Deepak Chopra, the new age guru next to him interrupts Larry’s question with some babblings about nothing, and then MacArthur interrupts him and says] there are secondary causes, that are human. The primary cause is God.’

If you look at Acts 4:27, it makes it even clearer the ultimate cause

²⁷ *“For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, ²⁸ to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur.*

There’s everybody, Israel, Jews, Gentiles, the rulers Herod and Pontius Pilate, but v. 29 they were tools in the Hand of God to do what His purpose had predestined to occur! God ultimately did it! In the chapter we began in, Matt. 26, right before Jesus goes to His trial He knew would lead to His death, He prays to His Father 3x “... *Thy will be done*” (v. 42). And He goes to the cross so God’s will is done, not man’s. He described His suffering on the cross as a cup *the Father gave Him*, not anything mere man did or gave.

And when He explained to His disciples in that chapter what’s about to go down in His crucifixion and their abandonment, He quotes God from the OT prophet: “*I will strike the Shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered*” (26:31). He’s quoting God saying “***I will strike the shepherd ...***” It wasn’t mere men striking Jesus the Good Shepherd, God struck Jesus as well.

In fact, Jesus said nothing to the humans who struck Him but in chapter 27, on the cross He cries out “*My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?!*” (v. 46). Not “why are they, the people doing this to me, why have my disciples left me?” No, “*why have You?!*”

As darkness covers the land for 3 hours, God is bringing judgment, not on the sinners in Jerusalem, but on the sinless Savior on the cross who God is pouring His cup of wrath out upon, treating Him on the cross as if Jesus had committed all the sins of all the people He is redeeming, so He can treat them as if they had never sinned and as if they had lived the perfect life of Jesus. The sinlessness of Christ is given to the redeemed whose sinfulness is put on Christ and punished in Christ by God, killing Christ! 2 Cor. 5:21 “***God made Him who knew no sin [sinless Jesus] to be sin on our behalf so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.***” Wow!

Isaiah 53 says the Messiah was ultimately “***stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted ...*** [and it explains why:] ***the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him*** [on Jesus, v. 4, 6. God caused this!] ... ¹⁰ ***But the LORD was pleased To crush Him ...***

*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son ...
For God so loved the world that He killed His only begotten Son...
For God so loved the world that He crushed His only begotten Son*

Isa. 53 explains: “*He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities ... All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him ... He was cut off out of the land of the living For the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke was due? ...the LORD was pleased To crush Him ... as a guilt offering [i.e., as substitute for our sins, in our place]... the Righteous One ... will justify the many, As He will bear their iniquities ... Because He poured out Himself to death, Yet He Himself bore the sin of many, And interceded for the transgressors.* (Isa 53:5-6, 8, 10-12)

God killed His Son who willingly gave Himself up for our sin. God raised Him from the dead to His right hand where He lives, and makes intercession for all who repent of their sin and look to Christ in faith as the only Mediator and their only hope of salvation

The Plan of Salvation in Romans

1. We Must Be Saved *FROM* GOD

“*For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men ... But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God*” (Romans 1:18, 2:5)

“*There is none righteous, not even one; There is none who understands, There is none who seeks for God; All have turned aside, together they have become useless; There is none who does good, There is not even one ...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*” (Romans 3:10-12, 23)

2. We Must Be Saved *BY* GOD, *THROUGH* GOD THE SON

“... *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified [declared righteous by God the Judge] as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus*” (Romans 3:23-24)

“*But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.*” (5:8-10)

3. We Must Receive God’s Gift By Grace, By Faith *IN* GOD and *IN CHRIST’S WORK*, Not By Trusting In Our Works

“*For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*” (Romans 6:23)

“*Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. But ... God credits righteousness apart from works ... for our sake also, to whom it will be credited, as those who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, He who was delivered over because of our transgressions [sins], and was raised because of our justification. Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace, in which we now stand*” (Romans 4:4, 6, 24-25, 5:1-2)

“*But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace.*” (Romans 11:6)

“*if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved ... for ‘Whoever Will Call on the Name of the LORD will be saved’*” (Romans 10:9, 13)

“*For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.*” (Romans 11:36)

We’re saved TO GOD – to His glory!

¹ Shai Linne, “Were You There?” Atonement CD

² John Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, p. 59–60.