

The Trial(s) of Jesus

A Reflection on Good Friday, Particularly the Trial, Scourging, and Mocking

Matt 27; Mark 15; Luke 23; John 18:28–19:42; see also 3 Nephi 8

- Jesus in the Hands of the Romans (Mark 15:1–21; Matt 27:1–32; Luke 23:1–32; John 18:29–19:17a)
- At Calvary (Mark 15:22–28; Matt 27:33–38; Luke 23:33–34, 38; John 19:17b–24)
- Activities at the Cross (Mark 15:29–32; Matt 27:39–44; Luke 23:35–43; John 19:25–27)
- Last Moments (Mark 15:33–37; Matt 27:45–50; Luke 23:44–46; John 19:28–30)
- The Burial of Jesus (Mark 15:42–47; Matt 27:57–66; Luke 23:50–56; John 19:38–42)

The day traditional associated with the crucifixion of Jesus, the Friday before Easter, is called “Good Friday” in English either because it is a “holy” Friday, or, more likely, because in English “good” is often an archaic expression for “God,” hence “goodbye” for “go with God.” Accordingly it is “God’s Friday” because on this day was the culmination of God’s reconciling the world to himself through the death of his Son.

But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement. (Romans 5:8-12).

None of the gospels directly date the crucifixion to Friday; this is a deduction from the fact that a sabbath began at sundown shortly after Jesus died. While it is a natural inference that this was the weekly sabbath (sundown Friday to sundown Saturday), the first day of the Passover as a “high day” was also a sabbath (John 19:31; see note 31c in the LDS KJV), making it possible that Jesus was crucified on a Thursday.

Trial, Scourging, and Mocking

Matthew, Mark, and John have Jesus examined and perhaps tried by various Jewish authorities during the course of the night after Jesus’ arrest. Scholarship is divided on whether the Jewish authorities had the right to execute a person condemned for blasphemy, one of the charges discussed in Matthew and Mark. Luke portrays a formal hearing before the Sanhedrin the next morning; this was mostly likely an investigative hearing to gather information for the charges to be laid before Pilate.

Whereas the charge in the Jewish hearing was one of blasphemy, the one laid against Jesus in the Roman trial was political: Jesus claimed to be a king, an offense against the Roman order. Pilate is described in the gospels as indecisive and at times even desirous to let Jesus go. This in no way exculpates him; when political pressure is brought upon him by the Jewish leadership (“If

thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar's friend . . ." John 19:12), Pilate knowingly allowed an innocent man to be executed. In the end, discussions of immediate responsibility are irrelevant. Jesus' death was a critical part of the plan of salvation, and it was made necessary by us. Elsewhere I have written,

. . . what remains important is that judgment took place, and it is both significant and ironic that the two 'trials' of Jesus took place before the two peoples who were most dedicated to and obsessed by law. Just as the two trials reflect the two realities of Christ's identity—as both Son of God and King—so the Jews and the Romans represent all Gentiles and all of Israel (Acts 4:27). Examining the trial should not be for us an issue of assigning culpability—to Judas, the chief priests, or Pilate—for the betrayal and condemnation were necessary parts of the Atonement." ("Roman Trial of Jesus," *From the Last Supper to the Resurrection*, 316)

And the world, because of their iniquity, shall judge him to be a thing of naught; wherefore they scourge him, and he suffereth it; and they smite him, and he suffereth it. Yea, they spit upon him, and he suffereth it, because of his loving kindness and his long-suffering towards the children of men. (1 Nephi 19:9)

After both the Jewish hearing and the Roman trial, Jesus was subjected to abuse: mocking, scourging, spitting. Although often overlooked as we concentrate on the three pivotal points of the Atonement—Gethsemane, Golgotha, and Garden Tomb—this abuse was a prophesied part of what Jesus would suffer for us. The fact some of the most powerful recorded prophecies of the abuse and mockery are found in the Book of Mormon in such passages as 1 Nephi 19:9, 2 Nephi 6:9, and Mosiah 3:9 suggests that they cannot be overlooked. "The focus there is not with when and how the scourging, hitting, and spitting took place, but why. Christ was willing to suffer these things 'because of his loving kindness and his long-suffering towards the children of men.'" (Huntsman, 316–317)