

CSI: Jerusalem

Message 3 - The Murder Scene

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ROLL-IN VIDEO SUMMATION PIECE

So far we've talked about two things . . . two areas of evidence. First of all, we talked about the mystery. There was a death. Jesus was dead. But then, after burial, the dead body could not be found. We talked about the Resurrection – or, to be strictly accurate – the claim of the Resurrection. I love the quote of Antony Flew, the most famous atheist of our time who, shortly before his death changed his beliefs and came to believe – actively and aggressively – in the existence of God.



On the Resurrection and the evidence for the Resurrection Antony Flew wrote:

The evidence for the resurrection is better than for claimed miracles in any other religion. It's outstandingly different in quality and quantity from the evidence offered for the occurrence of most other supposedly miraculous events.

It's time to pay attention when the atheists start saying that the evidence for the Resurrection is compelling.

Secondly, last week, Vic talked to you about the evidence surrounding the New Testament and its credibility. Recently, one of the strongest of the New Testament has been that the church deliberately tampered with the New Testament over the years, changing the story from Jesus as gifted teacher to Son of God. In fact, I did my undergraduate work in Religious Studies at what has become a center for this kind of thought . . . The Department of Religion at UNC Chapel Hill.

So, what about it? Did the church tamper with the text. I'm not going to re-preach last week's message but I'll quote one scholar. Dr. Bruce Metzger of Princeton University. When asked about any variations in the copies of the New Testament which worked their way through the church during the first 3-4 Christian centuries the leading scholar in the world on the subject said very simply:

The variations between the manuscripts are almost always very minor. And, even the more significant variations do not overthrow any doctrine of the church.

. . . it has increased the basis of my personal faith to see the firmness with which these materials have come down to us, with a multiplicity of copies, some of which are very ancient.

When asked if scholarship had diluted his faith, Dr. Metzger answered:

On the contrary, it has built it. I've asked questions all my life. I've dug into the text. I've studied this thoroughly. And, today, I know that my confidence in Jesus has been very well placed. Very well placed indeed.

Moral of the story is simply this. There is a case to be made – a strong case indeed – for both the Resurrection of Jesus and the reliability of the New Testament.

I also love this quote, from another atheist. “If Jesus is raised from the dead then the New Testament is exactly what it claims to be – revelation from God.”

Mmmm. Makes you think.

This week we're going to look at another aspect of Jesus and his death. The Murder Scene. The place of his death. We'll consider the evidence for it. And then implications of it.

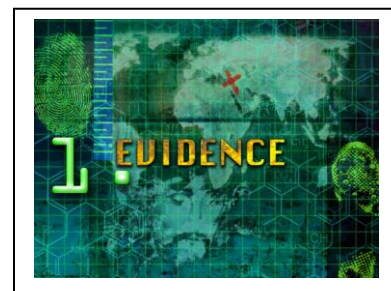
Let's pray.

PRAYER

READ SCRIPTURE . . . JOHN 19

I. Evidence

Some people might think that pursuing the subject of the evidence around Jesus' crucifixion is unnecessary. I beg to differ. This is a crime scene . . . and our work is incomplete if we do not consider the scene of the crime itself.



I've already spoken a fair number words. Let's change to pictures. Actually, I took these pictures when I was in Israel a number of years ago. You might say I did my own "crime scene investigation".

I want to take you through some very simple statements made in John 19 about the place where Jesus was crucified. Five of them to be exact:

1. Jesus was crucified at a place called "The Hill of the Skull" or "Golgotha"

¹⁷ Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha).¹

2. That place was near the city

²⁰ Many of the Jews read this sign, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city²

3. Nearby, there was a garden

⁴¹ At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden,

4. In that garden there was a tomb

and in the garden a new tomb

5. at the time of Jesus' death that tomb could contain, at most one body

in which no one had ever been laid.³

6. That tomb itself was cut out of rock

So Joseph bought some linen cloth, took down the body, wrapped it in the linen, and placed it in a tomb cut out of rock.

7. That tomb had a stone covering which was in some sense circular

Then he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb.⁴

¹*The Holy Bible : New International Version.* 1996, c1984 (Jn 19:17). Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

²*The Holy Bible : New International Version.* 1996, c1984 (Jn 19:20). Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

³*The Holy Bible : New International Version.* 1996, c1984 (Jn 19:41). Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

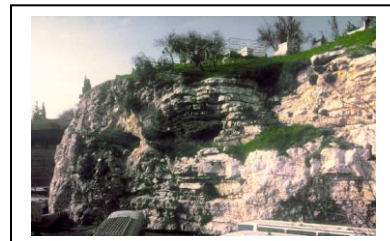
So what do we have? A description of a crime scene – the actual place of the death of Jesus – that must meet the following criteria:

1. It must be a hill that uniquely looks like a skull.
2. It must be near the city of Jerusalem.
3. There must be a garden nearby
4. In that garden there must be a tomb.
5. That tomb must be cut out of rock.
6. It must have some kind of a circular stone enclosure.
7. It cannot have more than one body . . . and if the story is really to be true, it must be empty.

And, it would be much better, if this sight was not preserved from antiquity because then one could legitimately claim that it was created in ancient times in order to fit the story. Thus, a much more modern discovery of this sight would be far preferable.

Let me show you some picture. Pictures that I took. I went to Jerusalem. Myself. I did the investigation with my own eyes. The question was far too important to leave to others to do:

I want you to look closely at this picture. Do you recognize anything? Let me highlight a couple of things for you just in case you're missing it. Do you now see the eyes? The nose? The mouth? Does not this small hill with a limestone cliff on this one side looking eerily like a skull? It's quite amazing, isn't it?



Now notice this picture. It's of the city walls of Jerusalem, immediately adjacent to the Damascus Gate. Guess what's just across the road from that gate? That's right. The Hill of the Skull. Remember, the New Testament told us that Golgotha would be "*near the city*". I think across the street from the walls qualifies.



⁴The Holy Bible : New International Version. 1996, c1984 (Mk Zondervan.

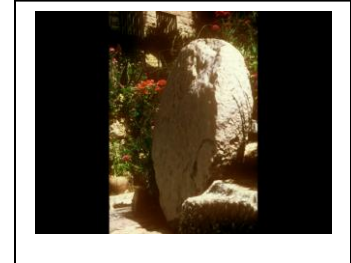
Now, the next point. The hill must not only look like a skull and be near the city. It must also have a garden nearby. I love this picture. What you see is a cistern – an underground pool or tank dug out of pure rock to hold large quantities of water. Why would you do such a thing? Well, if you were planting a garden in the arid environment of Israel then a reliable source of water would be handy, would it not? You guessed it. This cistern is just footsteps away from the Hill of the Skull. And, yes, there is a garden planted there today but what really matters is the discovery of this cistern which dates back to the time of Jesus telling us that there was a garden in this location during the time that Jesus died.



The evidence is building. Perhaps we have found the actual crime scene. The place where Jesus died. But we're not there yet. All the evidence has to match up. John 19 says that in this garden, near the hill which looks uniquely like a skull which must be near the city of Jerusalem there must also be a tomb. A tomb carved out of rock.



But, there must be more. This tomb, carved out of stone, in the garden, near the hill which looks like a skull, near the ancient city of Jerusalem must also have an enclosure made out of stone which is circular in some sense.



And, one more thing, that tomb can have at most one body in it. Guess what. I've been inside that tomb. I took that picture. Let the evidence speak for itself. There is a tomb, carved out of rock, with a circular covering made out of stone, in an ancient garden dating to the time of Jesus, footsteps away from a hill which looks exactly like a skull which, in turn, is just outside the ancient walls of the city of Jerusalem.



And, guess what, there is no more than one body in that tomb. Actually, the story is better than that. I've seen it with my own eyes. I took that picture.

The tomb is empty.

What do we have? What's the evidence? There is a strong suspicion that we have found the actual crime scene. The place where it happened. And while I don't have time to go into it this morning, there is a precise correlation between not only the scene of Jesus' death as it is described in Scripture and the objective evidence which you've just seen but

also between the method of Jesus' death as it was described in Scripture and the medical evidence surrounding crucifixion. Dr. Samuel Houghton, MD, physiologist at the University of Dublin, notes the minute detail in John's Gospel and its medical accuracy with regard to Jesus' crucifixion and concludes:

The importance of this is obvious. It shows that the narrative John 19 could never have been invented; the facts recorded must have been seen by an eye-witness.

Similarly, scholarly research uncovered in 1969 detailed descriptions of Roman crucifixion and found precise agreement in detail with the Gospel accounts of Jesus' death.

So here is the real question . . . if the evidence is compelling, if the Bible so accurately describes the method of Jesus' death, and if we can verify that method and location with objective evidence then isn't it only reasonable to then ask the question of whether or not the Bible is accurate as to the meaning of Jesus' death?

II. Implications

Here is the simple reality. The cross of Jesus Christ takes us to the primal truths about man and God. It uncovers things about us – things that we may not really want to know. And it reveals things about God – things which are both terrible and wonderful at the same time.



The cross of Jesus tells us that sin is real, deep, profound. Fixable only by something as radical as the death of the Son of God. It tells us that God is more than loving. It tells us that He is holy. That sin is serious to him.

I want to do some theology here . . . and talk about a guy who was recently on the cover of Time magazine. Rob Bell. Perhaps you've heard of him. Bell has written a book – a Christian book – entitled "Love Wins". He's articulate and insightful. I appreciate some things Bells says and I think he often has the right tone with which to speak to those outside the church.

But Bell is wrong some things . . . in my opinion seriously wrong. Let me read a quote or two to you and use that as an opening through which to talk to you about the meaning of the cross of Christ. Bell writes:

"Many have heard the gospel framed in terms of rescue. God has to punish sinners, because God is holy, but Jesus has paid the price for our sin, and so we can have eternal life. However true or untrue that is technically or theologically,

what it can do is subtly teach people that Jesus rescues us from God." (p. 182) ". . . the violent, demanding God, the one people need Jesus to rescue them from." (p. 184)

I see where he's coming from. Too many Christians, and preachers, when they have talked about the cross and the wrath of God have painted God as a loose cannon. They have an angry God and you at times they seem like angry people. That's different from grace. I get it.

But the theology is wrong. And weak. And muddled. Let me talk to you about the cross of Jesus and both the holiness and grace of God.

The cross repaints the picture of Moses on the mountain in Exodus 33. He asks to see God and God says you can't, not directly. I'm way too much for you, sinful man. No one can see me and live. But there is a way, Moses. A way for you to be close to me. I'll put you in that cleft in the rock and I will cover you with my hand and so my glory will pass by and you will see my glory and hear my voice.

In other words Moses, you must hide from God. And you must hide from God, in God.

This is exactly what Paul had in mind when, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit he wrote:

Romans 5:9

⁹ Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! ⁵

And what about Isaiah 53:

Isaiah 53:5-6

***⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was upon him,
and by his wounds we are healed.***

***⁶ We all, like sheep, have gone astray,
each of us has turned to his own way;
and the LORD has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.⁶***

⁵*The Holy Bible : New International Version.* 1996, c1984 (Ro 5:9-10). Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

⁶*The Holy Bible : New International Version.* 1996, c1984 (Is 53:5-6). Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

The cross of Jesus means two things at the same time. God is holy and sin must be accounted for. Paid for. There is such a thing as the wrath of God but notice that God's anger is nothing like human anger which is so often self-centered, capricious, and deeply flawed. When God is angry it is a perfect anger . . . completely just.

But the cross of Jesus means more than the wrath of God, it also means that God is gracious because Christ takes our place. God punishes sin and acquits us. Holiness and grace. Justice and mercy. These seemingly incompatible things meet perfectly in the cross.

As Charnock wrote, "God has sheathed the sword of his wrath in the body of his own dear son upon the cross."

And I still love Reinhold Niebuhr's quote diminishing the liberal view of Christianity that Bell is flirting with . . . liberalism leaves us with "a God without wrath saving a mankind without sin by the ministration of a Christ without a cross."

My friends, take away the wrath of God and you have taken away the grace of God. Unless we are guilty the acquittal means nothing. And we have done more than violate the Law of God, when we did so we violated God. As David said so penetratingly, "Against you and you only have I sinned."

Remember the hymn, "And on that cross as Jesus died, the wrath of God was satisfied."

What's it mean? Consider the words of Jesus himself:

John 10:14-16

¹⁴ "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me—¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep."⁷

Consider also that the Bible tells us that when Jesus died, he died an innocent man for even the cynic Pontius Pilate declared him so:

John 18:38

With this he went out again to the Jews and said, "I find no basis for a charge against him."⁸

The heart of the story is this:

⁷*The Holy Bible : New International Version*. 1996, c1984 (Jn 10:14-16). Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

⁸*The Holy Bible : New International Version*. 1996, c1984 (Jn 18:38). Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

2 Corinthians 5:21

²¹ God made him who had no sin to be sin^a for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.⁹

Stunningly, the Son of God became the cursed of God in the process:

Galatians 3:13 (quoting Deu 21:23)

¹³ Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.”^{f10}

Calvin wrote, “Faith apprehends an acquittal in the condemnation of Christ, a blessing in his curse.”

What’s the meaning of it all?

1 Peter 1:18-19

¹⁸ For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers,¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.¹¹

Romans 5:6-8

⁶ You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.⁷ Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die.⁸ But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.¹²

I am in favor of the wrath of God. I want a God who is holy and just. Who is angry about the slaughter of the Jews, the genocide in Rwanda, the killing of children in the womb. To not be angry about those things would be morally wrong. I want a God who

^a Or *be a sin offering*

⁹*The Holy Bible : New International Version.* 1996, c1984 (2 Co 5:21). Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

^f Deut. 21:23

¹⁰*The Holy Bible : New International Version.* 1996, c1984 (Ga 3:13). Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

¹¹*The Holy Bible : New International Version.* 1996, c1984 (1 Pe 1:18-19). Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

¹²*The Holy Bible : New International Version.* 1996, c1984 (Ro 5:6-8). Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

is incensed at the abuse of the sex slave trade, rape, child abuse, corporate greed that drives people into greater and greater debt, and yes, the wanton abuse of the environment.

I do not want a God who has my often tepid, and lukewarm reaction to sin for He could he then be the Just Judge of the universe?

But, amazingly, God is more than just. More than holy. More than angry about sin. God is also gracious. Merciful.

Indeed, there is only one answer for fallen man. Christ crucified.

Christ died. Christ became sin. Christ suffered the wrath of God. If you want the picture of what God's punishment for our own sins would look like, consider the cross. But Christ took our place. So that we can be forgiven and restored and, evenmoreso, in Christ God began reclaiming the whole of Creation, the whole universe, the whole of history, the whole of time. And beyond. This is no small event.

Isn't it true that we know this in our lives, that it's a common observation in life, many times something bad must happen so that something good can happen. That's a pattern often observed. Something bad must happen so that something good can happen. Maybe it's true in life because that is one of the clues to how God has done his greatest work of all.

I love how John Calvin summed it up:

Suppose we learn, as Scripture teaches, that we were estranged from God through sin, were heirs to wrath, subject to the curse of eternal death, excluded from all hope of salvation, beyond every blessing of God, the slave of Satan, captive under the yoke of sin, destined finally for a dreadful destruction and already involved in it; and that at this point Christ interceded as our advocate, took upon himself and suffered the punishment that, from God's righteous judgment threatened all sinners; that he purged with his blood those evils which had rendered sinners hateful to God; that by this expiation he made satisfaction and sacrifice duly to God the Father; that as intercessor he has appeased God wrath; that on this foundation rests the peace of God with men; that by this bond his benevolence is maintained toward them. Must not our hearts be even more moved by all these things which so vividly portray the greatness of the calamity from which we have been rescued. (Institutes, Book 2, chapter 16, point 2)

ENTER ARTISTS AND ART WORK RE THE CROSS OF CHRIST TO
"JESUS PAID IT ALL"