

## I. Set Up

A. Welcome / Guests / The world is full of questions. What do you think the most important question ever might be? We are going to reflect on that a bit as we enter continue with the final chapters in Luke.

## II. Introduction

A. Most people who are famous, are famous because of what they did. Jesus is famous in large part because of how he died. Make no mistake, he did a lot.

1. He gave us the greatest ethical system we have.

2. He launched the church – this association of grace, hope and love that is based on his life and work – and which overwhelmed the Roman Empire and kept going. It is now everywhere – it is more everywhere than Google or McDonalds. He did this with no money and a bunch of unimpressive people.

3. Jesus healed people, he fulfilled prophecy, he attacked corruption, he cared for the poor and oppressed.

B. I do not want to suggest that he didn't do amazing things. He did. But the focus of the Gospels is on his death. And we are just about there.

## III. It's now early Friday morning on the day we call "Good Friday."

A. Let me pause here – as I have before – to note that we do not know why it's called "Good Friday," and to remind you that it's only called Good Friday in America. In other countries it's called *Holy Friday*, *Passion Friday*, *Sorrowful Friday*, *Long Friday*, *Friday of the Lament* or something like that. It's called somber things, not "good." We do not know why we call it Good Friday.<sup>1</sup>

B. I am not sure what to make of that, other than to say, the name "Good Friday" is a bit of a mystery. And, it was good for us. The fact that God did everything that needs to be done for us, that he satisfied the needs of justice and love – through the substitutionary death of his son, is an amazing thing that we can celebrate.

## IV. Thursday included the Passover meal; Judas betrayal, prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane and his arrest.

A. There'd been a brief scuffle, but he quickly restored calm, announced that he wasn't going to fight. Indeed, he pointed out that he had never been hiding. He'd come with them.

B. The disciples then scattered and he was led away. The verses just before our passage report on Peter betraying Jesus. I am reading now, Luke 22, beginning with verse 63.

V. **The men who were guarding Jesus began mocking and beating him.** We can be cruel to each other, including – sometimes, especially, to the good. Good can make bad feel worse about itself. Bad can feel as though good is judging it when it is not. Good can feel judgmental without intending to.<sup>2</sup> Whatever was going on, they beat him.

VI. **V64: They blindfolded him and demanded, "Prophecy! Who hit you?" And they said many other insulting things to him.**

**A.** Close your eyes for a second. Now imagine that someone is about to hit you. // You can open your eyes. My point is, getting punched is bad. Getting punched when you have no idea where you are going to be punched, and then waiting for the next punch, is worse.

**B.** There are a few things to see here that I don't want you to miss. The first is the irony in what's going on. These thugs are taunting Jesus, asking, "Which one of us hit you?" They are doing this because a prophet was expected to be able to avoid getting caught.

1. Back in 2 Kings 1, there is an account of Ahab trying to kill the prophet Elisha. Ahab has fifty soldiers chasing him. They trap Elisha on hill and yell, "Man of God come down." Elisha says, "If I am a man of God, fire will come down and kill you." And it does.

2. That is a prophet. A prophet has power. A prophet doesn't get arrested. So they taunt Jesus, saying, "You're no prophet. If you were a prophet you wouldn't have gotten caught." Of course, Jesus was a prophet. And the irony is, He'd not only recently predicted that Peter would deny him and Judas would betray him, He'd just predicted his own suffering – including the fact that he would be mocked and beaten.

3. And, if you've arrived in Luke 22 after reading the first twenty-one chapters, it's clear to you that Jesus could overpower these guys without lifting his little finger. You don't think: Jesus is getting owned by, everything is falling apart. You marvel that he accepts this suffering without fighting back.

**C.** A second thing to see is who kills Jesus. One of the things that supposedly fuels anti-Semitism, is the charge that the Jews killed Jesus. That's not really what happened.

1. First, technically it's the Romans who kill Jesus. The Bible is a Jewish book. Starting with Genesis 12 through the middle of the Book of Acts – which is about ninety percent of the book, just about everyone is a Jew. Jacob, Joseph, Moses, David, Mary, Esther, Peter, Paul, Jesus – pretty much everyone. That said, Jesus ends up being killed by the Romans. Had the Jews been in charge, Jesus would have been stoned to death for blasphemy not hung on a cross for sedition. This was a Roman death.

2. Secondly, if you read Luke, you do not to come away blaming the Jews or the Romans, you come away thinking, "this is on me!" Oh my goodness. Jesus, the Son of God, the perfect man, died for me. In some churches, during a traditional Good Friday service, the entire passion scene – where Jesus dies – is read out loud. There are a few other things going on – you pray and sing some songs – but the service is given over to reading of the events from his arrest to his crucifixion. It's officially a responsive reading, but only one small part is saved for the congregation to read aloud. The one part that is reserved for us to read aloud is where the crowd yells, "Crucify him." That's because, that's our role. That's our part. The suggestion is, we're responsible. In many ways, we're like Judas.

3. And by the way, if you are really paying attention, you pick up on two other things: 1) The New Testament suggest that the Father send His Son to His death. So, he takes responsibility; and 2) Jesus reports that he willingly goes to his death. No one takes my life from me, I willingly lay it down.<sup>3</sup>

4. It turns out that, though there are many we might say are guilty of Christ's death – the Romans, God the Father, Jesus, ourselves – the Jews are not a viable option.

D. Let me keep reading:

**VII. V66: At daybreak, the council of the elders of the people, both the chief priests and the teachers of the law, met together, and Jesus was led before them. “If you are the Messiah,” they said, “tell us.”**

A. Here is the first jury Jesus stands before. It's before the Jewish leaders, who do not have the ability to order Jesus killed, because the Romans are in charge. But they are given an opportunity to question Jesus. What question do they ask? *Are you the Messiah?* In other words, are you claiming to be the chosen one?

1. *Messiah* is the Hebrew term for anointed.
2. *Christ* is the corresponding Greek term.
3. English Bibles use a variety of terms - *Messiah, Christ, anointed one, chosen one* – interchangeably.

B. This group asks Jesus, “Do you claim to be the one we have been waiting for?”

**VIII. V67: Jesus answered, “If I tell you, you will not believe me, and if I asked you, you would not answer. But from now on, the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the mighty God.”**

A. Here is what you need to see:

1. They ask Jesus if he was the Messiah, which in their mind was a military leader but not God. Their template for messiah was David. He was a national hero who united the Jewish people, helped them defeat their enemies and become the Super Power of their day. At the time of Jesus, everyone was looking for a Messiah who would overthrow the Romans.
2. Jesus has avoided the limelight so far, in part because he is not going to fulfill those hopes. He does not want to be identified as the Messiah because, he is not interested in doing what they think the Messiah will do. His plans were a lot bigger than that. He was not about their regional politics. He was the Savior of the World.

B. So, they ask, “Are you the Messiah?” And Jesus says, “You wouldn't believe me if I said I was. This conversation is going nowhere. So let me just set it out there. You will see the ‘Son of Man’ seated next to the Father.” Claiming to be the Son of Man is way bigger to them than claiming to be the Messiah.

C. Son of Man is the way Jesus refers to himself often. I think over eighty times in the Gospels. It sounds modest but was not. It comes from Daniel 7:13, where we hear Daniel explaining a vision. There he says:

1. In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

D. So here is what is happening: They ask: Are you the Messiah? Do you think you're going to be a national hero? Are you claiming to be the next David? (Are you here? Use hand to indicate a 6 on scale of 1-10)

E. Jesus says, "You are not going to believe me no matter what I say. So, let's get to the real issue. You are going to see me seated next to God the Father. I am the Son of Man. (In other words, I am here – indicate a 15 on scale of 1-10). Their response?

**IX. V70:** "Wait. What are you saying? Are you kidding me? Did you just say that? **Are you claiming to be the Son of Man?** Are you claiming to be God?" **He replied, "You say that 'I am.'" Which is another amazingly big claim.**

A. And in order to help you see it, I want to read this for you from Mark's account. Mark 14:55 reads:

**1. The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death, but they did not find any. Many testified falsely against him, but their statements did not agree.**

B. All four Gospels record this event. They come at it from different angles to persuade different audiences. Matthew writes for the Jews, Mark the Romans, John the Greeks, Luke for Gentiles. Mark gives more details, noting that the Jewish leaders were having trouble getting any charges to stick.

C. Remember, they do not have the authority to have Jesus put to death. The Romans do not allow them that power. So, they need evidence that Jesus was claiming to overthrow Rome so they can go to Pilate and say, "This man is a threat to Caesar."

**1. Then some stood up and gave this false testimony against him: "We heard him say, 'I will destroy this temple made with human hands and in three days will build another, not made with hands.'" "**

D. Remember, he was claiming to be the Temple. He was now the intersection of God and Man. He was the place to go for forgiveness.

E. They wanted Jesus arrested and killed, but their case was unraveling. They had even paid people to testify against Jesus, but

**1. V59: Yet even then their testimony did not agree. Then the high priest stood up before them and asked Jesus, "Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?" But Jesus remained silent and gave no answer.**

**2. Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?"**

**3. "I am," said Jesus. "And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven."**

**4. The high priest tore his clothes. "Why do we need any more witnesses?" he asked. "You have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?"**

- X. To appreciate what just happened you need to know that the translation of the Hebrew name for God – Yahweh – is “I am.”
- A. When Moses asked God for his name – back in Exodus 3 – God responded by giving Moses his “name name,” not a title. Up until that point, all of the “names” of God had not been names, they had been titles.
  - B. In Exodus 3, God reveals his name. It is *Yahweh*, the tetragrammaton. The only Hebrew word with four consonants.
  - C. And it translates, “I am.” He says to Moses, “When the people ask about me, tell them, “I AM” sent you.”
  - D. And the Jews felt that this name was so sacred, so holy, that they not only would not say it, they would never even write it. But in this passage, Jesus not only says it, he claims it for himself.<sup>4</sup> This is easy to overlook in English. It’s much easier to see in the Greek. And trust me, they got what he was saying.
  - E. So, they ask: Are you claiming to be the next David – someone who will lead us over Rome? Jesus says, “This conversation is going nowhere fast. Let me make this easy. I am claiming to be the Son of Man. I am the I AM.”
  - F. When the priest hears this, he tears his clothes because what he has heard is so blasphemous that he needs to repent for even hearing it.
- XI. V71: **Then they said, “Why do we need any more testimony? We have heard it from his own lips.”**
- A. We do not need any witnesses. He just committed a capital crime in our presence. He’s committed blasphemy. He deserves to die.
  - B. It turns out that the Jewish council has a different problem than they thought. They were trying to get people to testify that Jesus was going to revolt against Rome so the Romans would kill him. Once they start questioning him, he claims to be God. This was a capital offense in their world, but not one the Romans cared about. (The Romans believed in all kinds of gods. What did they care if this man violated Jewish religious law). So, they have the evidence they need but not the evidence the Romans need, so they will spin this and tell the Romans, “He believes he is King and he is trying to undermine Caesar.”
- XII. That’s what is going on at the hastily called trial that happens at sunrise. The Jewish leaders are waking up to the fact that Jesus is not just claiming to be the one to lead the Jews, he is claiming to be God. Those of us who’ve been reading Luke’s account, should not be surprised by this. Of course Jesus is claiming to be God because, Jesus is God. This is chapter 22!
- A. The book opened with an angel announcing his upcoming birth.
  - B. His mother has a supernatural conception and becomes pregnant while remaining a virgin.
  - C. When he is born, holy people swoon in his presence and evil people try to kill him, but God protects him.
  - D. He was a remarkable child.

- E. When he turned 30 He was identified and celebrated by John the Baptist as “the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.” He is then anointed by the Holy Spirit and blessed by the voice of God the Father, saying, “This is my son, who I love and with whom I am pleased.”
- F. In a kind of repeat of what Adam failed at, He goes toe-to-toe with the devil and prevails.
- G. He then not only teaches with a power that no one else has, but he systematically demonstrates his power over sickness, death, evil and nature.
- H. Most recently, He has paraded into Jerusalem as a King:
  - 1. He said he was going there to die.
  - 2. When he gets there, he parades in on a donkey – a clear throwback to Solomon and the prophecies made about the Messiah.
  - 3. He immediately proceeds to go to the Temple and claim that He is replacing it – he is the new epicenter of heaven and earth.
  - 4. He changes the Passover meal by claiming that it is about him. He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.
- I. In the last 24 hours he has predicted who was going to betray him.
- J. He just healed the ear of the Roman guard after Peter lopped it off.

XIII. We are not surprised that Jesus claims to be God. Luke has been developing that argument all along.

- A. Luke has built the case that Jesus is no ordinary carpenter, no ordinary man, no ordinary prophet. He is God the Son. He is the Savior of the World.
- B. So let me call the question. We started this service noting that the world is full of questions. Some more important than others. I would submit to you that questions about Jesus are the most important questions of all. I would submit to you that the most important question you face is, what are you going to do about his claims and his offer. Because Jesus is the biggest question.
- C. And by the way, I’m hardly alone in suggesting this. A while back I heard Larry King interviewed. He was asked, “if you could interview anyone and ask them anything, who would it be and what would you ask?” And he said, “I’d interview Mary, and I’d ask her, ‘Was it really a virgin birth?’ Because that would settle it.”

XIV. If you’ve been around here for any length of time then you know that in various ways – sermons, books, blogs, whatever – I have hammered away at four big ideas:

- A. Jesus is the most influential person to ever live:
  - 1. More books have been written about him than have been written about any other person who ever lived. He has inspired more paintings and music than anyone else.
  - 2. Tens of thousands of schools, colleges, hospitals, orphanages and homeless shelters have been founded in his honor.
  - 3. His followers credit him with their efforts to abolish slavery, educate the masses and end poverty.
  - 4. His birthday is the largest annual celebration in the world.

5. Millions of people have laid down their lives for him, and millions more stand ready to do so.
6. His followers currently number close to two billion.
7. Sixty billion people have lived on this planet. Jesus has had the biggest influence of anyone.

B. Two: He claims to be God. The most influential person to ever live, claims to be God.

1. Some of you have heard otherwise. I did. I heard people say, “Jesus never claimed to be God.” Not true. Not even close to being true. We just looked at one of the many spots where he did just that.
2. The Jewish Council was having trouble in the trial. Pilate will later not want to put Jesus to death. He could have gotten off if he played this right. There was no incentive for him to lie about this. He simply makes his identify clearly known. He says – in the clearest ways he could to those he was talking to – I am god.
3. In other places he will: accept worship, forgive sins, say the he is eternal, claim to be the Creator of everything, say that he will judge everyone.
4. Jesus claims to be the Messiah, Savior, Son of Man, one with the Father. He claims to be God.

C. Number Three: Given what he said, He’s either God or a bad man.

1. I want to prevent you from the non-option that many try to take, saying, “I think Jesus was a great moral leader, a wise, kind, wonderful person, but not God.”
2. That is like bring on “Let’s Make a Deal,” with Monty Hall or Wayne Brady and being offered \$500 or what’s behind the curtain, and saying, I’ll take the new car. And they say, “That’s not an option. It’s \$500 or what’s behind the curtain.” And you say, “I’ll take door number two.” And they say, “Sit down. You lose.”
3. Men and women, understand your options. Jesus forces us to make a choice. He sets this up very clearly. He is God or he’s bad. This has always been the claim. Back in the early 1950s, in *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis famously framed this argument with the trilemma: Jesus is Lord, Liar or Lunatic. Some others expanded this argument to say, “he might also be a legend.” The point being, he’s not a good man He’s not a great moral leader. He’s God or He’s bad.
4. Well, this argument didn’t start with C.S. Lewis. It was big 2,000 years ago. People have always wanted to say, “He’s a nice guy. He’s a good example. He’s a great ethical guide.” The early church said – not an option. listen to what he said: He is savior and Lord or nothing. And they framed it this way: *Alt Deus, alt homo malus*. Jesus is either God or he’s a bad man.
5. When I was over in Cambridge for my sabbatical about five years ago, I studied in a library where lots of noted theologians have studied, and their books are there. I ended up spending a good deal of time studying one of them, R.T. France. Here is what he said about Jesus:

- a) It's worth stating that if you are neutral or ambivalent about Christ, you have not understood his claims or demands. There are many gentle souls out there – “generous philanthropists, high-minded reformers and altruistic social workers. Long may they continue.” Jesus was not one of them. He did not claim to be one of them and he did not act like one of them. Had he, we could look on with some interest, be encouraged and walk away. Christ made demands.
6. Which leads to point four:
- a) One: Jesus is the most influential person to ever live
- b) Two: He claimed to be God
- c) Three: Either He is or He is a bad man.
- D. Four: We have to decide. Make that, you have to decide. I already decided.
1. If he is not God, walk away. If He didn't rise from the dead, walk away.
2. But don't put this off. The decision about Jesus is the most important decision you will face. I am convinced that He is who He claims to be and that you will never get a better offer than the gracious offer he makes. “Come to me and you will be forgiven and gain eternal life.
- E. Men and women, in this country, we have a right to believe whatever we want, but not everything we believe is right.
- F. A Christian is not someone who lives a good life. It is someone who embraces the only one who lived a good life. And then, seeks to do good – to love God, serve others and share the story – but does so from the vantage point of acceptance, not to earn God's favor.
- XV. I am going to close by giving you a chance to place your faith in Jesus. Let me say three things about that.
- A. This is not a bait and switch. I am not going to ask you to raise your hand or walk forward. I am going to say, you need to let someone know before you leave the room. Placing your faith in Jesus is not the end of the road it is the beginning.
1. You can text me
2. You can talk to one of the people up front after the service
- B. What holds most people back is not a lack of evidence, but pride. We do not want to admit that we need God. We want to do this on our own. But we cannot. We do need God. And God loved us enough to show up.

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<sup>1</sup> Some argue that Good is a contraction of God. But, of course, it isn't. God might be a contraction of Good, but it doesn't work the other way. Although, “Good by” is a contraction of “God be with yee.” So, Good may be a contraction of God.

<sup>2</sup> I'd also note that this is one of those situations where everyone is suffering even if they do not see it. Jesus has done nothing to deserve this. But he is not the only one suffering here. The men beating him are destroying themselves as well.

<sup>3</sup> John 10:14-18

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<sup>4</sup> It's not the only time (see John 4 and Mt. 14:22), but it appears to be the first time these leaders have heard him do it or understood what he was claiming.