

## **GREAT LOVE, GREAT SACRIFICE**

*The Passion of Jesus Christ from the Gospel of Luke (19:28–23:46)*

### **SET THE STAGE:**

**Context:** A staged event full of symbolism, cheered on by fans who have followed Jesus from Galilee.

**Tie-in to theme:** God’s great love is expressed in a series of decisions.

**What to listen for:** How Jesus stays focused on a mission, all the things Jesus could have said but didn’t.

### **THE READING:**

**Luke 19:28** After he had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem.

**Luke 19:29** When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, <sup>30</sup>saying, “Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. <sup>31</sup>If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ just say this, ‘The Lord needs it.’” <sup>32</sup>So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. <sup>33</sup>As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, “Why are you untying the colt?” <sup>34</sup>They said, “The Lord needs it.” <sup>35</sup>Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. <sup>36</sup>As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. <sup>37</sup> As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, <sup>38</sup>saying,

“Blessed is the king  
who comes in the name of the Lord!  
Peace in heaven,  
and glory in the highest heaven!”

<sup>39</sup>Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, order your disciples to stop.” <sup>40</sup>He answered, “I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.” *[As good as an admission of his identity.]*

Weeping over Jerusalem, lamenting its spiritual blindness

Cleansing of the Temple

Daily teaching in the Temple, the scrutiny of the chief priests and scribes

- Theological wrangling, especially about the Temple, and its destruction
- The time of the Messiah’s glorious return

**Luke 22:1** Now the festival of Unleavened Bread, which is called the Passover, was near. <sup>2</sup>The chief priests and the scribes were looking for a way to put Jesus to death, for they were afraid of the people.

**Luke 22:3** Then Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot, who was one of the twelve; <sup>4</sup>he went away and conferred with the chief priests and officers of the temple police about how he might betray him to them. <sup>5</sup>They were greatly pleased and agreed to give him money. <sup>6</sup>So he consented and began to look for an opportunity to betray him to them when no crowd was present.

- The preparation and gathering for the Last Supper → Maundy Thursday

[Luke 22:39](#) He came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples followed him. <sup>40</sup>When he reached the place, he said to them, “Pray that you may not come into the time of trial.” <sup>41</sup>Then he withdrew from them about a stone’s throw, knelt down, and prayed, <sup>42</sup>“Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done.” <sup>43</sup>[Then an angel from heaven appeared to him and gave him strength. <sup>44</sup>In his anguish he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground.] <sup>45</sup>When he got up from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping because of grief, <sup>46</sup>and he said to them, “Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray that you may not come into the time of trial.”

[Luke 22:47](#) While he was still speaking, suddenly a crowd came, and the one called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him; <sup>48</sup>but Jesus said to him, “Judas, is it with a kiss that you are betraying the Son of Man?” <sup>49</sup>When those who were around him saw what was coming, they asked, “Lord, should we strike with the sword?” <sup>50</sup>Then one of them struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his right ear. <sup>51</sup> But Jesus said, “No more of this!” And he touched his ear and healed him. <sup>52</sup>Then Jesus said to the chief priests, the officers of the temple police, and the elders who had come for him, “Have you come out with swords and clubs as if I were a bandit? <sup>53</sup>When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness!”

[Luke 22:54](#) Then they seized him and led him away, bringing him into the high priest’s house. But Peter was following at a distance. <sup>55</sup>When they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down

together, Peter sat among them. <sup>56</sup>Then a servant-girl, seeing him in the firelight, stared at him and said, “This man also was with him.” <sup>57</sup>But he denied it, saying, “Woman, I do not know him.” <sup>58</sup>A little later someone else, on seeing him, said, “You also are one of them.” But Peter said, “Man, I am not!” <sup>59</sup>Then about an hour later still another kept insisting, “Surely this man also was with him; for he is a Galilean.” <sup>60</sup>But Peter said, “Man, I do not know what you are talking about!” At that moment, while he was still speaking, the cock crowed. <sup>61</sup>The Lord turned and looked at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, “Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times.” <sup>62</sup>And he went out and wept bitterly.

[Luke 22:63](#) Now the men who were holding Jesus began to mock him and beat him; <sup>64</sup>they also blindfolded him and kept asking him, “Prophecy! Who is it that struck you?” <sup>65</sup>They kept heaping many other insults on him.

[Luke 22:66](#) When day came, the assembly of the elders of the people, both chief priests and scribes, gathered together, and they brought him to their council. <sup>67</sup>They said, “If you are the Messiah, tell us.” He replied, “If I tell you, you will not believe; <sup>68</sup>and if I question you, you will not answer. <sup>69</sup>But from now on the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the power of God.” <sup>70</sup>All of them asked, “Are you, then, the Son of God?” He said to them, “You say that I am.” <sup>71</sup>Then they said, “What further testimony do we need? We have heard it ourselves from his own lips!”

[Luke 23:1](#) Then the assembly rose as a body and brought Jesus before Pilate. <sup>2</sup>They began to accuse him, saying, “We found this man perverting our nation, forbidding us to pay taxes to the emperor, and saying that he himself is the Messiah, a king.” <sup>3</sup>Then Pilate asked him,

“Are you the king of the Jews?” He answered, “You say so.”<sup>4</sup> Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, “I find no basis for an accusation against this man.”<sup>5</sup> But they were insistent and said, “He stirs up the people by teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee where he began even to this place.”

[Luke 23:6](#) When Pilate heard this, he asked whether the man was a Galilean.<sup>7</sup> And when he learned that he was under Herod’s jurisdiction, he sent him off to Herod, who was himself in Jerusalem at that time.<sup>8</sup> When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had been wanting to see him for a long time, because he had heard about him and was hoping to see him perform some sign.<sup>9</sup> He questioned him at some length, but Jesus gave him no answer.<sup>10</sup> The chief priests and the scribes stood by, vehemently accusing him.<sup>11</sup> Even Herod with his soldiers treated him with contempt and mocked him; then he put an elegant robe on him, and sent him back to Pilate.<sup>12</sup> That same day Herod and Pilate became friends with each other; before this they had been enemies.

[Luke 23:13](#) Pilate then called together the chief priests, the leaders, and the people,<sup>14</sup> and said to them, “You brought me this man as one who was perverting the people; and here I have examined him in your presence and have not found this man guilty of any of your charges against him.<sup>15</sup> Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us. Indeed, he has done nothing to deserve death.<sup>16</sup> I will therefore have him flogged and release him.”

[Luke 23:18](#) Then they all shouted out together, “Away with this fellow! Release Barabbas for us!”<sup>19</sup> (This was a man who had been put in prison for an insurrection that had taken place in the city, and for murder.)<sup>20</sup> Pilate, wanting to release Jesus, addressed them again;<sup>21</sup> but they kept shouting, “Crucify, crucify him!”<sup>22</sup> A third time he said to them, “Why,

what evil has he done? I have found in him no ground for the sentence of death; I will therefore have him flogged and then release him.”<sup>23</sup> But they kept urgently demanding with loud shouts that he should be crucified; and their voices prevailed.<sup>24</sup> So Pilate gave his verdict that their demand should be granted.<sup>25</sup> He released the man they asked for, the one who had been put in prison for insurrection and murder, and he handed Jesus over as they wished.

[Luke 23:26](#) As they led him away, they seized a man, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming from the country, and they laid the cross on him, and made him carry it behind Jesus.<sup>27</sup> A great number of the people followed him, and among them were women who were beating their breasts and wailing for him.<sup>28</sup> But Jesus turned to them and said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.<sup>29</sup> For the days are surely coming when they will say, ‘Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never nursed.’<sup>30</sup> Then they will begin to say to the mountains, ‘Fall on us’; and to the hills, ‘Cover us.’<sup>31</sup> For if they do this when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?”

[Luke 23:32](#) Two others also, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him.<sup>33</sup> When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left.<sup>34</sup> [Then Jesus said, “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.”] And they cast lots to divide his clothing.<sup>35</sup> And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, “He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!”<sup>36</sup> The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine,<sup>37</sup> and saying, “If you are the King of the Jews,

save yourself!”<sup>38</sup> There was also an inscription over him, “This is the King of the Jews.”

**Luke 23:39** One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, “Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!”<sup>40</sup> But the other rebuked him, saying, “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?”<sup>41</sup> And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.”<sup>42</sup> Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”<sup>43</sup> He replied, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”

**Luke 23:44** It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon,<sup>45</sup> while the sun’s light failed; and the curtain of the temple was torn in two.<sup>46</sup> Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.” Having said this, he breathed his last.

## **MOMENT OF SILENCE**

### **THE REFLECTION—in three parts**

#### **1. JESUS’S OPPONENTS:**

The people who cheered him on into his grand entry to Jerusalem were **not the same people** who released Barabbas and called for Jesus’ crucifixion (outsiders vs. Temple insiders)

Within the gates of Jerusalem was another population: politically minded, dependent upon the Temple for their living, power driven.

- Jesus was a threat to their livelihood (his talk about the Temple being destroyed and rebuilt in three days);

- Jesus was a threat to their theology of the Old Testament (about the Messiah).
- He was not a threat to Roman authorities, apparently: Herod and Pilate saw no guilt in him, even if they didn't take his claims seriously.
- The friends of Jesus, if any remained in the City, were now silent (the women watching from afar) or, as in the case of Peter, actively denying any association.

## 2. JESUS'S OPTIONS:

All along the Via Dolorosa, **Jesus could have opted out.** His great love was affirmed by choices that propelled him toward crucifixion:

- he could have denied his identity
- he could have recanted his predictions about the Temple
- he could have resisted arrest
- he could have worked a miracle (escape, glorious power play).

But no miracles today, no *visible* miracle. All too human, painful, political . . . so that the *invisible* work of God could take place—the salvation of humanity [more on that on Good Friday.]

The miracle here was Jesus “walking the talk,” and living out his conviction from his prayer at Gethsemane, “Not my will, but Yours be done.”

## 3. JESUS'S OBEDIENCE:

### **Great love, great sacrifice**

- <sup>6</sup> Though he was in the form of God,  
 did not regard equality with God  
 as something to be exploited,  
<sup>7</sup> but emptied himself,

taking the form of a slave,  
being born in human likeness.  
And being found in human form,  
8 he humbled himself  
and became obedient to the point of death—  
even death on a cross. [PHIL 2:6-8]

A series of loving acts that precede his actual crucifixion:

- to say, “if these people don’t give witness, even the stones will cry out” = claim to be Messiah
- presiding at the Passover table, and instituting the sacrament of Communion— “my body given for you, my blood shed for you”
- serving even his betrayer at the table
- suffering ridicule and physical abuse without protest.

And then, of course, the crucifixion:

- Rom. 5:8 But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.
- John 15:13 No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.
- Kindness to the penitent criminal crucified next to him
- Forgives his persecutors

**OPPORTUNITY IS GIVEN TO US:**

As Holy Week progresses, take a moment each day to reflect on what Jesus did for you at great cost to himself. Like Barabbas, we have been released from the sentence of death.

Become aware of the incremental, loving, and costly choices you could make each day that, put together, show your gratitude and love to God for what he has done for *you*.