THE DEATH of the MESSIAH

Introduction
Series Outline

First Sunday in Lent: Introduction

Second Sunday in Lent: Jesus prays and is arrested in Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives, Across the Kidron

Third Sunday in Lent: Jesus Before the Jewish Authorities

Fourth Sunday in Lent: Jesus before Pilate, the Roman Governor

Fifth Sunday in Lent: Jesus is crucified and dies on Golgotha. He is buried nearby.
References

References

A Crucified Christ in Holy Week. Essays on the Four Gospel Passion Narratives
Almighty God, whose blessed Son was led by the Spirit to be tempted by Satan; Come quickly to help us who are assaulted by many temptations; and, as you know the weaknesses of each of us, let each one find you mighty to save; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

Collect, First Sunday in Lent, Book of Common Prayer, p. 218
Formation of the Gospel Traditions and the Passion Narratives
Formation Passion Narratives

“Backward” Formation

The gospel tradition formed “backwards,” starting from Jesus’ resurrection, working towards his birth:

Early Christians focused on Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection.

Accounts of Jesus’ public ministry emerged after reflection on the career of the crucified one.

Finally, accounts of his birth emerged (in Luke and Matthew).
The relationships and dependencies among the four Passion Narratives in the four gospels is controversial, but a consensus view adopted by most scholars is as follows:
There may have been one or more oral (and possibly written) pre-Gospel Passion narratives.

Mark wrote his Passion Narrative using *only* these pre-Gospel narratives.

Matthew wrote his Passion Narrative:
- Drawing heavily from Mark’s narrative, and
- Weaving additional material from “pre-Matthian” traditions known to him.
Formation Passion Narratives

Luke and John’s Narratives

- Luke wrote his Passion Narrative:
  - Also drawing heavily – but more freely – from Mark’s narrative, and
  - Weaving additional material from oral “pre-Lukan” traditions known to him.

- John wrote his Passion Narrative *independently* from Mark, Matthew and Luke using “pre-Johannine” traditions known only to him.
  - He also had access to some of the same “pre-Lucan” traditions Luke used.
Narrative and Plot

Passion Narratives as Drama

Order of events led to a real narrative and plot:
- Arrest had to precede trial, which had to precede sentence and execution.
- We read of the actions of Jesus, as well as surrounding characters.
  - Peter, Judas, Pilate, Barabbas, the Roman soldier who recognizes Jesus as the Son of God.
- Encourages the acting out of the Passion narratives as drama and film.
Narrative and Plot
Passion Narratives as Drama – Act 1


The first Act of the Passion Narrative describes how Jesus, having left the Last Supper with his disciples, went across the Kidron to a place (Gethsemane) on the Mount of Olives and prayed there to his Father while his disciples slept, Judas arrived with an armed party; and, during an incident where the ear of the servant of the high priest was cut off, Jesus was arrested.

Scene 1: Jesus Goes To The Site And Prays There (Mark 14:26-42; Matt 26:30-46; Luke 22:39-46; John 18:1)

Narrative and Plot
Passion Narratives as Drama – Act 2


The second Act of the Passion Narrative describes how Jesus, having been led to the high priest (and other authorities), was tried/interrogated by him/them, and how Jesus' answers caused him to be given over to the Roman governor. Related to Jesus' trial/interrogation was a mockery by Jewish authorities/police, three denials by Peter, and an attempt by Judas to render back to the Jewish authorities the price of innocent blood.


Scene 2: Mockery/Abuse of Jesus; Denials by Peter; Judas (Mark 14:65-15:1; Matt 26:67-27:10; Luke 22:54b-65; 23:1; John 18:15-18,22-23,25-28a)
Passion Narratives as Drama – Act 3


The third Act of the Passion Narrative describes how Jesus, having been given over to Pilate, was interrogated by him about being the King of the Jews. Although Pilate was not convinced of Jesus' guilt, the crowds preferred the release of Barabbas, a criminal, demanding that Jesus be crucified. Pilate acceded, had Jesus scourged, and gave him over to be crucified by Roman soldiers who first mocked and abused him.
Narrative and Plot
Passion Narratives as Drama – Act 4


The fourth Act of the Passion Narrative describes how Jesus, having been led out to Golgotha, was crucified between two others as “the King of the Jews." During the hours that he hung on the cross, there were reactions by various people who stood nearby, as well as words spoken by Jesus until he gave up/over his spirit. His death was greeted by wondrous events, and again reactions by various people. Finally Joseph from Arimathea took the body and buried it nearby, while the women looked on.


Audience Participation Invited
Where would we have stood as part of the Passion narratives?

- With the disciples who fled from danger, abandoning Jesus?
- With Peter, denying Jesus?
- With Judas, betraying Jesus?
- With the Pilate of John, trying to avoid a decision between good and evil?
Audience Participation

Where Would We Have Stood?

With the Pilate of Matthew, washing our hands of a bad decision so to appear blameless?
With the religious leaders who condemned Jesus?
  Many were sincerely religious people with a deep attachment to their tradition, which Jesus had challenged.
Factors Coloring the Passion Narratives
Apologetic motives likely colored the Gospels

Desire to justify Jesus’ innocence before Roman hearers of the gospel:

Tacitus, the Roman historian: Jesus was a criminal put to death by the procurator of Judea, Pontius Pilate.

There was a bitter relationship between the early Church and the synagogue. Attitudes of some Jewish authorities may have been attributed to “all.”

There likely were corrupt “ecclesiastical” politicians who saw Jesus as a danger to their position.

But the vast majority of Jewish authorities in the Passion narratives were likely sincerely religious people who felt they were ridding Israel of a false prophet.

Law in Deuteronomy 13:1-5: false prophets must be put to death lest they seduce Israel from the true God.
Involvement of Jewish Authorities in Jesus’ Death
Involvement of Jewish Authorities

Attitudes in Early Centuries

- Involvement of Jewish authorities in Jesus’ death is a complicated issue.

- Gospel writers tended to generalize blame onto “all” Jews, influenced by the bitter relationship between early Church and synagogue.

- Some famous Christian theologians (Augustine, John Chrysostom, Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther) wrote of a Christian duty to hate or punish the Jews because they killed Jesus.
Involvement of Jewish Authorities
Attitudes in Early Centuries

Babylonian Talmud, \textit{Sanhedrin 43a}: \textasciitilde200 AD admits responsibility for “hanging” Jesus on the eve of Passover because “he seduced Israel, leading her astray.”

However, modern Jewish writers reject major Jewish involvement in the crucifixion.°
Involvement of Jewish Authorities

Arguments Against Major Jewish Involvement

Some have argued the Sanhedrin legal proceedings in the Gospels don’t follow Jewish law in the *Mishnah*:

*Mishnah* was a compilation of rabbinic oral law (Rabbis = successors to the Pharisees).

However, the Sanhedrin of Jesus’ day was dominated by Sadducee priests, who *rejected* oral law. The trial did not violate written law.
Arguments Against Major Jewish Involvement

Confusion in the accounts of the questioning of Jesus by Jewish authorities (Sanhedrin):

- **Mark and Matthew**: formal Sanhedrin trial at night.
  - Matthew notes high priest was Caiaphas.
- **Luke**: informal Sanhedrin questioning of Jesus in morning.
- **John**: no Sanhedrin questioning, but instead temple police interrogation by high priest Annas.
- **John**: Jesus’ arrest included both Jewish temple police and Roman soldiers.
  - Roman soldiers would only have participated at the command of Pilate.
Involvement of Jewish Authorities
Attitude Today

- Any hostility between Christian and Jew today over the death of Jesus is wrong and against our fundamental understanding of Christianity.

- God has revealed Godself in the *compositions* and *words* of human beings:

- Therefore some attitudes in the Scripture, colored by the humanity of the authors, may be *wrong* if repeated today.
Diverse Portrayals of the Crucified Jesus
Diverse Portrayals
Theology Drove Description of Events

- Theology was the primary driving force among the gospel writers in choosing what events to describe.
- Pain and suffering, pathos and emotion did not drive evangelists, who report laconically “They crucified him”
- Details anticipated in Old Testament are described, such as:
  - Division of garments
  - Placement of criminals crucified with him
- Emphasis: through the Scriptures of Israel, God had taught about the Son.
Diverse Portrayals
Different Facets of Jesus

Each of the Gospel writers had a distinctive outlook on the Passion. Each knows a different facet of Jesus:

- The Jesus in Mark and Matthew plumbs the depths of abandonment only to be vindicated.
- The Jesus in Luke worries about others and gently dispenses forgiveness.
- The Jesus in John reigns victoriously from the cross in control of all that happens.

No one of these perspectives exhausts the meaning of Jesus. It is as if one walks around a large diamond to look at it from three different angles.
Mark and Matthew present a Jesus:
- abandoned by his followers,
- seemingly even abandoned by God,
- who must face his hour *alone*,
- thus enduring the cross in a particularly agonizing way.
Diverse Portrayals

Mark and Matthew

Mark and Matthew both have:
- a Jewish trial of Jesus and
- a Roman trial.

The Jewish authorities and the Romans both treat Jesus unjustly; both physically abuse him.

Using false testimony, Jewish authorities try to convict Jesus of planning to destroy the sanctuary.
- When Jesus acknowledges that he is the Messiah, the Son of God (Mark: “of the Blessed”), they accuse him of blasphemy, and abuse and mock him as a false prophet.

Romans accuse Jesus of claiming to be “King of the Jews.”
- Pilate knows Jesus has been handed over out of envy, and that (in Matthew) he is a just man; yet
- Pilate releases a criminal, and gives Jesus over to be crucified.
- Roman soldiers flog, mock, and abuse Jesus as “King of the Jews.”
Diverse Portrayals
Mark and Matthew

Jesus’ ordeal is framed by two prayers:

- In Gethsemane Jesus prays in Aramaic and Greek to his Father to let this cup pass from him.
  - His prayer receives no overt answer.
  - His disciples fall asleep three times rather than keep vigil with him. They all flee when Jesus is arrested.
- On Golgotha, Jesus prays a second time in Aramaic and Greek to “My God” asking why he has been forsaken.
  - His heartrending cry is greeted only with mockery by those present.
  - No supporters of Jesus are present at the cross.

Jesus dies uttering a loud cry, similar to that with which the vanquished demons left the possessed.
He dies, seemingly vanquished by his enemies.
Diverse Portrayals

Mark and Matthew

Only *after* Jesus has died do we see:
- signs of Jesus’ vindication,
- signs that his Father – who appeared to have ignored Jesus’ prayers and forsaken him – had been present all along:

The veil in the temple is rent in two from top to bottom:
- The Jewish trial had accused Jesus of threatening to destroy the sanctuary in the temple; the crowds at the cross had mocked him about it.

A Roman centurion is moved to profess “Truly this man was God’s Son”
- The Jewish trial had accused Jesus of blasphemy in saying he was the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed God; the crowds at the cross had mocked him about it.
Diverse Portrayals
Mark and Matthew

Mark and Matthew dramatize:
- how difficult it is for Jesus to go through his crucifixion and
- how he is clearly recognized as belonging to God only after he has suffered to the full.

This is meant both as:
- a graphic warning and
- a consolation to the readers of these Gospels.

Mark’s and Matthew’s gospels both have a strong theme that it is necessary:
- For the Son of Man to suffer and
- For his disciples to take up the cross to follow him.
Mark and Matthew tell us there may be times in our lives when:

- we too, like Jesus, will find the cross we bear difficult, nearly unbearable;
- we may flee like the disciples did,
- it seems like God has abandoned us, forsaken us.

Yet if we ultimately persevere, God will vindicate us when our own final hour comes.
Diverse Portrayals

Luke

Mark and Matthew emphasize:
- The profound *isolation* of Jesus during the Passion,
- His abandonment by the disciples, and seemingly by God the Father.

Not so Luke. In Luke Jesus seems in communion with his Father throughout his ordeal:
- Angels come to strengthen Jesus as he prays in Gethsemane (Mount of Olives).
- When Jesus dies on the cross, his last words are not an anguished cry of forsakenness, but a tranquil “Father, into your hands I place my Spirit.”
Diverse Portrayals

Luke

- The disciples are portrayed in a more positive light:
  - They fall asleep just once – not three times – as Jesus prays in Gethsemane, and they fall asleep because of their grief.
  - Peter is assured that Jesus has prayed for him in order that his faith might not fail
    - when Peter denies Jesus, the Master is there looking on to remind him of that.
  - The disciples as a whole are congratulated and rewarded for having remained with Jesus in his trials.
  - Luke is discretely silent about the disciples after Jesus’ arrest, the only hint in Luke that they fled.
Diverse Portrayals

Luke

The Jewish participants are portrayed more positively in Luke:

In Mark and Matthew, all the Jews, both Jewish authorities and the Jewish crowds, are hostile

The only exception are Jesus’ own followers.

In contrast, in Luke a multitude of the people follow Jesus to the place of execution, take no part in any mockery, and return striking their breasts. The Daughters of Jerusalem beat themselves and lament for him.
Jesus in Luke continues to heal and forgive despite his ordeal and suffering. He:
- heals the ear wound of one who has come to arrest him,
- heals the antagonism that had existed between his judges (Pilate and Herod, previously enemies, become friends from that day forward),
- forgives those who crucify him, not knowing what they do, and,
- rewards with the promise of paradise the thief crucified with him who requested remembrance.
Luke reminds us that Christians will be persecuted, just as Jesus was persecuted; but if we are truly his followers, we should continue:
- to show forgiveness,
- to maintain a sense of unbroken union with God and Jesus.

The sense we have of a “Christian” death – a death forgiving others and at peace with oneself – is the kind of death that Jesus in Luke died.
Diverse Portrayals

John

John’s portrait of Jesus’ passion is markedly different from that in Mark, Matthew and Luke.

In John, the Jerusalem authorities have already tried to seize or kill Jesus several times. John’s Jesus is fully in control: “I lay down my life . . . no one has taken it away from me; rather I lay it down of my own accord” (John 10:17-18).

Jesus does not pray to the Father in Gethsemane that the hour or cup of the passion pass from him: He cannot, for He and the Father are one. His whole purpose is to come to this hour and drink this cup in order to glorify God’s name and fulfill the Scriptures.
Diverse Portrayals

John

 Entirely in control of all that will happen, Jesus gives Judas instructions to do quickly what he is going to do, and Jesus is waiting for Judas when he comes with the arresting party.

When the arresting party asks if he is Jesus of Nazareth, Jesus answers, echoing the divine name, “I AM”

The Roman soldiers and Jewish police fall back to the ground helpless.
When he is interrogated by the high priest Annas, Jesus turns the interrogation back: “Why do you question me?”

He tells Pilate, “You have no power over me at all”; and Pilate is afraid when he hears that Jesus claims to be God’s Son.

The scene is much more the trial of Pilate before Jesus than vice versa.
Diverse Portrayals

John

The scriptures are fulfilled as foretold:
- In condemning Jesus at noon, the very hour when the Passover lambs began to be killed in the Temple precincts, Pilate fulfills at the end of the Gospel the words John the Baptist spoke at the beginning – that Jesus is the lamb of God who would take away the world’s sin.
- While Jesus hangs on the cross, the Roman soldiers fulfill Scripture by dividing his garments exactly as the psalmist foretold.
- Unlike Mark, Matthew and Luke, Jesus does not die alone, for gathered near the cross are followers, including the beloved disciple and his mother.
- He relates them to one another in family bonds and thus leaves behind a community of believers.
Diverse Portrayals

John

Finally, knowing that he has completed the Scriptures and all that the Father has given him to do, Jesus says “It is finished” and gives over his spirit to those believers, thus laying down his life of his own accord as he said he would.
Diverse Portrayals

John

Readers who could identify with the other Gospel portraits of Jesus in his passion may find it difficult to identify with John’s triumphant Jesus, a Jesus whose power from God annuls all that his enemies can do to him.

But we should remember:

This is the narrative that made Good Friday good.

This is the narrative for all those who in the course of history have been persecuted by the powerful, but whose sense that God is with them has made them realize how little power any worldly authority really has.

Those who believe in Jesus have eternal life, and like him they can say, “No one takes it from me.”
Diverse Portrayals

John

It is a passion seen so totally with the eyes of faith that the victim has become the conquerer.

I John (5:4): “Whoever is begotten by God conquers the world, and the victory that conquers the world is our faith.”
Next week:

**THE DEATH of the MESSIAH**

Act I: Jesus Prays And Is Arrested In Gethsemane On The Mount Of Olives Across The Kidron