

SESSION 5

A DEATH LIKE NO OTHER



Why do we care when famous people pass away?

QUESTION #1

#BSFLheart

Jesus' death is the heart of the gospel.



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

"Would you give your blood to help save your sister?" the doctor asked Timothy, looking into the young boy's eyes. Timothy's sister was suffering from an illness he had survived. And because they shared a rare blood type, Timothy was the ideal donor.

The boy hesitated after the doctor's question. His chin began to quiver as he fought back tears. Then, with a solemn strength and even the hint of a smile, he said, "Yes. I'll do it."

An hour later, Timothy watched the blood flow out of his arm and into a plastic tube. Quiet for most of the procedure, he finally asked, "Doctor, when will I die?" The boy thought donating his blood meant giving *all* his blood. Timothy had willingly offered the greatest sacrifice out of love for his sister.

Let's explore a death like no other—the day when Jesus, the One through whom all things were created, willingly gave Himself up out of His great love for us.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Matthew 27:28-31,45-50,54 (NIV)

28 They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him,

29 and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand. Then they knelt in front of him and mocked him. “Hail, king of the Jews!” they said.

30 They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again.

31 After they had mocked him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.

45 From noon until three in the afternoon darkness came over all the land.

46 About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “*Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?*” (which means “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”).

47 When some of those standing there heard this, they said, “He’s calling Elijah.”

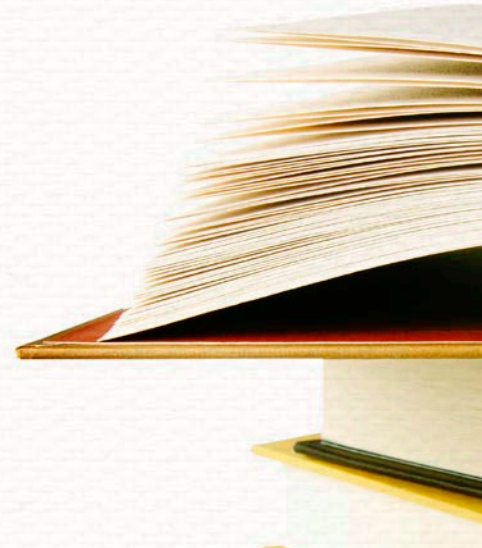
48 Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge. He filled it with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink.

49 The rest said, “Now leave him alone. Let’s see if Elijah comes to save him.”

50 And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit.

54 When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, “Surely he was the Son of God!”

Elijah (v. 47)—The prophet Malachi wrote that God would send Elijah before His day of judgment on the earth (see Mal. 4:5). The witnesses mistook Jesus’ words as a reference to that prophecy.



What do these verses teach us about Jesus?

QUESTION #2

Matthew 27:28-31

Nobody likes bullies. They push you. Shove you. Mock you. It's bad enough to be bullied by people you don't really know and don't particularly care for. But to be pushed into the path of bullies by people you love and trust—that's a far deeper pain.

Jesus came to bring salvation to His own, yet His own rejected him. The religious leaders handed Jesus over to brutal Roman soldiers who stripped Him, robed Him in purple, stuck a crown of thorns on His head, knelt down before Him, and mocked Him. In their mockery, they stuck a reed in his right hand as if it were a king's scepter. Then they spat on Him. They took that same reed and beat Him with it.

As I read this passage, I keep getting stuck on the word "reed," which was a slender stick or stem. This isn't the first time we see a reed in the Bible. Isaiah wrote about another reed, but it was a bruised reed—something weak and vulnerable—not one used to mock or strike: "A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice" (Isa. 42:3).

The bruised reed in Isaiah 42:3 stands for those of us who've been hurt. Bullied. Broken. Bent. The verse speaks of God's faithfulness to those who've been harassed by life's circumstances—or by people we loved and trusted: a hurtful mate. A toxic parent or relative. A backstabbing coworker.

How ironic that the One who came to bring justice to the bruised reeds in this life was bruised Himself by a reed. He who would cup the wilted reed in His hand and nurture it back to health and strength stood bloodied, beaten, and mocked by those He came to save. And yet He said nothing in return.

The soldiers led Him as a sheep to the slaughter even though He was the true King on the cross. Jesus was bullied, but bullies didn't put Him on the cross and nails didn't hold Him there. His love for us held Him there.

Jesus willingly sacrificed His life so that we could be saved.

Matthew 27:45-50

How do we explore the tension between the truth of God's love and the events in these verses?

QUESTION #3

When I experience an allergic reaction, my eyes water, my nose itches, and I often sneeze. Many of you know firsthand about allergies. If you're allergic to an animal, you'll usually get away from it as soon as you can.

God is "allergic" to sin in the sense that He will have absolutely nothing to do with it. He is holy. Holiness is the very nature and character of God. And since holiness and sin are diametrically opposed, God and sin cannot hang out together. Furthermore, since sin is a part of who we are, that means God will not hang out with us.

Yet there's still hope. God, out of His great love, created a way for you and me—in spite of our sin—to enter His presence. That way is through the cross. That way has been made possible through Jesus, the sinless sacrifice who bore our sins.

When Jesus hung on the cross, all of the sins of the 7 billion people alive today—as well as those of the billions who came before us—fell upon Him. All the sins, both actions and attitudes, of countless billions of people were hurled upon Jesus Christ.

How bad was that moment?

We often think the pain of the cross came from the whip that stripped the skin from Jesus' back. Or from the crown of thorns that dug deeply into His skull. Or from the nails in His hands and feet. But all that agony was nothing compared with that moment in time when He looked up to heaven and groaned, "*Elí, Elí, lemá sabachtháni?*" That is, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken me?"

At that moment, Jesus became sin, severing Himself from the fullness of the intimacy He had always known with His Father. As the sin of the whole world shot through His body, God the Father turned away from His Son.

What emotions have you experienced while discussing Jesus' death?

QUESTION #4

Matthew 27:54

I used to go to a barber in Dallas who had a sign on his window that read: "In God we trust. Everyone else pays cash." It was his shop, so he could make the rules.

In a similar way, our world is God's "shop"—His kingdom. He makes the rules. And He requires payment through only one source: the death, burial, and resurrection of His Son Jesus Christ. That is the only way to satisfy His holy demand to pay for sin.

The earth itself revolted when the Son of God hung there to die. "The earth shook, the rocks split" (Matt. 27:51). Why? Because Jesus had formed and shaped the earth (see John 1:3); therefore, the very earth He created now protested.

Those who stayed with Jesus while He hung on the cross that day became frightened by the earth's response. Who wouldn't have? If you've ever been in a storm, if you've ever seen the blue sky turn green just before the fierce winds of a tornado pass through, if you've ever watched wall hangings first shake and then fall as the ground moves beneath you in an earthquake—you know the fear that can rise up.

At times like these, people get real religious, real fast! At those times, we come face to face with our own humanity and the awesome power of God's hand, and we wake up and realize in just whose world we live. The centurion in this passage had just such an experience. So did the guards keeping watch. Their experience at the death of Jesus led them to only one response: "Surely he was the Son of God!"

When in your own life did you encounter the truth that Jesus is God's Son?

QUESTION #5



