

Easter Series **“Who Took What?”**

*[Please note : sections in blue type are not broadcast on every radio station.
King James Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]*

Introduction

Welcome to *Truth for Today* where, unusually, our talk entitled “**Who Took What?**” is not part of a series but, rather, in the nature of an Easter stand-alone talk based upon the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. The rather enigmatic title of “Who took what” might initially confuse some of you, though, as you listen, I am sure that it will make sense and cause us to look afresh at the wonder which is at the very centre of the wonder and the love and grace that ever shines forth from the cross. The death of Jesus of Nazareth at Calvary which is at very centre of the Christian Gospel might not be as well known to today’s younger generation as it was to a previous one. Hence we need to constantly turn to the Scriptures to read the account of the Lord’s death as it is recorded for us in each of the four Gospels.

Some listeners might enquire as to why the death of the Lord is significant to us today. My answer would be that the meaning of the death of the Lord Jesus never alters just because the world changes. For instance, I fully admit that I have no wish to return to the dental practices of my grandfather’s time. Less teeth and more pain seemed to be the dentist’s legacy to the working-class of the late nineteenth century, though perhaps, I am maligning the dental profession of those years. We are glad that dental practices have changed! We must not make the mistake of assuming, however, that man has essentially changed and no longer needs the message of Calvary. God’s redeeming love has an enduring message which concerns salvation. A verse from Paul’s letter to the Romans plainly states this:

“But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

I need to say now that all quotations from Scripture today will be from the Authorised Version, sometimes known as the King James Version.

I suggest that there are two clauses in that verse which tell us why the death of the Lord is significant in any age, regardless of the level of sophistication which infests society. They are firstly, Christ’s death is indicative of God’s love; and secondly, that we are all sinners. Consequently, if we want to know if God loves us, we only have to look at the cross, whereas, if we want proof that we are sinners we need to examine ourselves. If we had time, we could further develop those thoughts by examining the doctrines of repentance, atonement, and sin. But it must suffice to reiterate that the death of the Lord Jesus reveals God’s love to us while we were unbelieving sinners.

Jesus taken by the Jews & the Temple Officers

After that short introduction, we must move on to consider the first of the answers to the question that forms the title of our talk today which, in case you have forgotten, is “Who took what?” The first of the Scriptures that directly answers this question is found in the Gospel of John chapter 18, verses 12 & 13 (my highlighting added):

“Then the band and the captain and officers of the Jews **took Jesus**, and bound him, and led him away to Annas first; for he was father-in-law to Caiaphas, which was the high priest that same year.”

From these verses, the first answer to “Who took what?” is that initially it was the Jewish Temple officers who combined to arrest or “take” Jesus. From early in His ministry, several of the ruling parties (whether Pharisees, Sadducees or Herodians) had been offended by the words and works of Jesus. When eventually his popularity with the common people grew, Mark tells us that on one occasion

“The Pharisees went forth, and straightway took counsel with the Herodians against him, how they might destroy him” (Mark 3:6).

For the Pharisees to find common cause with the Herodians, shows the depth of hatred towards the Lord Jesus. When Judas Iscariot promised to guide the soldiers and officers to the garden where Jesus was praying, the opportunity was eagerly grasped. The only opposition to Jesus being arrested came from Peter, who struck out with a sword, though he was soon told to desist. The whole event in the garden demonstrates that Jesus considered it part of God’s plan for Him. The chains, or ropes, with which He was bound signify, not the power of the Temple police, but rather His meek submission to the Father’s will. The soldiers were so oppressive that the Lord, who had offered no resistance to the detachment of soldiers, was led away in chains to Annas. If we follow the account laid out in the 18th chapter of John’s Gospel, we discover that Jesus was taken and questioned by Caiaphas, after possibly an informal session with Annas. There is no doubt that Caiaphas was biased in his questioning, for John tells us that, he, Caiaphas, had already determined that it was expedient for one man to die for the people (John 18: verse 14). Peter’s conduct, and the cry of the crowd, add further pathos to this sad scene, for we see Peter, who had been so close to the Lord during His years of ministry, roundly denying ever knowing Him, while the crowd demanded the release of a robber in preference to Jesus of Nazareth.

Suffering under Pontius Pilate, the Roman

From the first verse of John chapter nineteen we learn of another person that “took” Jesus:

“Then Pilate therefore **took Jesus**, and scourged him.”

Luke, alone of the Gospel writers, gives the reason for the scourging in chapter 23 verse 16 when Pilate hoped this terrible and frightful punishment would satisfy the crowd. He, Pilate, no doubt was confident that having the power of Rome behind him he could, with impunity, take Jesus and scourge Him. If he had been in the Garden of Gethsemane a short while before, he would have heard Jesus say that He could call upon twelve legions of angels. He did not do so because it was necessary for Him to suffer, but we must note that under different circumstances, the Roman legions from all over the Empire would not have been sufficient to **take** the Lord. Pilate was allowed to do this as part of the great plan of salvation. We must take note of the Roman governor’s cruel action when he had the Lord scourged, even before the unjust verdict of ‘guilty’ was pronounced. Alfred Edersheim, the 19th century ecclesiastical historian, following Luke’s comment, proposed that Pilate hoped the horrors of the scourging would satisfy the crowd, despite the ferocious, continuous cry of “Crucify Him, Crucify Him”¹. It was not to be, for Jesus of Nazareth

was taken back into the Praetorium for further humiliation at the hands of the soldiers. Consequently, we must place Pilate in the dock as weak and venal in his action of taking Jesus, brutally lacerating His back, then delivering Him to the soldiers, all the while being convinced of His innocence.

Further humiliation was heaped upon the Lord by the soldiers, when they placed the crown of thorns upon his head and dressed him in a purple robe. There is evidence, which suggests, that this was a callous game played by the soldiers upon some condemned prisoners. There is a verse of a hymn, written by Miss C.H. von Poseck, (1859 – 1953) which encapsulates this scene:

“Thou gavest Him, well knowing all
That lay before Him here—
The thorny crown, the purple robe,
The gall, the cruel spear;
And in that hour of woe supreme
Did Jesus bear our sin—
The patient, holy, suffering Lamb,
Of God forsaken then.”²

Our response to the suffering of the Lord ought to be as written in the third verse:

“Father, this mystery of love
Must all our praise excel:
No human, no angelic tongue
Its wondrous depths can tell;
For what were we that Thou on us
Such love shouldst ever pour?
We bow, and, filled with joy and awe,
Father and Son adore.”

Surely, none of us who claim to be believers in the Lord, could remain indifferent whenever the sufferings of the Lord are brought before us!

For me, verses five and six of John chapter nineteen are very powerful, being the culmination of Pilate’s warped and corrupt practice of Roman justice, to a man he freely admitted was innocent:

“Then came Jesus forth, wearing the crown of thorns, and the purple robe. And Pilate saith unto them, Behold the man! When the chief priests therefore and officers saw him, they cried out, saying, Crucify him, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Take ye him, and crucify him: for I find no fault in him.”

Much scorn had been heaped upon Jesus, along with the phrase, “Behold the man”, which I would suggest, is the corollary of Caiaphas’s “man dying for the people” (John chapter 18 verse 14). I would also suggest that “Behold the man” has the connotation of contempt. Some commentators hold that that phrase contains the meaning of “poor creature.” Whether or not this is true, the chief priests certainly had no empathy with the suffering Christ, for their vile response to the presentation of the Lord was, “Crucify him.” A cry with which Pilate acquiesced, despite confessing that He considered Jesus was innocent. The result of Pilate “taking Jesus” was that Jesus was led off to Calvary, where He was crucified for our redemption and so secured our eternal blessing.

There is, however, one last point that I wish to make from the scene in the judgment hall, where Pilate attempted to engage Jesus in conversation. At least four times he questioned the Lord - though we only have time to look at one of those questions:

“Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I unto the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice” (John 18:37).

I have highlighted this incident to show the steadfast courage of the Lord, as He faced the unjust charges brought by those who violently opposed Him. This incident was cited, some years later, by Paul, as an example to Timothy to continue to bear a good profession (1 Timothy 6:12-13). We, too, need to witness in our time, when ungodliness seems to increase daily.

The soldiers take His garments

Unwittingly, the soldiers played a part in fulfilling prophecy at the crucifixion when they took the garments of Jesus, though, as far as they were concerned, it was business as usual. We find the relevant prophecy in Psalm 22:18:

“They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture.”

John notes this action in his Gospel chapter 19 and verses 23 & 24 (my highlighting added):

“Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, **took his garments**, and made four parts, to every soldier a part; and also his coat: now the coat was without seam, woven from the top throughout. They said therefore among themselves, Let us not rend it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be: that the scripture might be fulfilled, which saith, They parted my raiment among them, and for my vesture they did cast lots. These things therefore the soldiers did.”

I say again, that for the soldiers it was an accepted prerequisite to receive the victims' belongings. They were not to know that they were fulfilling the actions prophesied many, many years before. What also marks them is their callous disregard of the sufferings of the men being crucified nearby.

Over the years, the “coat without seam” has been the object of much interpretation, some of it very fanciful indeed. It has been suggested that it stands for the unity of Christ's followers, or of the wholeness of His teaching, or perhaps, the unity of the church. For myself, I am unable to support most of these interpretations, though there is a commentator I respect who writes that:

“... this feature is mentioned because it has a symbolic value. Everything about our Lord, both as to His Person and work, was of one piece, woven without seam.... In that coat Jesus appeared before men, the symbol of His perfection and it was not to be rent.”³

At *Truth for Today* we believe in typical teaching, or that some of the persons, numbers and figures in the bible have allusions to deeper truth providing that the interpretation lines up with the rest of Scripture

John takes Mary the Mother of Jesus

The next incident of something being taken concerns the amazing tender care that the Lord Jesus showed to His mother, even in the extremity of His suffering on the cross. From John chapter 19, verses 26 & 27 (my highlighting added) we read:

“When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son! Then saith [Jesus] to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple **took** her into his own home.”

It is usually accepted that the disciple mentioned is the Apostle John, who as he lived to be a great age was able to carry out this commission. There is no mention in Scripture of Mary's death, though it would be very unlikely that John would predecease her. As far as we know John outlived the other disciples. In fact, his own brother James was martyred in the very early days of the church. Is this commission, when John was appointed to care for Mary the mother of Jesus, a happy accident? I judge not. Rather was it according to the foreknowledge of God. The second point from this incident is the instant obedience of John, for the Scripture states that it was “from that hour” that John took Mary into his care. Practically speaking, do we obey the Lord's commands with the alacrity of John?

Taken by His Friends

We must move on, as the crucifixion is only part of the Easter story, so to portray the next event we shall continue to look for “who took what”, which is the title and theme of this talk. With a little searching we can soon find that it concerns Joseph of Arimathaea:

“And after this Joseph of Arimathaea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, besought Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus: and Pilate gave him leave. He came therefore, and **took the body** of Jesus” (John 19: 38).

Before discussing the action of Joseph, let us look at the man himself. Matthew's Gospel tells us that he was rich (Matthew 27:57), while Mark adds that he was an honourable counsellor (Mark 15:43). Luke 23:51 states the significant fact that he stood out against the decision of the Council to crucify Jesus. He might have been a secret disciple previous to this crisis in the life of Jesus, yet when the disciples fled, this man demonstrated loyalty to the Lord by boldly requesting the body of the Christ that he might take it for burial. This latter action was very costly in material terms, as well as to Joseph's reputation, as it was his own unused tomb that became the grave of Jesus. Such rock tombs were expensive and not easily available in Jerusalem; and this one was, obviously, meant for himself and his family. Leon Morris suggests that under Jewish law it was not permitted to bury anyone else in a grave after a criminal had been entombed in it.⁴ It would have taken much moral courage for Joseph to stand against the judgment of the Sanhedrin when he objected to the collective decision. Now the secret was out. Now his allegiance was known to all.

Nicodemus was also present at the burial of Jesus, and it is not impossible that he, too, was a secret disciple, for on the three occasions John mentions this man he also says that he came “by night.” I know that there could be other reasons why Nicodemus met Jesus when it was dark, but the point I make applies to the action of Joseph if not to Nicodemus. It took a crisis moment to persuade Joseph, and possibly Nicodemus, to pledge their loyalty to Jesus and make a testimony unto Him by being identified with Him in His death, when they had everything to lose and nothing to gain. Do we openly confess to our peers that we are believers in Jesus? We should remember in our prayers the Christians, in other countries, who are being persecuted, and even killed, because they read the Bible and confess that they are Christians. They need our prayers and moral support. Nicodemus also brought 75 pounds of spices with which to cover the body of the Lord, a sign that he was rich. We might not be rich, but how much of our resources do we devote to the Lord and His service? The measure would be an index of our commitment to Him. I make one last point on the Lord's burial. Surely, the rock tomb and the spices are a fulfilment of the prophecy of Isaiah 53:9 that “he was with the rich in His death.” The body of Jesus was destined to be dumped into a pit, or common grave, together with the other two men who were crucified with Him that day, or, as Isaiah says, in the quoted verse, “... he made his grave with the wicked.” Joseph of Arimathaea and Nicodemus made sure that did not happen.

Jesus Takes our Sins

For our final comments we move away from the crucifixion scene to consider a statement of John the Baptist, recorded for us in John 1: 29:

“The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which **taketh away** the sin of the world.”

From this verse we learn the reason why the Lord willingly endured the cross, despising the shame. It is that on the cross He dealt with the question of sin. Typically, in the Old Testament a lamb was often sacrificed for sin in the Temple services. I believe that John, divinely inspired, saw Jesus in that sense. When John saw Jesus He was walking towards Him along the bank of the Jordan river. Scripture tells us that He came much further than that. We, at *Truth for Today*, believe in the Incarnation. In other words that Jesus is God incarnate and came from heaven. I emphasise we do not believe that the incarnation is a myth, but an integral element of the Christian Gospel. He, the Son of God, died that we might be forgiven. I repeat the text from Romans chapter five that I read at the beginning of this talk:

“But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”

I do not cite these verses as theoretical proof texts. We want you to believe in Jesus as the Man who battled with sin, evil and death, and who, by His victory over death, is alive for evermore. Yes, we believe that Jesus rose again and has taken our sins away, giving to us abundant life here and now. This is what Easter is all about.

I finish our time together today by quoting part of a hymn by Captain J. Wilson Smith (1842 - 1922):

“He who once was crowned with thorn
Crowns of glory now adorn;
Jesus sits upon the throne,
Hosts His triumph gladly own!

Soon will He appear again,
Then His saints with Him shall reign;
Echo far the glorious words:
King of kings and Lord of Lords.”⁵

Thank you for listening to this talk *Truth for Today* entitled “Who took what?” numbered T1246.

Endnotes:

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| (1) EDERSHEIM, A. | Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah. 1907 (vol. 2) p.579 |
| (2) Von POSECK, C.M | Psalms Hymns and Spiritual Songs 1978. Hymn 287 verse 2 |
| (3) HOLE, F.B. | The Gospels and Acts. p.298 |
| (4) MORRIS, L. | The Gospel According to Matthew. 1992 p.729 |
| (5) WILSON SMITH, J. | Psalms, Hymns & Spiritual Songs. 1978 Hymn 108 verses 2 & 5 |

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