

# Adult Teaching Resources

March 20, 2016



## Season of Lent (February 10-March 26)

When Old Becomes New — 2 Corinthians 5:11-21

God's New Thing — Isaiah 43:16-21

**The Dark Night Before the Dawn — Luke 23:1-49**

Ladies First — Luke 24:1-12

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# The Dark Night Before the Dawn

Luke 23:1-49

## FIT Teaching Guide

by Rick Jordan

This adult teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Baptists Today*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Baptists Today* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Baptists Today* so they can prepare before the lesson.

### Fellowship Question

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Use *one* of the following to break the ice, to begin discussion, and lead into the study:

Describe one way you are “seen” by someone else. (For example, “My wife sees me as a terrible driver” or “My child sees me as the world’s greatest dad.”)

Think of your spouse or best friend the first time you met them. Tell us who that is and describe your first impression in four or fewer words.

### Information

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Perception is an important skill. If we have good perception skills, we are less likely to miss great opportunities. If we have poor perception skills, we are more likely to be scammed.

In Luke 23, there are stories of ten persons or groups of persons and their perceptions of Jesus. For today’s lesson, we will read these stories, describe the character’s point of view (POV) regarding who Jesus was, and then put that point of view into a question or a sentence.

[Write on the board three columns: Character; POV; Sentence/Question] [NOTE to teacher: I will include my suggestions for the POV and sentence/question below, but your class members will doubtless have different (quite possibly better) answers, so take mine as suggestions to prime the pump or to offer guided questions. Try to guide class members to offer a different set of answers for each character. For example, for many of these, “a bad guy” could be a correct answer, but we are looking for something deeper — why was Jesus perceived as a bad guy (or a good guy)?]

[Have a class member read Luke 23:1-2.]

Who are the main characters in his part of the story? (“the assembly” and Pilate) We will consider Pilate soon. But for now, it would help us to understand who “the assembly” was. According to THE BIBLE LESSON writer, “The Sanhedrin consisted of seventy-one priests, scribes, and elders. It was the supreme governing body of the Jewish people, and the Romans allowed it wide-ranging powers of self-government, though capital punishment was not among them.”

[Write *Sanhedrin* on the board in the first column.]

## Information *continued*

How did the Sanhedrin perceive Jesus? (a threat, a law-breaker) From what we are told in other stories about Jesus, he did not say the things the Sanhedrin are accusing him of saying. Maybe they knew that and they are simply lying. Possibly, they did not have all of the facts, but only partial facts or distorted facts based on rumors and fear. Either way, “perception is reality.” What sentence or question do we hear coming from the Sanhedrin? (this man is an enemy of the state, this man is corrupting our people, this man is a threat to the political structure, etc.)

[Have a class member read Luke 23:3-5.] [Write Pilate on the board.]

Pilate was a politician assigned to be governor over Jerusalem and the surrounding area. Like all political leaders of that day, Pilate had the challenge of meeting Rome’s expectations and of keeping the locals fairly happy. You may have heard that “politics makes strange bed fellows.” Pilate, like many politicians, wants to keep his power and his role. To do that, he needs to make alliances he may not really desire and compromises that conflict with his core beliefs.

How does Pilate perceive Jesus? (a political challenge, a potential crisis, an innocent man, etc.) What statement or question do we hear from Pilate about Jesus? (I find no fault in him, I defer judgment, etc.)

[Have a class member read Luke 23:6-9.]

Who is our main character for this text? (Herod). Herod was eager “to see” Jesus. Why? How did Herod perceive Jesus? (a magician, a miracle worker) Why do you think he had this perception? (He must have heard of miracles Jesus performed, Jesus’ reputation preceded him, etc.) Do you think others may have seen Jesus in this same way? What statement or question would describe Herod’s perception of Jesus? (“Prove to me you have power.” “Amaze me.” “You want something from me? Earn it.” in four or fewer words, Etc.)

[Have a class member read Luke 23:10-12.]

Here, we again have religious leaders — not members of the Sanhedrin, necessarily, but religious leaders who felt threatened by Jesus. And we have some new characters. Who are they? (soldiers) How do they perceive Jesus? (a criminal, the butt of a joke, entertainment, etc.) What statement or question might we hear from the soldiers? (who do you think you are?, you are a nobody, etc.)

What happened between Pilate and Herod? Why do you think Luke thought this significant enough to mention here?

[Have a class member read Luke 23:13- 25.]

Here are familiar political and religious figures, but now there is another group. Who is that? (“the crowd,” a mob) Although Pilate wishes to release Jesus, the mob sees this as an opportunity to set free a local hero who had been imprisoned for sedition and murder. Who was Jesus to this crowd? (a bargaining chip, an ordinary/weak man compared to Barabbas,

## Information *continued*

etc.) What sentence or question might we hear from this crowd? (Jesus is no leader of us, Jesus is expendable, Barabbas is better for us than Jesus, What has he done for us lately?)

[Have a class member read Luke 23:26.]

Who is the new character of this story? (Simon of Cyrene) Cyrene was in Africa. It is reasonable to expect that Simon looked different from the typical person on the street of Jerusalem that day. It is possible that Simon was selected from the crowd at random, but it is also possible that he was selected because he was a minority or a foreigner. For whatever reason, Simon of Cyrene was made to carry the cross of Jesus. What do you imagine Simon's perception of Jesus was? (an unfair burden, an unexpected problem, etc.) What statement or question might we hear from Simon of Cyrene? (Why me? This is not right. Jesus is a burden I did not ask for, etc.)

[Have a class member read Luke 23:27-31.]

Who are the new characters in this part of the story? (weeping women) How might they be perceiving Jesus? (a victim, a sad man, a man who represents lost hopes and dreams, etc.) What statement or question might we hear from these women? (Why should the innocent suffer? We thought he was the Messiah, etc.)

In our next passage, we have many of the persons present at the crucifixion that we have heard from already.

[Have a class member read Luke 23:32-38.]

There are many witnesses to Jesus' trial, flogging, and crucifixion. All of them had different perceptions of who Jesus was. But none of them see him for who he is, ultimately. Yes, Jesus is an man innocent of any crime; he is a miracle worker; he is a "fool" as far as the powerful are concerned; he is a pitiful sight. But he is more. In our next passage, one person recognizes this.

[Have a class member read Luke 23:39-43.]

Two criminals. What was the perception of the first criminal? (Jesus was a fraud; Jesus was powerless; Jesus was a diversion from his own guilt and punishment, etc.) What statement or question might we hear from him?

How about the second criminal — what was his perception of Jesus? (Jesus was an innocent man; Jesus was bringing in the Kingdom of God, etc.) We are not told anything about any prior relationship to Jesus, so how do you think he came to this conclusion? So far, this is the only man to perceive Jesus correctly. What statement or question might we hear from him?

[Have a class member read Luke 23:44-49.]

Who is the newest character in this part of the story? (the centurion) What was his perception of Jesus? What do you think changed his perception of Jesus? Why? What statement or question might we hear from him?

## Transformational Exercise

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Look at all the ways people perceived Jesus on this day. What difference does it make to our lives in how we think of Jesus? (it changes how we live now and in eternity; it is possible to see Jesus but not trust in Jesus, etc.)

All of these witnesses were witnessing the same scene, yet they do not share the same perspective. What does this tell us about our spiritual lives?

It was the least likely who recognized Jesus for who he was — a criminal and a foreign military leader. What does that tell us about our spiritual lives?

Many people were not present to see Jesus that day. They were in town, busy, pre-occupied. To them, Jesus was perceived as being irrelevant. Even today, many perceive Jesus in this way. Even some who have been raised in church live as if Jesus is irrelevant. How can this be?

Regarding our perception of Jesus, CS Lewis said this in *Mere Christianity*:

“I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept his claim to be God. That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic — on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg — or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.”

What do you think of Lewis’ comment about how we might perceive Jesus?

No one who witnessed Jesus dying that day could imagine that what he said about his resurrection would be true. That must have sounded as foolish as the sign hanging over his head. It was impossible.

As we enter Holy Week, let us consider all the ways others perceived Jesus. But let us also consider how we perceive Jesus. Is he in one of these categories in the POV column?

For the next few moments of silence, repeat this prayer silently: “For me, Jesus, you are \_\_\_\_\_.”

[Close in a prayer something like this: *God, it is incredible that people could be in the presence of Jesus, but so wrongly perceive him. But it is amazing that some saw him rightly as a man innocent of any wrong and as the Messiah. Give us the eyes to see you all around us, to perceive you at work, and to follow you and your Way. Amen.*]

**Comments or Questions for Rick Jordan?** You may send comments to the lesson plan author at [rjordan@cbfnc.org](mailto:rjordan@cbfnc.org). Rick is also available to lead workshops and conferences on Christian Education, with particular emphasis on how best to use the FIT Faith model.

## Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartlege

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Baptists Today*. Watch for the “shovel” icon in the THE BIBLE LESSON, and then reference that item in this Digging Deeper resource. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Baptists Today* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Baptists Today* so they can prepare before the lesson.

**A tricky situation** — Both Pilate and Herod Antipas found themselves in a delicate situation: both understood that Jesus was innocent of sedition and there was no cause to execute him. They wanted to remain in favor with the influential Jewish officials of the Sanhedrin who wanted Jesus dead, but likewise recognized that Jesus had widespread grass roots support, which also had to be considered. Herod Antipas’s failure to either condemn or exonerate Jesus reflects that concern. John Nolland has suggested that the governor’s decision to mock Jesus by having a royal robe thrown over his shoulders could have been done to put Jesus in a humiliating position and thus undermine his popularity. Nolland puts it this way:

“Antipas would need to consider his response in the light of Jesus’ popular appeal. Mockery is no statement of innocence; it looks rather more like a measured strategy, designed to undermine the public image of Jesus without creating a direct confrontation. If anyone was to do more, far better to let Pilate bear the responsibility. Pilate’s thinking in sending Jesus to Herod in the first place is likely to have had a corresponding motivation. Both seemed to have been of the opinion that, while Jesus himself represented no significant threat, the situation needed to be handled with some delicacy, since strong Jewish feelings and conflicting opinions about Jesus did constitute a potential threat to public order” (*Luke 18:35—24:53*, vol. 35C of *Word Biblical Commentary*. Accordance electronic ed. [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993], 1122).

**Who killed Jesus?** — In his commentary on Luke, Malcolm Tolbert observed that many generations of Christians have avoided the implications of the cross by blaming it on the Jews while failing to see that the people who killed Jesus were no different than we are, preferring to silence the voice of God and take over the world for ourselves. This, he says, is the ultimate idolatry. “In this sense the crucifixion is not only something that happened a long time ago; it takes place every day in our own world” (“Luke,” in *The Broadman Bible Commentary* [Nashville: Broadman Press, 1970], 178). How do you react to this statement?

**Paradise** — The word translated “paradise” (*paradeiso* in Greek) is derived from a Persian word meaning “heaven.” It was used three times in the New Testament. In Luke 23:43 it refers to a place where the righteous dead abide. In Rev. 2:7 it describes the restoration of an Eden-like paradise as predicted in Isa. 51:3 and Ezek. 36:35. When Paul used the term in 2 Cor. 12:4, it appears to be in parallel with the “third heaven” he had mentioned in 2 Cor 12:2 as the place where God dwells, which he had visited in the spirit.

## Digging Deeper *continued*

**Quotations from the cross** — Jesus' words of committal from the cross are a partial quotation from Psalm 35:1:

*“Into your hand I commit my spirit;  
you have redeemed me, O LORD, faithful God.”*

The “cry of desolation,” mentioned in Mark 15:34 and Matthew 27:46 but not in Luke, is from Psalm 22:1:

*“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?  
Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?”*

## The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartlege

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### Why did Pilate allow an innocent man's execution?

All four gospels make it clear that Pilate believed Jesus was innocent of sedition against Rome, despite the charges brought against him. This is particularly clear in our text from Luke, where Pilate pronounced Jesus innocent no less than three times. After the leaders of the Sanhedrin brought Jesus to him with their trumped up charges, Pilate said: "I find no basis for an accusation against this man" (23:4). After sending Jesus to Herod Antipas and receiving him back again, Pilate "called together the chief priests, the leaders, and the people," announcing that "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. Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us. Indeed, he has done nothing to deserve death" (23:13-15). After his aborted attempt to solve the problem by releasing Jesus in favor of the rebel Barabbas, "Pilate, wanting to release Jesus, addressed them again; but they kept shouting, 'Crucify, crucify him!' 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'" (23:20-22).

The other three gospels tell the story differently, but all agree that Pilate did not believe Jesus was guilty of any crime deserving death. If Pilate's main concern had been justice, he would surely have released Jesus, as he clearly wanted to do — but he did not. Why?

Pilate was appointed by Rome rather than elected as governor, but he was no less a politician. To keep peace in Jerusalem and the surrounding area, he was caught in an intricate web of competing interests, pulled between the dictates of Rome, compromise with the influential Jewish leaders, pressures from the people as a whole, and the cause of justice.

In this case, justice came in last. Rome's first priority was that Pilate keep the peace and ensure a steady flow of taxes from his territory. There was already a threat of insurrection from Galilean zealots who had the potential of stirring up trouble. Pilate knew that the charges against Jesus were false, but needed to curry favor with the powerful and well-connected Sanhedrin, who could have fomented unrest among the people or appealed directly to Rome for his replacement. In the initial stages of the trial, it seems, Pilate was torn between a desire to stay on good terms with the Jewish leaders and a concern that Jesus' popular appeal among the people could lead to a potential uprising if he had him killed. In the end, however, the people — at least those present during the proceedings — also turned against Jesus. Whether the change in tenor was instigated by partisans planted by the priests, or whether the people's messianic hopes had been dashed when they saw Jesus humiliated before Pilate and Herod, or whether there was simply bloodlust gone

## The Hardest Question *continued*

viral among the crowd, it became apparent to Pilate that Jesus' support among the people was melting, and he could give the Jewish leaders what they wanted without the threat of a popular uprising.

From a political point of view, then, setting Jesus free would have been of no particular benefit to Pilate or to Rome. For Pilate, the path of least resistance and most advantage was to give the priests and the increasingly vocal crowd what they asked for. Not for the first time or the last, justice fell victim to expediency: "But they kept urgently demanding with loud shouts that he should be crucified; and their voices prevailed. So Pilate gave his verdict that their demand should be granted (23:23-24).