

BaptistWay Bible Series for Feb. 26: Every day of Jesus' life focused on the cross

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Every day of Jesus' life focused on the CROSS

• *Luke 23:32-46*

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We Americans are pretty pragmatic. What's the "bottom line"? So what? Those are the questions we so often ask and hear. Let us ask those same questions about the life and work of Jesus.

Luke records many wonderful things done by Jesus. He performed miracles, healed the sick, fed the hungry and amazed people with his teachings and parables. He even brought the dead back to life.

Jesus had quite a following, too. Wherever he went, a crowd of people surrounded him, including a select few who followed him everywhere.

All these things were important parts of Jesus' life and ministry, but he still had one thing to do that took priority over everything. Jesus' entire life pointed to the cross. The cross was the destination in Jesus' journey on

earth.

The final moments of Jesus' journey were the most unpleasant. Pilate had the unfortunate position of holding Jesus on trial. Pilate knew Jesus was not guilty, and he did not want to crucify him, but Jesus' accusers were insistent. They demanded Jesus be crucified without giving legitimate reasons for his execution. Jesus raised no protest in the face of this great injustice. He never tried to escape his fate on the cross; Jesus remained obedient.

In Luke 9:23, Jesus said in order to become his followers, people must take up their crosses and follow him. This disturbing image surely turned some away. Death on a cross was not only one of the more painful forms of punishment, it also was perceived as a shameful way to die.

Nevertheless, obedience is essential in discipleship, and sometimes obedience presents us with some very unattractive propositions. To a first century audience, nothing could be less appealing than a cross, with all its implications of shame and death.

Sometimes, it is difficult for us to imagine that Jesus needed to be obedient. After all, he was God. At the same time, he was human, and he had a mission. He remained obedient to that mission, as he was betrayed by his friends, condemned by his accusers, beaten by his holders and hung on a cross. All through this, Jesus remained obedient.

Jesus, who led an innocent and good life, was sentenced to death along with two criminals. Along with those two, Jesus was led to a terrifying place known as The Skull. The Skull was a common location for crucifixions, and it actually had a similar shape to a human skull, making it a particularly eerie place. It was on The Skull that Jesus was crucified, one criminal on his left, the other on his right. All through this, Jesus remained obedient.

After his cross had been raised and completely situated, Jesus called out to

God, asking forgiveness for those who had raised that cross. “They know not what they do,” Jesus said of those soldiers who thought they merely were carrying out the orders of their employer. Even as Jesus was petitioning God for these men, they gambled for the rights to Jesus’ clothes. All through this, Jesus remained obedient.

Some of the important people in the crowd looked on and scoffed, mocking Jesus and challenging to save himself. An inscription, hanging at the top of Jesus’ cross read, “King of the Jews.” The soldiers looked up at that inscription and echoed the leaders in the crowd. “If you are the King of the Jews,” they said, “save yourself.” All through this, Jesus remained obedient.

Jesus even was mocked by one of the criminals crucified next to him. “Save yourself and us,” the man cried out. The other criminal spoke up for Jesus, testifying to Jesus’ innocence. Jesus promised that man would be in paradise with him that very day. Jesus did not save the men in the way the first criminal would have preferred. Jesus already had reached his destination.

Around noon, the sky became dark. The curtain in the temple was torn in two, symbolizing the fruition of Jesus’ goal. From the cross, Jesus cried out, “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.” At that point, Jesus’ mission was complete—he had done what he had come to do.

Jesus came to be a sacrifice to God on the behalf of all people. That curtain in the temple represented the exclusive access that the priests had in approaching God. The priests would bring sacrifices on behalf of others, but Jesus was the ultimate sacrifice.

Even though his heart felt the disappointment of betrayal and the pain of being hated, he remained obedient. Even though his body felt the wounds of a beating and the nails of a crucifixion, he remained obedient.

When Jesus died, a Roman soldier standing by looked up at the Christ’s

body. What could he say? He simply said, “Surely this man was innocent.” It was not anything Jesus said that led the soldier to this conclusion. Jesus never protested; he was only obedient to his call.

Jesus was on a lifelong journey to the cross. Along the way, he faced some great temptations but remained faithful. He surrendered popularity and earthly power to offer eternal life to humankind. He became human—a servant—and submitted himself to an ugly death. He did it out of love. He never stopped until his journey was completed.

Discussion questions

- *What does Jesus’ journey to and through the cross mean to you?*

