

killing jesus, part one: who killed jesus?

Active Listening Concepts and Vocabulary

Nehru jacket: _____

“Don’t mess with Rome”: _____

impeached: _____

plasma: _____

Wisdom of Solomon 2.12-20 (NRSV)

“Let us lie in wait for the righteous man, because he is inconvenient to us and opposes our actions; he reproaches us for sins against the law, and accuses us of sins against our training. He professes to have knowledge of God, and calls himself a child of the Lord. He became to us a reproof of our thoughts; the very sight of him is a burden to us, because his manner of life is unlike that of others, and his ways are strange. We are considered by him as something base, and he avoids our ways as unclean; he calls the last end of the righteous happy, and boasts that God is his father. Let us see if his words are true, and let us test what will happen at the end of his life; for if the righteous man is God’s child, he will help him, and will deliver him from the hand of his adversaries. Let us test him with insult and torture, so that we may find out how gentle he is, and make trial of his forbearance. Let us condemn him to a shameful death, for, according to what he says, he will be protected.”

-- late 1st century, B.C.E.ⁱ

Orientation Readings

He was executed. I mean everybody would agree that he was crucified, but we in the Christian Church have tended to speak of that as “dying for the sins of the world.” But the bottom line is, crucifixion is a form of execution. So he was executed, and unless that was simply a mistake, which most of us scholars don’t believe, he was executed because the powers that be felt threatened by what he was up to. So I think he was a threatening person as a historical figure. I don’t mean that he was leading a violent revolution -- but he was threatening in the way in which Martin Luther King was threatening to many people.

-- Marcus Borg, *Saving Jesus*

When they were wanting to make him their king in the story we call Palm Sunday, his head was not turned by the sweet narcotic of human praise. He simply had his eye on who he was and he never turned to the right or to the left to be destroyed by the praise of the people. And when he was being killed on Good Friday he never changed, he never became resentful. Most people when they're being killed unjustly do whatever they can do to survive one moment longer. They cuss, they fight, they scream, they bite, they plead, they weep, they whine. Whatever it might give them another chance at life. But Jesus is portrayed as accepting whatever people did to him and loving in return. His being was never distorted either by the praise of people or by the hostility of people.

-- John Shelby Spong, *Saving Jesus*

One way of making the crucifixion almost irrelevant is to say, "The Jews did it." It was some kind of a fight within the family, some kind of theological dispute about the Torah or the Messiah -- something that has almost no ongoing relevance except, possibly, anti-Semitism. There was some disagreement about theology between two groups of Jews and one group of Jews got the other one killed. You could say, "Sad story. We've all heard ones like it" -- nasty fight within a church, a sect, a cult. Someone is dead at the end, but not exactly of transcendental relevance (except, maybe: "Don't do it!")

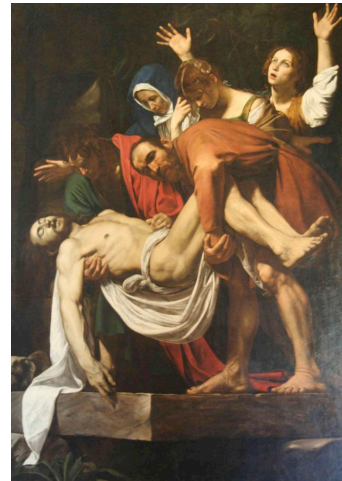
-- John Dominic Crossan (from *Victory and Peace or Justice and Peace*, published by Living the Questions)

Jesus was executed by the state.

-- Helen Prejean, *Saving Jesus*

Hitler saw the Passion Play (in Oberammergau) and admired it exceedingly because it showed, in his words, "The Arian superiority of Pilate above the muck and mire of Jewry."

-- John Dominic Crossan (from *Victory and Peace or Justice and Peace*, published by Living the Questions)



I get up to the Passion narrative, Matthew 27:25, and the crowd says, "His blood be on our heads and on our children!" and I knew where the hateful teaching had come from. By the time I got up to the Gospel of John where "the Jews" -- and that word is used over and over again -- are described in such negative terms, I felt personally wounded, so I knew then where the hateful teaching had come from, but because I had been raised and nurtured in this very warm, inter-religious sense, in effect I had been inoculated against the hate. I knew the text could be read in a hateful way -- *had* been read in a hateful way -- but I also knew it did not have to be read that way.

-- Amy-Jill Levine, *Saving Jesus*

Questions for Personal Reflection

To what degree might the “Wisdom of Solomon” (written approximately 100 years before the Gospels) influenced the Gospel writers in their telling of Jesus’ story?

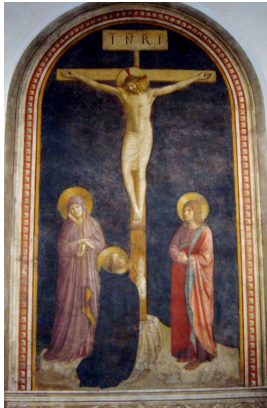
Who killed Jesus? Why?

Discussion Questions (following each DVD chapter or entire program)

Chapter 1

Looking at the Gospels as a whole, where did Levine start to have trouble when she first read the New Testament?

How was she “inoculated against the hate”?



Chapter 2

How exactly did Pilate and Antipas “get it right”?

According to Prejean, describe the purpose of crucifixion.

Chapter 3

Why was Jesus so threatening to the establishment?

What was he bringing against them?

Chapter 4

How has Prejean’s involvement with death row inmates affected her understanding of the crucifixion?

Additional Questions

What examples can you give of Jesus' death having been the justification for anti-Semitism?

Respond to this statement: "Christianity has been hopelessly compromised by its encouragement of and complicity with anti-Semitism."

How does talking about it as "execution" change the somewhat domesticated notion of "crucifixion"?

How are Rome's motivations for execution similar or different than the motivations in our culture? What are the implications of Rome's public approach versus the United States' shielded & secretive approach?

Saving Jesus Theme Question

What element or learning from today's session will be most important in "Saving Jesus" in the 21st century?

Contributors in DVD Session 9

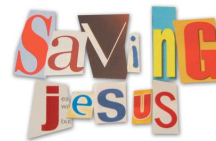
Marcus Borg: Jesus scholar, author of "Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time" & "The Heart of Christianity"

John Dominic Crossan: Jesus scholar, author of "Jesus, a Revolutionary Biography"

Bill Nelson: Founding Pastor Emeritus, Church of the Beatitudes, Phoenix, AZ

Helen Prejean: Roman Catholic Sister, author of "Dead Man Walking"

Bernard Brandon Scott: New Testament professor, author of "Hear Then the Parable"



ⁱ Note: *B.C.E. (Before the Common Era) and C.E. (Common Era) are the non-Christo-centric alternative designations for B.C. and A.D. often used by scholars.*