

Dr. Craig Keener, Matthew, Session 18, Matthew 26-27

Podcast Audio Overview

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Hey everyone and welcome back for another deep dive with us. Yeah, glad to be back. Today we're going to be looking at the events surrounding Jesus's death.

Okay. As told in the Gospel of Matthew, specifically chapters 26 and 27. Okay.

And we are going to be working through a lecture by Dr. Craig Keener. Oh, yeah. Who is a New Testament scholar.

Right. And I think you'll find that his insights are pretty amazing. Looking forward to it.

Yeah, so get ready to uncover some fascinating historical details. Okay. And cultural nuances that we often miss.

Yeah. In just typical retellings of this story. Yeah.

And of course, we always like to explore some of the intriguing questions that are raised by the text. So we'll be looking at things like how different people valued Jesus. Okay.

We'll be looking at the contrasting responses to his betrayal. Interesting. And we'll also be looking at some of the fascinating parallels between ancient Roman customs and the events leading up to Jesus's crucifixion.

I'm intrigued already. Yeah, it's really, really fascinating stuff. So one of the things that I thought was so interesting right off the bat is just this contrast in how people valued Jesus.

Okay. You have this woman. Yeah.

Who anoints him with this super expensive perfume. I mean, this is like a family heirloom. Wow.

This is nard that was imported all the way from India. That's a long way. I know.

It's just this incredibly lavish act of devotion. It really is. And Jesus defends her actions.

He does. And he even states that her story will be told wherever the gospel is preached. Yeah, and that's significant because it kind of elevates her gesture.

Right. It showcases her deep love and reverence for him. Yeah, but then on the other hand you have the disciples who are complaining about the wasted money.

Right, like it should have been sold and given to the poor. Exactly. And it seems practical on the surface, right? It is very practical.

But Dr. Keener points out that they're focusing on the material and they're totally missing the point. They fail to grasp the magnitude of who he is. Exactly.

Yeah. And then this contrast becomes even more apparent when we look at Judas. Right, Judas who betrays him for a mere 30 pieces of silver.

Which is the price of a slave. The price of a slave in Exodus. Yeah.

Yeah, that's crazy. The difference in value is just staggering. It is.

Judas views him as a commodity. Right. And the woman recognizes his immeasurable worth.

Okay, so let's move on to the Last Supper because this scene is just packed with layers. It is. Dr. Keener explains that this was a Passover meal.

Right. And Jewish people at that time they would recline on couches during these feasts. It's true.

That was actually typical of banquets in the ancient world. Interesting. Yeah.

And I think understanding this physical context really helps us. Right. Because you have John leaning back on Jesus's chest.

Right. And Judas has easy access to receive the sop. Yeah.

And this adds a whole new dimension to the narrative. Absolutely. It really does.

It's like we're transported right there into that room with them. And then, of course, you have those pivotal words. You know, this is my body.

This is my blood. Right. And Dr. Keener explains how these words have been subject to various interpretations, sometimes leading to misunderstanding.

Yeah, misunderstanding and even misrepresentation. Right. Yeah.

And he highlights how Paul, years later, had to address misinterpretations among the Corinthians. Yeah. Like their understanding of the Lord's Supper had become completely distorted by social hierarchies and status.

Yeah, they had totally missed the message of unity and selflessness that Jesus was embodying. Totally. Yeah.

So what are we supposed to make of this? Well, I think Dr. Keener is urging us to consider the original context. Okay. Of Jesus, the Passover, and the setting in which he used the symbolic language.

Right. And I think understanding this context helps us grasp the depth of Jesus's sacrifice. Yeah.

And the true meaning of communion. Right. Because it's not just a ritual.

It's not just a ritual. It's a powerful reminder of his love and sacrifice. Yeah.

Calling us to unity and selflessness in our own lives. That's good. All right.

So now the narrative takes a somber turn. It does. We're moving to the Garden of Gethsemane.

Okay. And Dr. Keener paints this really vivid picture of Jesus's emotional anguish. Yeah.

Where he pleads with his disciples to stay awake and pray with him. Right. But they repeatedly fall asleep.

They do. Despite his pleas. Even though he's begging them.

I know. It's kind of a scene that seems embarrassing. It is.

Even unbelievable. Yeah. Would early Christians really fabricate a story where the disciples.

Right. Those closest to him. Right.

Fail him so dramatically. That's a good point. You know.

Yeah. It seems a little too awkward. It does.

To have been made up. Yeah. And I think this really speaks to the raw honesty of the gospel accounts.

It does. And it really resonates with our own human failings. Doesn't it? It does.

Even as modern-day disciples, we mess up. We do. We get distracted.

All the time. We prioritize our own comfort. Way too often.

And we fail to fully grasp the gravity of situations. But Dr. Keener reminds us that despite all of our weaknesses. Yeah.

Jesus's love and sacrifice remain steadfast. They do. His love never fails.

That is reassuring. Isn't it? So then we see two really stark betrayals. Yeah.

You've got Peter's denial of Jesus before the rooster crows. Right. And then you've got Judas handing him over for those 30 pieces of silver.

Right. Two very different acts. But they both result in deep regret.

They do. And Dr. Keener really juxtaposes their responses. Yeah.

Peter weeps bitterly, repenting of his actions. All right. But Judas, consumed by guilt, chooses suicide by hanging.

And Dr. Keener points out that that particular method was considered dishonorable in their culture. Yeah. It was similar to the biblical figure of Ahithophel.

Right. Who betrayed King David and met a similar end. And this raises an important question about repentance and forgiveness.

Yeah. Because Peter's story offers hope. It does.

It shows that even in our darkest moments, redemption is possible. Now this next point that Dr. Keener makes really got me thinking. Okay.

What's that? He talks about this chain of guilt. Okay. That runs throughout the narrative.

You know Judas hands Jesus over to the chief priests. Right. The priests hand him over to Pilate.

Right. And finally Jesus hands himself over to death. Wow.

It's like this tragic relay race of blame-shifting. Yeah, it really is. And it reflects the complexity of guilt and responsibility.

It does because Judas cries out about betraying innocent blood. Right. The priests wash their hands of it.

Right. And even Pilate tries to distance himself. It's like this timeless human desire to avoid accountability.

Isn't it? And it's still so relevant today. It is. We see it everywhere.

We do. Yeah. And then Dr. Keener takes it a step further.

Okay. He brings up this Old Testament law where communities bore responsibility for unsolved murders. Oh, wow.

That's interesting. He's arguing that both individual and societal guilt play a role in Jesus's death. That's a powerful point.

It is. Yeah. It's not just about pointing fingers at individuals.

Right. But acknowledging the systems and structures that contribute to injustice. And speaking of injustice.

Yeah. The trial of Jesus is just a stark example of political expediency overriding true justice. It is.

And Dr. Keener gives us this fascinating background on Pontius Pilate. He does. He describes him as a bully who often resorted to shows of force.

Yeah, but also susceptible to backing down when he's facing strong opposition. Right. Remember, Pilate was in a really precarious political situation.

He was. As an equestrian, not a senator. Right.

He was more vulnerable to accusations from his enemies. Yeah. And plus he had a history of clashes with the Jewish people.

He did so; condemning Jesus was probably the easiest way out for him. Yeah. The path of least resistance.

Especially given his precarious political standing. Yeah. He wanted to avoid further unrest in Jerusalem.

Right. It's a classic example of power dynamics at play. It is.

Pilate, despite his authority, chooses the path of least resistance. Yeah. And sacrifices justice in the process.

And that highlights a recurring theme throughout history. Those in power often prioritize self-preservation over what's right and just. This next scene is tough to hear.

It is. The Roman soldiers mocking Jesus, scourging him, forcing a crown of thorns on his head. Yeah.

Dressing him in a purple robe, beating him with a cane. Horrific cruelty. I know, but Dr. Keener points out the irony.

Yeah. They're trying to mock Jesus as the king of the Jews. Right.

But they unknowingly participate in this twisted coronation of the true king. That's powerful. And in the midst of all this chaos.

Yeah. We see the fulfillment of Jesus's prophecy about Peter's denial. Oh, yeah.

It's heartbreaking. It is. It really highlights how easily we can crumble under pressure.

Right. Even with the best intentions. Even when you love Jesus.

Yeah. Yeah. But it also sets the stage for Peter's eventual redemption.

Right. And, you know, his powerful leadership in the early church. Okay, so now we come to the crucifixion itself.

Right. Dr. Keener explains that Jesus would have carried the cross beam. The petibulum.

Petibulum to the execution site. Right. Where the upright stake, the palassie, was already in place.

And it was a grueling journey. It was. Made even worse by the fact that Jesus was already so weak from the torture.

Yeah, he couldn't carry the cross beam the whole way. No. And a bystander, Simon of Cyrene, was forced to help.

And the irony is just so poignant. Yeah. Jesus had told his followers that discipleship requires taking up one's cross.

Yeah. And following him. And here he is unable to carry his own cross.

And a stranger is compelled to bear that burden. That's powerful. It is.

It's a powerful image that speaks to the cost of discipleship. Yeah. But also to the unexpected ways God works through ordinary people.

That's good. I love that. I do, too.

Yeah. And it really challenges our assumptions about what it means to follow Jesus, Dustin. It does.

Sometimes it's not about our strength or our ability. Right. It's about our willingness to just show up even when it's difficult.

Even when it's inconvenient. Exactly. Dr. Keener doesn't shy away from the brutal realities of crucifixion either.

He describes how the person would be nailed or tied to the petibulum. Right. Which would then be hoisted up onto the palace.

And it was a slow, agonizing death. It was a horrible way to die. It was.

And he highlights how this form of execution was particularly humiliating for the Romans. Yeah. You know, it was reserved for the worst criminals, rebels, slaves.

Yeah. The fact that Jesus, whom they mocked as the king of the Jews. Right.

Was subjected to this form of punishment is just incredible. It speaks volumes about the Roman perception of his claims. Right.

And the threat they perceived him to pose. It's amazing how much symbolism is packed into this whole event. It really is.

Okay. So Jesus is on the cross. Yeah.

And you have these various groups interacting with him. Okay. You've got the religious leaders continuing their mockery.

You've got the soldiers gambling for his clothes. Right. And then you have these two criminals who are crucified alongside him.

And Dr. Keener points out that one of the criminals. Yeah. Recognizing Jesus's innocence actually rebukes the other and expresses faith in Jesus's coming kingdom.

That's pretty amazing. It is. And this really echoes that theme of recognizing Jesus's true identity.

Right. That we've seen throughout Matthew's gospel. Yeah.

Even in his final moments, Jesus is still drawing people to himself. And then you have this incredible moment where darkness falls over the land for three hours. It's true.

It's like creation itself is reacting to the injustice of what's happening. It really is. Yeah, it's this dramatic symbol of the cosmic significance of Jesus's death.

Yeah. It's not just a human tragedy. Right.

But an event that disrupts the very order of the universe. And then right before he dies, Jesus cries out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Yeah, it's such a raw human cry of anguish. It is.

And Dr. Keener explains that these are the opening words of Psalm 22, which is a psalm of lament that ultimately ends in victory. Interesting. So by quoting this psalm, Jesus identifies with the suffering servant, foreshadowing his ultimate triumph over death.

And then the curtain of the temple is torn in two. Yes. From top to bottom.

It's like a physical manifestation of the barrier between God and humanity being ripped apart. Yeah, this symbolic act signifies the end of the old sacrificial system. Right.

And the ushering in of a new covenant through Jesus's sacrifice. Wow, talk about a paradigm shift. It is a huge shift.

Okay, so Jesus dies. Yeah. And then there are these strange events that follow.

Okay, like what? Like an earthquake, tombs opening, and the dead rising. It's almost apocalyptic. It is.

And Dr. Keener suggests that these events underscore the momentous nature of Jesus's death. Okay. And its impact on the world.

Yeah. It's like the very fabric of reality is being shaken up by this event. And then we have this detail about the Roman centurion and the other soldiers who are guarding Jesus.

Right. They're absolutely terrified, and they proclaim Surely he was the Son of God. It's incredible.

Remember, these are Roman soldiers, pagans. Yeah. Who had no prior belief in Jesus.

So their recognition of his true identity. Right. In the face of his death.

Yes. Is powerful. It is; it serves as a powerful testimony to the impact of his life and teachings.

Okay, so now let's talk about the burial. Okay. Dr. Keener notes that it's a wealthy Jewish leader named Joseph of Arimathea.

Right. Who requests Jesus's body from Pilate. Yeah.

And lays him in his own tomb. And this detail is really significant. Yeah, why is that? Because it shows that even among the Jewish elite.

Okay. There were those who believed in Jesus. Right.

Even if they hadn't publicly declared it before. It also kind of foreshadows the fact that Jesus's message would eventually reach people from all walks of life. Yeah.

Including those in positions of power. Exactly. And the fact that Jesus is buried in a new tomb.

Right. One that's never been used before is also significant. In what way? Well, it fulfills Old Testament prophecy.

Oh, okay. And it symbolizes the beginning of something new. The inauguration of a new covenant.

Okay, so we've got Jesus laid to rest in this tomb. Yeah. And then the chief priests and the Pharisees go to Pilate, worried that Jesus's disciples might try to steal his body.

And claim that he's risen from the dead. Right. So they request a guard to be placed at the tomb.

This just shows the extent of their fear. Right. And their unwillingness to accept the possibility of Jesus's resurrection.

It's like they've witnessed all these miraculous things. They have. And they still remain blind to the truth.

They're blinded by their own preconceived notion. They are. And ironically, their actions end up providing further proof of the resurrection.

Yeah. It's like they've inadvertently set the stage for something extraordinary to happen. It's a testament to how God can use even the actions of those who oppose him to accomplish his purposes.

He can, and he does. Yeah. Yeah.

It really is mind-boggling how everything seems to be aligning, even the actions of those who oppose Jesus. Now, Dr. Keener dives into some fascinating historical parallels, too. Oh, yeah.

He compares what we see in the Gospels to other known practices and personalities of the time. Okay. And it gives us this much richer understanding of the political and social landscape of first-century Palestine.

Yeah. It's like adding historical footnotes to the story, right? Exactly. For instance, he talks about the practice of releasing a prisoner during Passover.

Right. Which Pilate offers to the crowd. Exactly.

And it might seem like just a plot device. It does. But Dr. Keener explains that this was an actual custom.

Really? Yeah. It's attested to in other historical sources. So not just some random detail thrown in there for dramatic effect.

No, it really happened. Wow. Yeah.

And this adds a layer of authenticity to the narrative. It does. It also helps us understand the political pressure that Pilate was under.

Right. He's trying to appease the Jewish leaders. Right.

The Roman authorities. Yeah. And maintain some kind of order in Jerusalem.

Yeah. Talk about being caught between a rock and a hard place. Dr. Keener also sheds some light on the character of Caiaphas.

Okay. The high priest. Yeah.

Who was instrumental in condemning Jesus. Right. And he describes him as a shrewd politician.

He does. Who managed to stay in power for an unusually long time. Probably by keeping the Romans happy.

Most likely. Yeah. It kind of paints this picture of him as a master manipulator.

It does. Willing to sacrifice anyone. Even an innocent man.

To maintain his position. His power. Yeah.

It's chilling. To think about the motivations at play. Yeah.

It makes the story even more tragic. It does. But also more realistic.

Yeah. You know, people are complex. Right.

And power can corrupt even the best intentions. Absolutely. And it reminds us that this whole battle between good and evil.

It's not just some abstract concept. No. It's a very real struggle.

Yeah. Playing out in human hearts and in those holes of power. Okay.

We've got to talk about the inscription on the cross. Okay. This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.

Such a simple statement, but it carries so much weight. It does. And Dr. Keener points out that this inscription, the titulus.

The titulus. Yeah. Was standard Roman practice.

Okay. It was a warning to others. Right.

And it declared the crime for which the person was being executed. So in this case, a charge of treason. But by proclaiming Jesus as the King of the Jews, even in mockery.

Yeah. The Romans inadvertently acknowledged the truth of his claim. It's another example of how God can use even the actions of his enemies to accomplish his purposes.

It is. That inscription becomes this silent testament to Jesus's true identity, even as he hangs on that cross. Yeah.

And Dr. Keener also points out how problematic this inscription would have been for early Christians. It would have been. Because to claim allegiance to a crucified king was considered a treasonous act against Rome.

Right. Could have gotten them in trouble. Big trouble.

Serious trouble. Yeah. It speaks volumes about the courage and conviction of those early believers.

It really does. They were willing to risk everything. Their lives.

Everything for their faith in Jesus. Even in the face of persecution and death. That's true.

Their unwavering commitment is truly inspiring. Now, there's this detail about the darkness that falls over the land during the crucifixion. Yeah, it lasts for three hours.

From noon to three in the afternoon. Oh, time. It's just this really strange and eerie detail.

It is. And some scholars have tried to explain it away. As like a natural phenomenon.

Yeah, like a solar eclipse or a dust storm. But Dr. Keener seems to suggest it's meant to be understood as a supernatural event. Yeah, like a sign from God.

Right. That something extraordinary is happening. It's like creation itself is mourning the death of its creator.

That's a powerful image. It is. Okay.

So we've talked about a lot of really heavy stuff today. We have. But ultimately the message of the gospel is one of hope.

It is. And victory. Yeah.

Dr. Keener's insights have given us so much to think about. They really have. From the cultural nuances to those historical parallels.

Absolutely. I think we've gained a deeper understanding of this pivotal event. We have.

And its lasting impact on the world. And we've only scratched the surface. We have.

There's so much more to explore in Matthew's gospel. There is. And we encourage you to continue this journey of discovery and reflection.

Yeah. Keep seeking out those hidden gems of wisdom. Yeah.

That this ancient text has to offer. Thank you for joining us on this deep dive into Matthew's account of Jesus's death. It's been a pleasure.

We hope you'll join us again next time for another fascinating exploration. We'll see you then.