

Dr. Craig Keener, Matthew, Session 19, Matthew 27-28

Podcast Audio Overview

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All right, so are you ready to dive deep into Matthew with us today? We're going to be looking at the final chapters, specifically a lecture by Dr. Craig Keener, and it really sheds some fascinating light on the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. It really does. Yeah.

What I thought was so cool was just how much historical and cultural detail it brings out, you know? Yeah. Gives a fresh perspective on a story that we all think we know so well. Absolutely.

And that's key to really understanding any historical event, right? You need that context. Oh, absolutely. So where do we even begin with a story as big as this one? Well, the lecture starts by setting the scene, you know, the crucifixion itself.

And one detail that stood out to me was this practice of drafting bystanders to carry the cross beam. Oh, yeah. And, you know, we've all heard of Simon of Cyrene.

Right. But I bet you didn't know that he might have been Jewish in Jerusalem for Passover. Wait, seriously.

I always just pictured him as like some random guy in the wrong place at the wrong time. Right. But the lecture points out that Simon was from Cyrene, which had a large Jewish population.

So it just makes you realize how many people from all over the Roman Empire would have been in Jerusalem for Passover. That's a really good point. It really sets the stage for the diversity of the crowd and just the tension surrounding, you know, Jesus's arrival.

Exactly. And speaking of tension, the lecture doesn't shy away from the brutality of crucifixion. Right.

You know, the Romans designed it to be slow and agonizing, a public spectacle to deter any thoughts of rebellion. You can really feel that weight, you know, in the lecture. And it even mentions that Jesus refused the painkiller offered to him.

Yeah. That must have been such a hard choice to make. It speaks to his willingness to embrace suffering, to experience the full force of what was happening.

It makes you think about how strong he had to have been to endure that pain and humiliation. Absolutely. And, you know, the lecture even mentions that even if a person survived the initial crucifixion, they were often so weakened that they would die afterward.

Wow. So Joseph of Arimathea stepped in to ensure a proper burial for Jesus. Right.

That was really significant. Especially considering Jewish law demanded burial. Exactly.

As the lecture points out, it adds a whole other layer to Joseph's actions, you know, showing respect for Jesus even in death. Right. And it also sets up the circumstances for the resurrection in a way that's grounded in the reality of the time.

OK. So speaking of the resurrection, the lecture analyzes those who mocked Jesus during the crucifixion. Yeah.

And it gets pretty insightful. It is fascinating how their words, though intended to be cruel, actually echo a passage from the Wisdom of Solomon, a Jewish text. Wow.

It's like they unknowingly condemn themselves by mirroring words meant to describe those who persecute the righteous. That's wild. It's like they're fulfilling prophecy without even realizing it.

Exactly. And there's another layer to this, too. The lecture explains how the mockers thought Jesus was calling on Elijah for help, which ties back to Jewish traditions about Elijah aiding rabbis in distress.

OK. The irony is that they totally missed who Jesus was. It's like they were looking right at the answer and still couldn't see it.

So let's talk about those dramatic signs that happened when Jesus died. The darkness, the earthquake, the temple veil tearing. It's like the world itself was reacting.

And the lecture reminds us that these weren't just random events. In Jewish tradition, these signs were often associated with the deaths of righteous individuals. OK.

So it adds a whole other dimension to their significance. Those signs are even more powerful now, almost like a cosmic validation of Jesus's sacrifice. But here's where it gets really interesting.

The lecture mentions that when Jesus died, some dead people actually came out of their tombs. Yeah. I mean, what are we supposed to make of that? Well, if we connect this to the bigger picture, it foreshadows the resurrection.

OK. It's like a symbolic preview of the new life that Jesus's death will bring. Wow.

That's a powerful image. It's like death itself is being challenged even before the resurrection takes place. But let's not get ahead of ourselves.

Right. Let's talk about the events surrounding the empty tomb. OK.

Let's unpack that. And there's one detail in the lecture that I find particularly fascinating. The fact that the Gospels emphasize women as the first witnesses to the resurrection.

Hmm. That is interesting, especially considering that in both Jewish and Roman law, a woman's testimony wasn't considered very reliable. Exactly.

So why would the Gospel writers include a detail that could potentially weaken their case? Right. It really suggests that they were committed to recording what actually happened, even if it wasn't the most convenient narrative. It makes you think about just how authentic the accounts are.

They weren't trying to create a perfect story. They were trying to tell the truth. Precisely.

And that strengthens the case for the resurrection. So let's dive into that. What does the lecture say about the historical plausibility of the resurrection? One point it raises is the lack of comparable resurrection narratives in other cultures.

The idea of a bodily resurrection where someone returns to life in a physical form. Right. That was unique to Jewish tradition.

Was unique to Jewish tradition. It really sets it apart. It's not just about a soul going to an afterlife, but an actual physical return to life.

Right. And the lecture emphasizes that this makes the resurrection even more radical and challenging. It's not a concept that would have been easily accepted in the ancient world.

Which makes the early and consistent testimony of the disciples even more intriguing. The lecture mentions that they were willing to face persecution, even death, for their belief in the resurrection. They clearly believed they had seen something extraordinary.

And it wasn't just a handful of people either. The lecture brings up Paul's account of over 500 people who saw the resurrected Jesus. Yeah, that's a lot of eyewitnesses.

That's a significant number of eyewitnesses. You can't just dismiss that many accounts. But the lecture also acknowledges the other side of the coin, the guards who claim the disciples stole Jesus's body.

That's a pretty blatant attempt to debunk the resurrection, wouldn't you say? Absolutely. And what's interesting is that Matthew includes this fabricated story in his gospel. It suggests that this rumor was circulating at the time and early Christians had to contend with it.

It highlights the challenges they faced in proclaiming the resurrection. They weren't just dealing with skepticism, but outright opposition and misinformation. Right.

And that makes their unwavering belief even more remarkable. It does. And for us today, it raises some important questions, doesn't it? Are we willing to stand up for what we believe in even when we face opposition? Are we willing to be like those early witnesses who boldly proclaim the truth even when it was risky? Those are definitely questions worth pondering.

The lecture challenges us to think about where we stand. Will we be like the women who bravely shared the truth even when it wasn't easy? Or like the guards who chose fear and self-preservation? It's a powerful call to action. And speaking of powerful, one detail that really struck me was the emphasis on the physical reality of Jesus's burial.

The lecture points out that Joseph of Arimathea, a wealthy and influential man, risked his own safety by requesting Jesus's body for burial. That's a really significant point. It shows that belief in Jesus wasn't limited to the poor or marginalized.

Even those who had much to lose were drawn to him. It's a testament to the power of his message and the impact he had on people from all walks of life. And the fact that he was buried in a tomb, according to Jewish customs, further underscores the reality of his death and consequently the significance of his resurrection.

Exactly. It wasn't a metaphorical or spiritual resurrection. The gospel accounts, especially as highlighted in the lecture, make it clear that this was a bodily resurrection, a physical return to life.

And here's where things get really fascinating. The lecture suggests that early Christians might have preserved the actual site of Jesus's tomb. The evidence is pretty compelling.

The lecture points out that the traditional site of Jesus's tomb, the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, was outside the city walls in Jesus's time, which aligns with Jewish burial practices. Oh, wait, isn't it inside the city walls now? That doesn't make sense. That's the key piece of the puzzle.

The city walls were expanded sometime after Jesus's death, meaning the tradition of the site predates the expansion. It suggests a continuous chain of knowledge and preservation dating back to the earliest Christians. Wow, that's incredible.

If true, it's like a direct link to the events themselves. It adds another layer of authenticity to the accounts. You know, this deep dive has given me so much to think about.

It's like peeling back layers of history and faith, revealing new insights and questions with every turn. It's been an incredible journey, right? And I think that's the beauty of exploring a topic like this. It's not about finding easy answers, but about engaging in a thoughtful, nuanced conversation that challenges us to think deeper and wrestle with the complexities of faith in history.

It really has been an incredible journey. But here's what I keep coming back to: like, what does all this mean for us today? It's one thing to, you know, explore the historical context, but how does it actually impact our understanding of faith? That's the million-dollar question, isn't it? I think for a lot of people, knowing the historical and cultural background makes the story feel more real, more tangible. It grounds the events in a way that can be really powerful.

I can definitely see that. For me, it makes those small details in the gospel accounts stand out even more. Like the fact that women were the first witnesses to the resurrection.

In that cultural context, that's huge. It speaks to the truthfulness of the accounts. Why include a detail that could be easily challenged unless it was what really happened? Exactly.

And I imagine for some people, digging into the historical context might actually raise more questions. You know, it's not always a straightforward, faith-affirming experience. That's true.

And that's okay. I think the point of a deep dive like this isn't to provide all the answers, but to spark curiosity and encourage deeper reflection. It's about grappling with the complexities and allowing ourselves to wrestle with the tough questions.

You know, it's kind of like what you were talking about earlier with the mockers at the crucifixion. They were so focused on their own limited understanding that they completely missed the bigger picture. Maybe sometimes we do the same thing, getting caught up in our own assumptions and biases.

That's a great connection. It reminds us to approach these stories with humility and openness, recognizing that there's always more to learn and understand. So as we wrap up this deep dive, what's one thing you hope listeners will take away from this exploration of the crucifixion and resurrection? I hope they come away with a renewed appreciation for the power of this story.

It's a story that has resonated across cultures and centuries, and it continues to challenge and inspire us today. And it's a story that invites us to keep digging deeper, to keep asking questions, and to keep seeking truth. That's a great way to put it.

And for those of you listening, here's a final thought. We've explored the historical context, the brutality of the crucifixion, and evidence for the resurrection. But what does it all mean for you personally? How does this knowledge shape your understanding of faith, sacrifice, and hope? Keep exploring these questions, keep diving deep, and keep the conversation going.