

## **Who killed Jesus of Nazareth?**

**Judas** begins things it would seem. He precipitates the death of Jesus when he goes to the priests to place Jesus in their hands.

Why would he do this?

Some think it was for money.

Others think it was that he was a revolutionary, in our terms, or a terrorist. "Iscariot" suggests the "Sicarii" the dagger men of the resistance to Rome. They were an assassination squad. Today they would use car bombs. Impatient men, wanting change now, at any costs. Jesus was moving too slowly, a martyr might help the revolution.

\*When do you do things for money that do not quite align with your faith and trust in Jesus?

\*When have you hurried something or someone along, to their hurt, when patience and trust might have been better? But your impatience was too strong? Your need mattered more than the details?

**The religious leaders** are probably guilty. They organized the death squad that snatched him by night. They arranged the mock trial in darkness, the conclusion foregone.

Jesus criticized them. He undermined their authority. He would undo the work they had done.

What was this work? The religious leaders were the only people in Israel trying to keep God's people safe under Roman rule! The Army was poised to smash the people, but worse, poised to destroy Judaism. God's temple. The sacrifices. The rituals of worship. They all hung in the balance, and it was the priests and the Pharisees who kept the balance. One hothead after another appeared and stirred up the rabble. "Oh it is nice to have a crowd hail you as king, but do they ever think about what happens next? In come the Legions to kill, to burn, to smash. And then the Holy city is smoldering rubble and charred bodies. Do they think it through? No! Hotheads never think it through. That is the job of the religious leaders." So someone has to make the hard decisions and take the hard actions, for the sake of the people.

\* How often have you put off doing something that seemed right at the moment, for the sake of longer-range thinking?

\*Have you ever turned someone away to keep a loved one safe?

\*Have you ever trusted your head over your heart and soul?

**The soldiers** actually did the beating and the killing. It was their hands that ended his life.

Roman soldiers were pulled from all over the Empire, but never asked to fight against their own people. The soldiers were foreigners. Far from home, lonely, and often bored. Afraid too. Assassins had murdered their friends. "These Jews were all the same, just a bunch of crazy religious freaks. They think their god is so good. But they say our gods were fake and false!" Well, the soldiers believed in their own gods, not this Jewish one. The Jews dressed funny and acted funny and you never knew who was likely to cheat you or tell you a lie and get you in trouble. Soldiers grow to hate the people they control. Ask any soldier you ever knew. Language, custom, clothes, culture all roll up into a wall of incomprehension, then dislike, then disgust, then hatred. You give them a name, like "rag-heads", and then they don't really count anymore.

So this next one, this Jesus the so-called holy one, was a perfect target for all the pent up fear and rage and revenge and frustration.

And even for the new recruits, you do what you are told. "Beat him!" says the sergeant, so you beat him. "Nail him up." so you nail him up. "Stab him." and you stab him. It's what soldiers do. Asking questions is not your job.

- \* And when have you turned away from suffering or evil because it was not your job?
- \* When have you let yourself hate without pause, believing what the newspapers say, what your friend thinks, assuming the worst of the politician, the celebrity, the person accused on TV?
- \* When have you killed a person by "character assassination"?
- \* When have you heard yourself say, "Oh, they're all .....those people."?

**The disciples** and his wide band of followers did nothing to prevent his death.

Peter is the spokesman for the whole group. When Jesus came into Jerusalem on Sunday the "whole multitude of his disciples" sang his praises. What happened to the multitude? Like Peter they thought it might be better to run away and fight another day. They watched, but from a safe distance. "Oh, no! I wasn't there. I was just close by."

Doing nothing, just being a by-stander. Letting someone else be the first to step forwards and speak up. "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing." said Richard Burke. We think we are good people, but we do nothing quite often.

- \* When did you stand by and do nothing?
- \* How many just causes do you not support?
- \* When did you last write to your MP, Premier or Prime Minister to voice your opposition?

**Pilate** signed the papers. A tired politician. Governor of Palestine was the job no one wanted. It was a job to be *survived* for a few years and then, if everything went well on your watch, you might get promoted to a civilized area. So pouring gasoline on this fire was not an option. He tried to give Jesus ways out. He tried to let the crowd make the decision for him. He tried to wash his hands of the whole affair. His job was to stop riots breaking out. "Kill the fewest you can when it is clear that blood will flow." That was his job. "Success is more important than truth. Peace is more valuable than justice. Staying in control means hurting people sometimes. They shouldn't get in your way. It's their fault. And by the time you end up in front of the Governor, the chances are you did something wrong. All in a day's work."

- \* When have you, out of tiredness or boredom, just got the job done?
- \* When did you not do something right, because it was quicker and easier to get it done so it looks OK and maybe it won't matter?
- \* When did you let someone else take the blame?

**Jesus** had "exit ramps" from crucifixion all along the road to the cross. He could have eased up when he was warned weeks earlier. He could have stayed out of the city. He could have apologized to the chief priests. Pilate offered him ways out. Jesus never wavered. Why not?

- \*When have you done right, regardless of the cost?
- \*When have you stood up for your beliefs and not worried more about what people would say or think?
- \*When have you walked by faith, and taken risks because you thought this was what God would have you do?

This is the judgment: **The light came into the world, but the people loved darkness** (John 3;19)

Jesus chose to be light and never stop being light.

Eventually the light becomes so uncomfortable to those who dwell, if not in darkness, but in a degree of comfortable shade, that they say, "Turn off that light."

And it becomes night...