Three executives were being ferried across Seattle in a helicopter. When without warning, a huge cloudbank descended. It was too high for the pilot to fly above it and too low for him to fly below it. So he carefully flew the helicopter through the dense mist. As he tried to regain his bearings, he could see a tall building through the cloud. As he flew towards it, he spoke to his co-pilot. The co-pilot took out an old map and wrote something on the reverse of it.

When the helicopter drew near the building the co-pilot held up the map. On which he had written: “Where are we?” The people in the building recognizing their distress quickly wrote on a large piece of paper and held it up and it read: “You are in a helicopter.” The pilot picked up a manual. Punched some co-ordinates into the on-board computer and flew the executives to their destination.

When they had landed, one of the executives turned to the pilot and asked: “How did you know where we were, from a sign that read: ‘You are in a helicopter.” Oh that was easy,” replied the pilot. “I just knew that had to be the Microsoft building. Because they gave me an answer that was technically correct and absolutely useless!”

When we look at the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, one of the questions that have to be answered is: “Who is most responsible for the death of Jesus on a cross?” This is a question, which has puzzled and intrigued sceptics and unbelievers alike. It has spawned many written works about the last days of Jesus trying to decide who was most responsible for putting Jesus on the cross.

And that’s the very question we want to look at today: Who is most responsible for the crucifixion of Jesus? I can give you the technically correct answer to that question. It was a nameless squad of Roman soldiers, commanded by a centurion, who crucified Jesus. The details are sketchy. We don’t know their names. Scripture gives no indication of their feelings as they carried out the death sentence on Jesus. They did what they were trained to do, execute criminals.

But if that’s the only answer you will settle for, you haven’t looked deep enough. We need to look at the crucifixion like an old paint covered chair. We need to strip away the layers and reach a conclusion on: “Who really crucified Jesus Christ?” We want to begin by stripping away the top three layers. These three layers are three men whom scripture holds particularly culpable for the death of Jesus.

The first one is one of His own disciples, Judas.

The first question, which is always raised about Judas, is: “How can Judas be held responsible, if his betrayal of Jesus was predicted?” Yes his betrayal was predicted, but doesn’t mean he wasn’t a free agent, anymore than the Old Testament prophecies of Jesus death would mean that he did not die voluntarily. There are numerous Old Testament prophecies about the death of Jesus and yet scripture says quite clearly “his death was his choice”.

Well, in the same way Judas’ choice was exactly the same. It was his choice to turn Jesus over to the authorities and it was a choice that crucified Jesus. Have you ever wondered what Judas’ motive was to betray Jesus? Again this is one of the questions of history that has been the subject of many books and much speculation.

However, when you turn to scripture you will find that the answer to: “Why did Judas betray Jesus?” Is as simple as it was sinful.
“Who Crucified Christ?”

We begin in John 12. Which as you remember, is the story of Jesus being anointed by Mary with a bottle of very expensive perfume. Judas protests the money could have been used to help the poor. But John goes on to say in John 12:6 “Not that he cared for the poor, but he was in charge of the disciples’ funds and often dipped into them for his own use”!

Judas was stealing from the pooled money. So the first point we note as to who crucified Jesus, we can say, Judas’ greed put Jesus on the cross. His greed crucified Jesus. And there is more evidence from scripture to support this.

After Jesus was anointed by the perfume, Matthew records that Judas left the room, went to the chief priests and he said to them in Matthew 26:15 “How much will you pay me to get Jesus into your hands?” And they gave him thirty silver coins.”

And do you know what? Judas was not a unique person. He’s only one of many people, who have sold out Jesus. Judas is simply a powerful illustration of a principle taught by Jesus when he said in Mark 8:36 “And how does a man benefit if he gains the whole world and loses his soul in the process?” “You cannot serve God and money”.

You will ultimately make a choice and Judas did. And his greed crucified Jesus. Judas is a tragic example of what happens when people go all out for materialism and in the process they lose their souls. Judas made a poor choice. What about you?

Now we scrape away the second layer of paint. Underneath this layer we find the leaders of the Jews and in particular, Caiaphas, the High Priest.

He’s the one that clearly exhibits their collective motives. He’s the one who orchestrated the worst miscarriage of justice in legal history. Lawyers who have studied the legal system of the Jewish people of that time are quite clear that, in his eagerness to get rid of Jesus, Caiaphas broke the law.

And he broke it many times over. He shouldn’t have allowed the trial to go ahead at night. He shouldn’t have allowed it to be held out with the Hall of Hewn stone in the Temple. He shouldn’t have allowed a criminal case to proceed during the Passover season. He could only allow the case to finish on the same day if it was a not guilty verdict. He didn’t have two witnesses examined separately before the trial. And he certainly didn’t have all the evidence for the court, prior to the start of the trial.

Because this time the verdict was decided before the evidence was even considered. What happened that would cause these men to conduct an unfair and crooked trial? Scripture has the answer. Matthew records that the Chief Priests and Jewish leaders were trying to find a way to get the Romans to pass the death sentence on Jesus. So they pack Jesus off, in chains, to Pilate but Pilate wasn’t conned by their claims that they cared about the future of the Roman Empire.

He knew their real motive. Matthew says in chapter 27:18 “For he knew very well that the Jewish leaders had arrested Jesus out of envy because of his popularity with the people”. Pilate knew it was out of envy that they had handed Jesus over to him. It was nothing more than sheer jealousy that motivated them.

That’s second point we note as to who crucified Jesus. The envy of Caiaphas crucified Jesus. He and the other officials viewed Jesus as a threat to their position and to their prejudices. Even though they hated Herod, they were no different from him when you closely examine them. Herod heard a new King had been born.
“Who Crucified Christ?”

The first thing he thought was: “he’s a threat and I have to get rid of him”. And that that’s exactly what Caiaphas and his crooked cronies did. They convicted Jesus, not because he was a sinner, but because they were. Greed and envy handed over the Son of God. It did then and it still does.

Let’s look at what’s under another coat of paint. As we strip it away, one name appears. One person whose finger prints are all over the cross and that’s the Governor Pilate.

It seems that Pilate was a man who valued justice and we reach that conclusion by the very fact that three different times, he publicly declared that Jesus was innocent. It’s recorded in Luke 23:22 “Once more, for the third time, he demanded,” Why? What crime has he committed? I have found no reason to sentence him to death."

Pilate tried to avoid sentencing Jesus to death but Pilate’s downfall was that he was also a consummate politician. He knew that releasing Jesus would not please the crowd. So he tried to please the mob with a series of four cowardly compromises. Giving them what they wanted, without this whole fiasco turning into a gross miscarriage of justice.

First, he packed Jesus off to Herod, claiming that Galilee was Herod’s responsibility. However, Herod sent Jesus back. Secondly, he decided to compare Jesus with a gangster. Believing that the mob wouldn’t want a violent thug released to them. It didn’t work. The mob chose Barabbus. Then thirdly, he decides he’ll have Jesus flogged within an inch of his death and that’ll come close to the real thing and satisfy the mob. Pilate should have known better. You don’t satisfy a pack of wolves by giving them a taste of blood.

And finally, the fourth thing he did, with great pomp and ceremony. He had a bowl of water brought to him and washing his hands, he tells the mob in Matthew 27:24 “I am innocent of the blood of this good man. The responsibility is yours!” And they said: “Fine, the responsibility is ours.” Every attempt he was trying to make to avoid sentencing Jesus failed. And then the Jewish leaders said something that sealed it.

John 19:12 “Then Pilate tried to release him, but the Jewish leaders told him, if you release this man, you are no friend of Caesar’s. Anyone who declares himself a king is a rebel against Caesar.” From that point forward, Pilate drops all this business about Jesus being innocent.

Pilate’s fear crucified Jesus. Pilate was afraid. Afraid that word would get back to Caesar that he was not loyal governor. Afraid that word would get to his peers that he was a weak governor. Afraid, the people would become restless and revolt against him.

Yes, Pilate wanted justice, but fear played a higher motivation in Pilate’s life than justice. And that’s the lesson we must all learn from Pilate. People must decide what their ultimate fear is going to be. That’s something Jesus said in Matthew 10:28 “Don’t be afraid of those who can kill only your bodies--but can’t touch your souls! Fear only God who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”

You see Pilate decided that his ultimate fear was what every politician fears: falling out with the people. That’s what it says in Mark 15:15 “Then Pilate, afraid of a riot and anxious to please the people, released Barabbus to them. And he ordered Jesus flogged with a leaded whip, and handed him over to be crucified.” That was Pilate’s fear, what’s yours?

You see greed put Jesus on the cross; envy held the nails and fear hammered them in. But the scriptures don’t stop there. We’ve looked around the cross and identified the guilty. Now we must look above the cross and see who else was responsible for the crucifixion of Jesus.
“Who Crucified Christ?”

Holman Hunt has a famous picture of Jesus. It shows Jesus at the door of the carpenter’s shop in Nazareth. He is still only a boy and has come to the door to stretch his limbs, which had grown cramped over the bench. He stands there in the doorway with arms outstretched, and behind him, on the wall, the setting sun throws his shadow, and it is the shadow of a cross. In the background there stands Mary, and as she sees that shadow there is the fear of coming tragedy in her eyes.

What Hunt is trying to say is that the shadow of the cross always hung over Jesus, from the moment he was born. Matthew 2:11 “Entering the house where the baby and Mary his mother were, they threw themselves down before him, worshipping. Then they opened their presents and gave him gold, frankincense and myrrh”.

Myrrh is the gift for one who is to die. Myrrh was used to embalm the bodies of the dead. John 19:39 “Nicodemus, the man who had come to Jesus at night, came too, bringing a hundred pounds of embalming ointment made from myrrh and aloes.”

You see something happens at the cross that was always in the mind of God. Yes, men were guilty of the most heinous crime ever committed. But somehow in some mysterious way, even though their evil depravity was responsible for crucifying Jesus, God was also at work.

These two ideas are brought together in Peter’s first sermon. Acts 2:23 “But God, following his prearranged plan, let you use the Roman government to nail him to the cross and murder him”.

God doesn’t make men evil but He does use evil men. Nor does God design treachery, but he can design treachery into His plan and we can say without a doubt that God put Jesus on the cross. The cross plan existed before Moses, Jacob, Isaac and Abraham. In fact the cross plan is older than this world. Revelation 8:13 “And all who dwell on the earth will worship him, everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain.”

That’s exactly why God could speak of the death of Jesus, His gospel, being according to the scriptures. God foretold the death of Jesus. Acts 3:18 “But God was fulfilling the prophecies that the Messiah must suffer all these things.” Jesus himself said the same thing in Mark 14:21 “I will die, just as it is written about me”.

And three of the sayings of Jesus on the cross are direct quotes from the Old Testament. It was God’s plan. Yes, the cross exposes human wickedness at its worse but it was also the revelation of how God was going to overcome human evil. And so we can say that God was also responsible for putting Christ on the cross. And you’ll find that in scripture too. Romans 8:32 “He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all.”

Scripture says that Judas put Jesus on the cross. Scripture says that Caiaphas put Jesus on the cross. Scripture says that Pilate put Jesus on the cross. And it also says that God put him on the cross.

The cross was God’s ‘Plan A’ from the beginning. Jesus knew that before he came. That’s what the struggle in Gethsemane was all about. He was praying so hard, he began to sweat blood. Before the crucifixion, as Jesus Christ prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, the disciple and physician Luke noted in 22:44 “For he was in such agony of spirit that he broke into a sweat of blood, with great drops falling to the ground as he prayed more and more earnestly.”

Although this medical condition is relatively rare, according to Dr. Frederick Zugibe, it is well known, and there have been many cases of it. The clinical term is “haematohidrosis.” “Around the sweat glands, there are multiple blood vessels in a net-like form.” Under the pressure of great
"Who Crucified Christ?"

stress the vessels constrict. Then as the anxiety passes “the blood vessels dilate to the point of rupture. The blood goes into the sweat glands.” As the sweat glands are producing a lot of sweat, it pushes the blood to the surface - coming out as droplets of blood.

What was the source of Jesus’ great stress and anguish? Clearly he was in intense spiritual agony. He has to make a decision. The same decision that Adam had to make. And the same decision that you and I have to make. Will I do what I want? Or will I do what God wants?

God asked such a small thing of Adam. He put him in a beautiful paradise; told him to have anything he wanted, but just don’t touch that one tree. That’s all he asked of Adam. But what did he ask of Jesus? He asked him to go and hang on a tree. That’s what Jesus was wrestling with and when he left Gethsemane, we know what his decision was because he didn’t back down.

Do you know why? Jesus died before he was killed. He died to self. He died to personal ambition. He died to personal desire. He died before he was killed. Jesus didn’t winge. He didn’t walk to the cross like a victim. He marched to the cross as a man who had fully embraced the will of his Father.

John 10:17-18 "The Father loves me because I lay down my life that I may have it back again. No one can kill me without my consent--I lay down my life voluntarily. For I have the right and power to lay it down when I want to and also the right and power to take it again. For the Father has given me this right."

Jesus had to make that decision. He didn’t have to choose to carry it out. Throughout his ministry he could have stepped back into heaven at any time. Even the devil knew that. As you know from Matthew 4 after Satan had failed to tempt Jesus, God sent angels to care for Jesus. I believe Jesus could have returned to his Father right there and then. And again, in Matthew 17 when Jesus spoke with Elijah and Moses, he could have returned with them.

He could have avoided the cross, but not if he wanted to accomplish the longing of his Father’s heart. His Father loved the lost children of the world and their only hope, was a perfect substitute, to take the penalty that they deserve. Jesus loved his Father and he knew what his Father wanted.

The night before he died, Jesus said in John 14:30 “I shall not talk to you much longer, because the prince of this world is on his way. He has no power over me”. Satan doesn’t make Jesus do anything. In John 14:31, Jesus says “But the world must recognise that I love the Father and that I act just as the Father commanded.”

So, we acknowledge that Jesus’ love put him on the cross. He chose the cross because he loved his Father so much and he chose the cross because he loved us so much. John 15:13 says “And here is how to measure it--the greatest love is shown when a person lays down his life for his friends” And Galatians 2:20 says “And the real life I now have within this body is a result of my trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me”.

Does anyone want to guess what “gave himself for me” really means? Jesus put himself on the cross. Yes, Judas, Caiaphas and Pilate put Jesus on the cross but in a mystery almost too complex for us to comprehend, the Bible says that God put him on the cross and it even says that he put himself on the cross.

He loved us and he put himself on the cross for us. And when we do business with that, it finally hits us that the very best answer as to “Who crucified Christ” is: our sins crucified him. Revelation 1:5 says “And from Jesus Christ who faithfully reveals all truth to us. He was the first to rise from
“Who Crucified Christ?”

death, to die no more. He is far greater than any king in all the earth. All praise to him who always loves us and who set us free from our sins by pouring out his lifeblood for us”.

Our sins crucified Jesus Christ. Though raised 2000 years ago, the shadow of the cross falls the length of time and it reaches us. And like Pilate we want to say: “I am innocent of the man’s blood. I didn’t have anything to do with the cross.”

Well, Pilate can protest all he wants, but scripture knows better and you do too. You can’t wash your hands of the cross. *Anyone got a problem with some of these?* "Idolatry, encouraging the activity of demons, hatred and fighting, jealousy and anger, constant effort to get the best for yourself, complaints and criticisms, the feeling that everyone else is wrong except those in your own little group--and there will be wrong doctrine, envy, murder, drunkenness, wild parties, and all that sort of thing."

Well, you know what? There are a few of my sins in there, it’s a lot longer than that, and so is yours. Remember the song: “Were you there when they crucified my Lord?” Yes, I was there and so were you. Not just as a spectator either, but as a participant! We will never understand the cross as something done for us, until we see it as something done by us.

In his painting the “Elevation of Christ”, Rembrandt depicts the cross being raised by men full of spite, malice and hate. But down in the left-hand corner in the dark shadows you can make out the face of Rembrandt himself.

You see Rembrandt understood that in a very real way, he was there too and his sins were as much responsible for the cross as the men who were there that day. Our fingerprints are all over the cross and the day that hits our hearts, is the day when we’ll get serious about discipleship!

After the first gospel sermon, Peter finished by saying to the people that “they had crucified Jesus”. They already knew that in their heads, but that day, it says they were pricked in their hearts. Acts 2:37 "Hearing this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "What are we to do, brothers?"

You will never own your cross, until you own up to his. Jesus has a cross for everybody. *The Old Rugged Cross* must become your rugged cross, if you’re going to follow Jesus. You and I will never carry our crosses until we are broken by the truth that our sins sent Jesus to his. It must get out of the heads, out of our Bibles and into our hearts where we are changed, broken and undone.

And until that happens, the cross will be still just a story we read and not the centre of who we are. Jesus handed over his life for you. *Have you handed your life over to him?*

If after reading this you want to know more about how we’re responsible for crucifying Jesus or if this sermon has raised other questions in your thoughts then please just contact me and I will get back to you as soon as possible.

God bless and thanks for taking the time to grow in your understanding of God’s Word.