

## Who Killed Jesus? – Matthew 26:1-5

**Introduction:** In 1910 in Chicago a burglar named Thomas Jennings was convicted of not only breaking and entering the home of Mr. and Mrs. Clarence Hiller. Mr. Jennings was also convicted of the murder of Mr. Hiller.

Being on parole for a previous burglary, being injured, and having a loaded gun in his possession with ammo that matched the bullets that killed Mr. Hiller made Mr. Jennings a suspect when he was picked up for questioning. But there was something else that confirmed the fact that he had been in the Hiller home that night and was indeed the killer.

Six years earlier Scotland Yard brought an exhibit to the St. Louis World's Fair that demonstrated a new science to identify criminals long after they left the scene of the crime. Does anybody know what science was? Fingerprinting.

It wasn't long before American police officers learned the procedure and began training many in law enforcement field on how to find and match fingerprints left at the scene of a crime with those of suspects.

Thomas Jennings had the singular distinction of being the first killer to be convicted by the use of evidence from the use this new science. Unfortunately for him, a railing outside the home had just been painted the day before... and he left a clear imprint in the still drying paint.

One of the tools CSI officers use to catch criminals is fingerprinting. If someone's fingerprints are found at the scene of the crime police will detain them as "*persons of interest.*"

When it comes to the death of Christ there are several "*Persons of Interest*" who may be said to be "*suspects*" in the crime. That is who we want to identify tonight. Who are they?

### 1. The Chief Priests and the Pharisees

Our text says that Christ's death was a pre-meditated action of the leaders of Israel. **Read Matthew 26:3-4**

Their decision was premeditated. They plotted to kill Jesus. But why? It was because they were afraid of Him.

Read **John 11:45-53 (NIV)**. They were afraid that everyone would start believing in Him and then they would lose their influence and authority over the people. They also feared Him because they felt that Rome would see Jesus as a threat to Caesar, and then the Legions would destroy all of Israel. Then there would be no personal influence and authority. So it was the Jewish leaders that killed Jesus, right?

Well, they were part of it, but they were not the only ones. Others had left their fingerprints at the scene of the crime as well.

### 2. The Jewish People

Acts 3 tells us that a crowd of Jewish people had gathered at the Temple and they saw Peter and John heal a lame man. Then Peter addressed those Jews and said: "*The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our*

*fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. YOU KILLED the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this.”*

### **Acts 3:13-15 (NIV)**

Peter wasn't just talking to the priests and Pharisees here. He was talking to ordinary Jewish worshippers who had been part of crowd which had asked Pilate to have Jesus crucified. They were as guilty as their leaders before God.

Now, for some, those were the only fingerprints they could see on the cross. But there are more. Who are they?

### **3. You and I**

One of the problems in Crime Scene Investigation can be the tendency to see only part of the evidence and ignore other information that can lead to the arrest of others who are responsible. And that is what has happened all too often in the history of the church down through the ages.

Everybody knew that the Jews had killed Jesus, and for some that meant the Jews didn't deserve to live. Since the Middle Ages, the Jewish people have subjected to constant harassment, forced removal from their homes, and even group massacres.

The Jewish people suffered terribly in the First Crusade. They were a major target of the Spanish Inquisition, and of course were the main victims during Hitler's holocaust during WWII.

So when *The Passion of the Christ* premiered, a virtual firestorm took place. Newsweek's John Meacham wrote in his column, "*Mel Gibson's powerful but troubling new movie, 'The Passion of the Christ,' is reviving one of the most explosive questions ever... Who really killed Jesus?*"

And the movie set off debates on the news talk shows and discussions in periodicals. I think the debates and controversies that ensued from this movie were not started by the Jewish people who feared another backlash, but by others who opposed the movie because it pointed the finger at themselves. Gibson's movie clearly showed that the central message of Scripture was that it was our own fingerprints that were all over that cross. And Hollywood didn't like it. In effect, the movie was a condemnation of Hollywood morality... and they didn't like it.

Billy Joel, who is a famous singer sang a song a few years ago which says, "*There's a guy... nailed to a cross and dripping blood, and everyone's blaming themselves for that man's torment, but I said to myself, 'Forget it. I had no hand in that evil. I have no original sin. There's no blood of any sacred martyr on my hands. I pass on all of this.'*"

Billy Joel could try to pass on this if he wanted to, but **Isaiah 53:5-6 (NIV)** declares "...*he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and*

*by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all."*

Jesus died for us. When asked in an interview "Who killed Christ?" Mel Gibson said, "*We are all culpable for the death of Christ. My sins, your sins put him on that cross.*"

Rembrandt once did a painting of the Crucifixion. It's powerful because of the attention to detail. When you look on the picture your eyes are immediately drawn to Cross with Christ hanging there. Then your attention becomes focused on the crowd gathered at the foot of the Cross you can see the attitudes and actions of the people that are there. And then, if you look closely, you can see at the edge of the picture, that there's someone standing in the shadow. That shadow is Rembrandt himself - Rembrandt was declaring that he realized he had helped to crucify Jesus. His fingerprints were on the cross.

In the shadows of the cross - along with Rembrandt - you and I are there as well!

Finally we need to realize that ultimately Christ's death on the cross was not our decision. There was someone else who was primarily responsible for the death of Christ.

#### **4. God, the Father**

It is true that Jesus was on the cross because of our sins; And it's true that the Jews may have been instrumental in calling for His crucifixion. And it's also true that the Romans may have been implicated in his death because they nailed Him to that cross. But it really wasn't their decision, and it wasn't our decision that put Jesus on the cross.

Ultimately it was God's decision. **Acts 2:23 (NIV)** tells us "*This man was handed over to (be crucified) by God's set purpose and foreknowledge...*"

Jesus came for the sole purpose of dying for us. His death had been planned by God. And He was long before the Jews ever knew He existed. And He was sent long before the Romans ever crucifixion as a form of execution.

And Jesus wasn't sent to the cross because God hated us Billy Joel had it wrong. Jesus wasn't sent there because God wanted us feel guilt. NO! **John 3:16 (NIV)** says, "*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever might believe in Him might not perish but have everlasting life.*"

**Romans 5:8 (NIV)** says: "*God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*"

**And Romans 5:10** says, "*... when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son...*"

Jesus died to bring us to God. Jesus died to reconcile us to Him. But Jesus didn't die on the cross because we deserved that act of sacrifice. Or because we were nice people and God was doing us a favor. We were sinners. We were enemies of God.

The crucifixion was planned. The Bible tells us that Jesus' death was planned from the very beginning. As **Revelation 13:8 (NIV)** says "...the Lamb (Jesus)... was slain from the creation of the world."

The prophecies of the coming Jesus and His sacrifice are all throughout the Bible. God had planned the crucifixion of Jesus. It was His decision. And God planned this not because He hated us... Jesus died on the cross because God hated sin.

**Conclusion:** I read a story about a woman who was dying of AIDS. A preacher was summoned, and he attempted to comfort her, but to no avail.

*"I am lost," she said. "I have ruined my life and every life around me. Now I'm going to hell. There is no hope for me."*

The preacher was at a loss of how to answer her. Then, he noticed a picture of a pretty girl on a table in the room. *"Who is this?"* he asked.

The woman smiled and said. *"She is my daughter, the one beautiful thing in my life."*

Then the preacher asked: *"How much do you love her? Would you help her if she was in trouble, or made a mistake? Would you forgive her? Would you still love her?"*

Without hesitation, the woman said, *"Of course I would! I would do anything for her! Why do you ask such a question?"*

The preacher said, *"I want you to know that God loves you so much He literally has a picture of you on His table as well."*

We are guilty of the death of Christ. Our fingerprints are on the cross. And Christ's death was a crime of passion. But it wasn't a crime of passion the way we often think of it.

The crime was ours... and the passion was God's. He loved us so much that if you or I had been the only people on earth... Jesus would still have been sent to die for us.