

Story of the Crucifixion



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Is Christian Morality Unique? Part One
Story of the Crucifixion

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In previous pages there has been a discussion about parallels between the common phrase of "money, power and relationships" and the three Commandments of "Thou shalt not kill" (cf. power), "Thou shalt not commit adultery" (cf. relationships) and "Thou shalt not steal" (cf. money).

An attempt has been made to show how from the earliest time, for the "followers of Jesus," the 'bar was raised' with regard to these key social Commandments.

Recall the mandate of the early church council (late 40's CE) to refrain from "blood"(cf. thou shalt not kill), "fornication" (cf. thou shalt not commit adultery) and "strangling" (cf. thou shalt not steal).

Mark is an "introductory gospel" (70CE)
For Matthew whose Jewish Christian readers were now cut off from Judaism, it was important to build up a sense of mutual trust and community.
For Luke, there needed to be a belief that the power of God would enable his Gentile Christian readers to observe and pass on the message of Jesus.
Do you think it possible the three different emphases would be shown by each of these three gospels in the story of the crucifixion?

Consider the story.

In such case "blood" would include violence as such, "fornication" would include uncommitted sex, and "strangling" would include unjust business practices.

To what extent do you see these three Commandments being at the core of the Christian message?

In such case do you consider it likely that the three synoptic gospels of Mark, Matthew and Luke could place particular stress on each one of these three?

We have already looked at the three synoptic (meaning similar) gospels

- ▶ Jesus died for others. In his immediate situation, he knew that plans were afoot to kill off the leadership of his followers, as well as himself cf.
- ▶ Lazarus, (Jn 12:9-11),
- ▶ James (Acts 12:1-2) and
- ▶ Peter (Acts 12:3-19).

His death would help to pre-empt this.



Money, Relationship and Power are key themes of Mark, Matthew and Luke

These themes are also cleverly woven into the story of the Crucifixion

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All four gospels include the story of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ (33 CE). In ancient times special note was taken of the way in which a prominent person died.

Across the gospels the accounts of the crucifixion are quite similar. The original writer of the story was Mark (70 CE), and his account of the crucifixion was copied by Matthew and Luke (around 85CE) and sometime later by John (around 100 CE).

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- ▶ Because of the efforts of the gospel writers to keep the story much the same, any deviations from Mark's version by the other writers, would be significant and would relate to their own key themes.



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- ▶ In Mark's account of the crucifixion, there is a heavy emphasis on suffering and the "stripping away" of all material comforts.

- ▶ This picks up on the theme of "*Thou shalt not steal*"



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- ▶ In Matthew's account there is emphasis on the "aloneness" of Jesus. For instance Matthew notes that "all the disciples fled".
- ▶ Matthew also recalls the words of Jesus on the cross "My God My God Why have you forsaken me?"
- ▶ This picks up on the Matthew's theme of relationship and the Commandment

"Thou shalt not commit adultery".



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Jeering about "the kingdom" in Mark's account

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- ▶ In Luke's account, the theme of **power** throughout his gospel is picked up in his story of the crucifixion.
- ▶ On the cross Jesus appears to be powerless as the Roman Army carries out his crucifixion.
- ▶ This picks up on the theme of power and "*Thou shalt not kill*".



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A question hangs over the story of the crucifixion in each of these gospels.
If Jesus was prepared to give up **material comfort, relationship and power** for the sake of others and according to his own teaching, was anything to be gained by this?

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If we take just one snippet from each Crucifixion account, we can pick up the **sense of irony** on the part of the writers.

As Jesus hangs on the cross, people around him are jeering and making fun of his situation.

However there is a "twist" in their ridicule. Consider.



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In Mark's gospel, as Jesus hangs on the cross naked, suffering and stripped bare of all material comfort, passers-by joke about how he had compared his body to the Temple saying "Destroy this Temple..." etc.

The Chief Priests and scribes there ask about his kingdom ... "If you are the King of Israel..." (Mk 15:29-32).



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Jeering about "the kingdom" in Mark's account

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Where is the irony?
Recall that when Jesus was teaching back in about 33 CE, the Chief Priests and their Temple were central to Judaism .
The Jews comprised about a tenth of the population of the Roman Empire and many regularly visited the Temple. .



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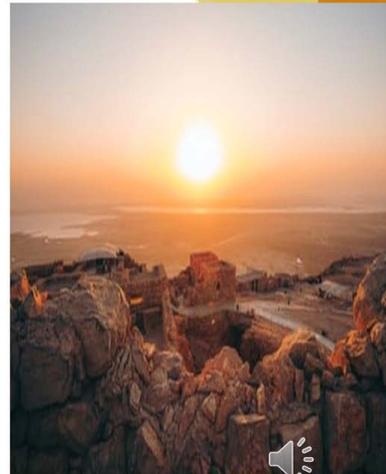


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- ▶ So, even as the chief priests and scribes jeered in Mark's story, written up in 70 CE, they themselves were being wiped out and soon the Jewish priesthood was to be no more.
- ▶ At the same time in 70 CE, Christian communities around the Empire, after the missionary efforts of Paul and others, were doing well.
- ▶ The "Kingdom of Jesus" was in fact, on the rise.



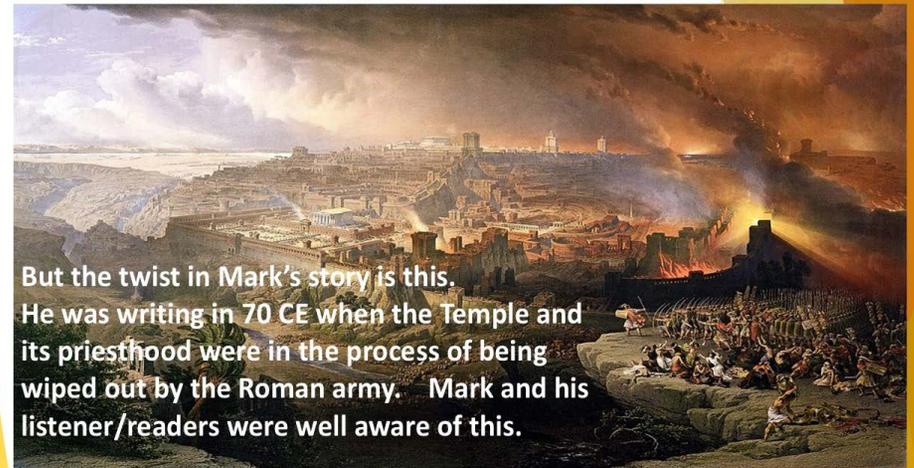
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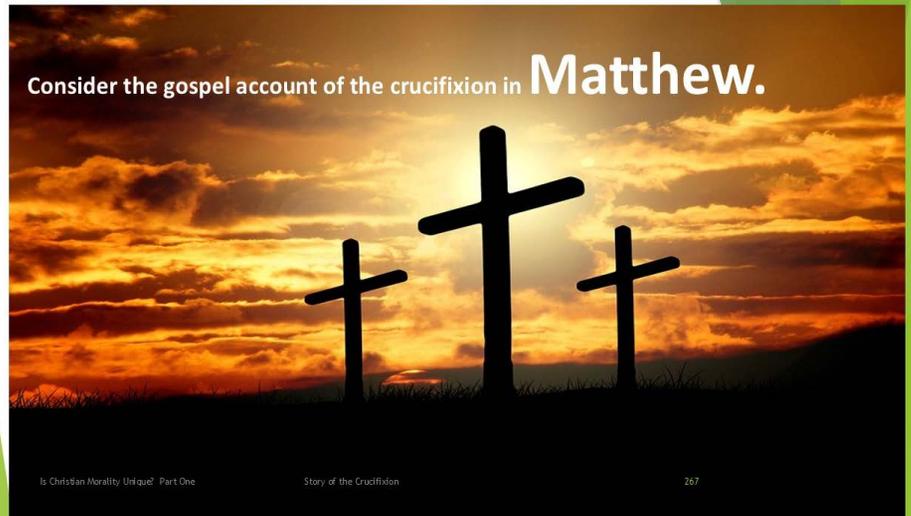
But the twist in Mark's story is this. He was writing in 70 CE when the Temple and its priesthood were in the process of being wiped out by the Roman army. Mark and his listener/readers were well aware of this.

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Consider the gospel account of the crucifixion in **Matthew.**

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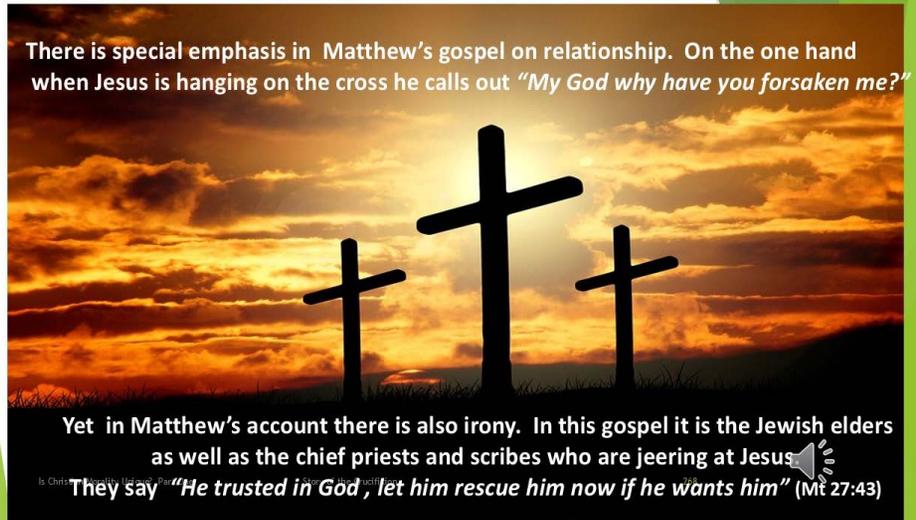
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The elders jerring "If God wants you"

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There is special emphasis in Matthew's gospel on relationship. On the one hand when Jesus is hanging on the cross he calls out "My God why have you forsaken me?"



Yet in Matthew's account there is also irony. In this gospel it is the Jewish elders as well as the chief priests and scribes who are jeering at Jesus. They say "He trusted in God, let him rescue him now if he wants him" (Mt 27:43)

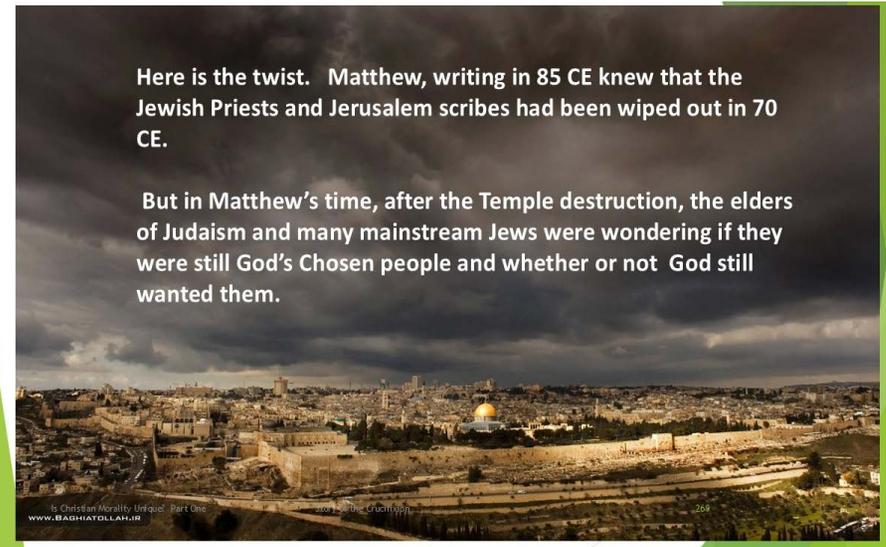
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Here is the twist. Matthew, writing in 85 CE knew that the Jewish Priests and Jerusalem scribes had been wiped out in 70 CE.

But in Matthew's time, after the Temple destruction, the elders of Judaism and many mainstream Jews were wondering if they were still God's Chosen people and whether or not God still wanted them.



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- ▶ At the same time in 85 CE, the followers of Jesus were building up their own support communities, independently of Judaism.
- ▶ By cultivating their discipleship of Jesus and their relationship with each other, they were assured that God did in fact still want them.



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Consider **Luke's** story of the Crucifixion

"And the people stood by watching" (Lk 23:34)



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In Luke, "If you are the Chosen One"

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Consider Luke's story of the Crucifixion



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Like Matthew, Luke was writing in about 85 CE. Luke was writing for Gentile Christians who were in a quite secular environment.

In Luke's gospel, when Jesus is hanging on the cross it is the people, rulers (implicitly secular) and soldiers who are jeering at Jesus. They call out

"If this man is the Christ, the Chosen One..."

(Lk 23:35)

- ▶ In fact at the time, the name of "Chosen One" was given to the Emperor of the day.
- ▶ Thus on the one hand, Jesus appeared to be totally powerless on the cross. between two common criminals with the Roman Army around him.
- ▶ He appears to be the opposite of *"the Chosen One"*.
- ▶ But again there is a twist. Despite all the Emperor's political power he has no power over the after-life, even if he thought of himself as a God.

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Luke points out that Jesus, on the other hand retains his own power to forgive.

(Lk 23:24)

Jesus also has power over the after-life and he promises one of the thieves

"This day you will be with me in paradise." (Lk 23:43)

Thus, for the followers of Jesus, even if their efforts do not appear to reap a result,

The positive result is there!

In Mark - money, In Matthew - relationship, In Luke - power Any Comments?

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The stories of the crucifixion show that each of the gospels of Mark, Matthew and Luke pick up on each of

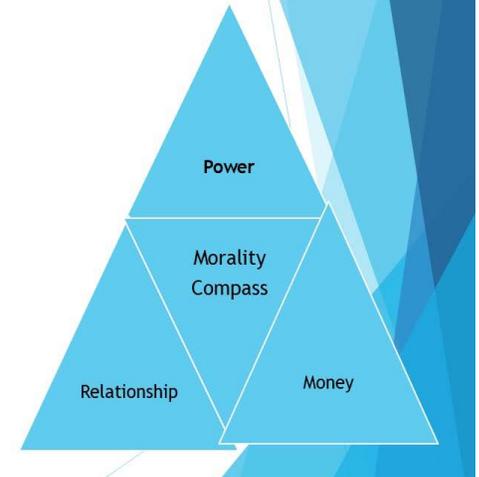
the three key morality values

This in itself shows how central these three morality values are to the message of the gospel stories about Jesus Christ.

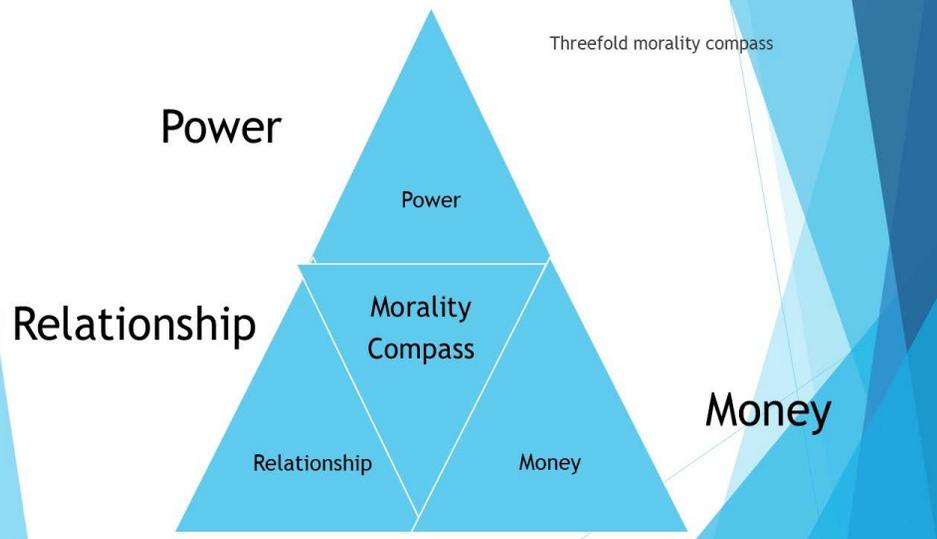
- ▶ Mark *"Thou shalt not steal"*
Money
- ▶ Matthew *"Thou shalt not commit adultery"*
Relationship
- ▶ Luke *"Thou shalt not kill"*
Power

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Threefold morality compass



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Via their key themes the gospel writers have embedded these three key social Commandments into the Christian story.

Putting the names of these three key themes into colloquial language we have

Money	Power	Sex