

Luke 23:26-43

Verses 26-31: *Now as they led Him away, they laid hold of a certain man, Simon a Cyrenian, who was coming from the country, and on him they laid the cross that he might bear it after Jesus.*

And a great multitude of the people followed Him, and women who also mourned and lamented Him. But Jesus, turning to them, said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For indeed the days are coming in which they will say, 'Blessed are the barren, wombs that never bore, and breasts which never nursed!' Then they will begin 'to say to the mountains, "Fall on us!" and to the hills, "Cover us!"' For if they do these things in the green wood, what will be done in the dry?"

--(26) Having been rejected by the religious leaders and Pilate, Jesus now heads to the cross. Luke, in giving an ordered account of these things, introduces us to numerous places, events, and individuals surrounding the cross.

--First, **they led Him away**. . . meaning led Him outside of the city to be crucified (**Lev. 24:13-14; Num. 15:35-36; 19:3; 1 Kings 21:13; Jn. 19:17-20; Heb. 13:12-13**).

--Jesus, weakened through His ordeal in Gethsemane and Pilate's scourging, couldn't carry the cross for long. The Roman soldiers then forced a man named Simon to carry the cross for Jesus.

--Cyrene was considered part of modern-day Libya. A community of Cyrenian Jews was known to be in Jerusalem, and some were saved and went on to carry the gospel into the world (**Acts 2:10; 6:9; 11:20; 13:1**).

--Mark, when naming Simon as the man who helped carry the cross for Jesus, also mentions his two sons Alexander and Rufus (**Mk. 15:21**) as though they were well known Christians in his day. Paul also mentions a Rufus and his mother (**Rom. 16:13**).

--It seems that Simon and his family became followers of Jesus through this event.

--Though Simon was unwillingly forced under the cross, Jesus was willingly placed on it. Simon carried the cross for a moment, but Jesus bore the curse of the cross once and for all. *How often do our interruptions end up blessings!*

--(27) Jesus would have been led out of the city, typically with a white plate with His crime written on it hung around His neck, to the nearest busy road without homes.

--A crowd gathers as the criminals make their way to their place of crucifixion. Women appear, mourning and lamenting. *The Talmud of Jerusalem mentions women who, at their own cost, would make a numbing mixture and offer it to those being led out to crucifixion. Was this those women?*

--(28-30) Jesus turns to address them as they mourn for Him. He calls them **Daughters of Jerusalem**, differentiating them from the women from Galilee who followed Him in His ministry, who are seen in **49**. What does Jesus say? He warns them of their coming judgment!

--Now, when we are suffering, especially unjustly, don't we feel the right to pity ourselves and even expect others to do the same? But here we find Jesus, barely able to walk to where He will be crucified, speaking to care for others in the same tone and character of speech we have seen throughout His ministry!

--His care for them was probably as startling as His warning. For a Jewish woman, to be childless was shameful. What circumstances would ever make them call the childless blessed?! Only circumstances so horrific they would rather be crushed by a mountain (**Isa. 2:19; Hosea 10:8; Rev. 6:15-16**)!

--It was a terribly strange warning from a true Stranger.

--**(31)** Jesus uses what was apparently a common proverb of the day. Dry wood burned easily and was therefore burned first. No one would throw green wood into the fire when there was dry wood.

--I think Jesus is basically saying, *If you think this is bad now, worthy of lament and mourning, what then?*

Verses 32-34: *There were also two others, criminals, led with Him to be put to death. And when they had come to the place called Calvary, there they crucified Him, and the criminals, one on the right hand and the other on the left. Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do."*

--**(32)** Luke now also introduces two criminals who are also being crucified with Jesus. He will get back to them later.

--**(33)** *When they had come to the place called Calvary.* . . Luke uses the Greek name Calvary instead of the Hebrew Golgotha. The important point for us here is that Luke is recounting a literal event that took place in a literal location and was witnessed by hundreds of eyewitnesses. The crucifixion of Jesus Christ is a historical fact.

--Luke: ***There they crucified Him.*** . .

--Matthew: ***Then they crucified Him.*** . .

--Mark: ***And they crucified Him.*** . .

--John: ***When they had crucified Jesus.*** . .

--The brevity of all four gospel writers is interesting to me. We know that crucifixion was excruciating—torture in an unimaginable fashion, but that being said, in the end, the Person of Jesus Christ demands our faith, not our compassion. He was not just broken. He was broken *for us!*

*Morgan (The Gospel According to Luke, pg. 269): *"In the last analysis, Jesus is never an object of pity on the part of sinful, condemned humanity."**

--It is Simon, the daughters of Jerusalem, the criminals, the Roman soldiers, the religious leaders, and us who are to be pitied because we need divine redemption and forgiveness!

--(34) Jesus could have turned to the Father for personal justice or personal mercy. Instead, He prays for the forgiveness of others.

Isaiah 53:12: *And He bore the sin of many, And made intercession for the transgressors.*

--Was He only praying for the Roman soldiers? I think **Acts 3:17** and **1 Corinthians 2:8** make Jesus' prayer wider. Jesus' prayer was not an excuse for their sin, but an explanation of their state.

--In heaven, I hope we discover that those Roman soldiers walked away with more than Jesus' sandals, belt, or garments (**Ps. 22:18**).

Verses 35-39: *And the people stood looking on. But even the rulers with them sneered, saying, "He saved others; let Him save Himself if He is the Christ, the chosen of God."*

The soldiers also mocked Him, coming and offering Him sour wine, and saying, "If You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself."

And an inscription also was written over Him in letters of Greek, Latin, and Hebrew: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.

Then one of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed Him, saying, "If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us."

--(35) ***And the people stood looking on.*** . . There was a shame to cross as well as pain. Evidently, Jesus was naked, His clothes taken so that He could be humiliated as well as executed.

Psalm 22:17: *I can count all My bones. They look and stare at Me.*

--The religious leaders couldn't imagine a Messiah that couldn't stop men from crucifying Him. So they sneered and mocked as He suffered to save them.

--(36-38) The Roman soldiers are equally as disgusted. They couldn't imagine any king who would allow himself to be crucified.

--His crime, or charge, is that He was the King of the Jews. Pilate, no doubt, kept the inscription just to spite the religious leaders for forcing his hand. ***We are meant to look at this scene and ask: *Why?* The answer: *For us.****

--(39) The criminal also throws in and mocks Jesus. He cannot imagine a king powerless to free himself or others.

--Studying the crucifixion of Jesus once again, I have been particularly struck by Satan's concerted effort to mock and humiliate Jesus. The unredeemed tongue is a powerful tool of the enemy! Yet, all the fire and venom of hell could not prosper against Jesus Christ.

Hebrews 12:3-4: *For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin.*

--If Christ endured such mockery and humiliation for us, we must not allow ourselves to become weary and discouraged by the slights of others.

--All these mockers question Jesus' power, never once questioning His purpose. Yes, He does have the power to save, but why should He?

Verses 40-43: *But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, "Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong." Then he said to Jesus, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom."*

And Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise."

--(40-41) The conversation with this repentant thief is particular to Luke. *Imagine what else happened in the life of Christ that we still know nothing about?!*

--The one thief rebukes the other, recognizing they would stand before God and face a judgment to come. He also recognizes that their condemnation was just. *Any truly repentant person can call out their own sin.*

--Also, this man recognizes that Jesus did nothing wrong. How does this all come about? We don't know for sure, but I believe it was the purity of Jesus Christ. No one had ever responded to crucifixion as this Man! Seeing the innocence of Jesus, and His unjust suffering, the thief is reminded of the world to come where all wrongs are finally made right.

--The thief knows that he is a justly condemned sinner, but he also has the distinct impression that Jesus cares about sinners. He instinctively feels and understands that Jesus is "the forgiving type," but he also knows there is something more...

--(42) **Lord. . .** And this in Jesus' most painful moment of suffering, sorrow, and humiliation!

Lord. . . When Jesus is crowned with thorns, His back flayed, His beard ripped out, His face beaten, when He was spit upon and mocked, naked, and hanging on a tree. **Lord. . .** The word is said with the belief of his heart and the confession of his lips.

1 Corinthians 12:3: *No one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.*

--I believe, with many other commentators, that this might be one of the greatest expressions of faith in all the Scriptures. We can take for granted how wild this was.

*Buechner (The Hungering Dark, pg. 63): *"I can imagine that the guards who had been posted there to see that the execution was carried out properly might themselves have felt something like embarrassment and turned away from the sheer lunacy of the scene."**

--The faith of this thief has been an example, and hope, and an encouragement to so many down through the ages, but it also leaves men without excuse. If he could believe in Jesus Christ as He was being crucified and rejected, how can any of us reject a risen Savior now?!

--It all seems hard to believe, doesn't it? *That* Jesus. Save others? Well, wouldn't it be just as crazy to walk up in the middle of Kensington, Philadelphia's city council, or a conference of abortion doctors and hold up a sign that says, *Jesus Saves*, or *Jesus, The King Of The Jews*?

When looking at Jesus outwardly, superficially, it is easy to despise Him.

--But Jesus does save. Jesus alone. And when sinners stop looking at Him in shallow amazement, and start looking at themselves, and instead of asking incredulously, *He saves?* Eventually, honest sinners start to look at themselves, and the real question begins to sink in: *Why would HE, the perfect, innocent, just One, save ME?*

--How does this all happen? What miraculous transactional experience takes place in a human heart? Where do the will of man and the Spirit of God meet? Jesus tells us it is a mystery (No matter what the Calvinists claim to know about the process of salvation!), but that you can see its effects (**Jn. 3:7-8**).

--The miraculous nature of the dying thief's faith points to the greater nature of his faith's object—Jesus Christ!

--**(43) *Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.***

--What a gift this was for Jesus Christ! What a joy for His heart!

Hebrews 12:2: *Looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

--What does Jesus give this dying, desperate heart? His word! A promise!

--See how He speaks! He cannot help but live as a King, though rejected by men. He speaks so certainly, confidently, and almost casually about the authority His word carries here and *beyond the grave!*

--Jesus speaks a single sentence offering this man:

1) Confidence: ***Assuredly, I say to you.*** . . *It is still His word that we hold onto when we face trials in life, and most certainly, at the ultimate trial of life!*

2) Immediacy: ***Today.*** . . *There would be no delay. There is no hint of soul sleep or the annihilation of personhood in this statement. God is the God of the living.*

3) Connection: ***You will be with Me.*** . . *To be with Him was a sign of favor. To be invited by a King to walk with Him in His private gardens was an esteemed honor and privilege.*

4) Comfort: ***In Paradise.*** . . *I am not going to speculate on the geography of this spiritual location—Hades, Heaven, etc., so as not to lose the main point. The focus being: the thief, and Jesus, who were now surrounded by sinners, mockers, murderers, and all those who hated Christ, would soon be with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and all those who died in faith and now lived in comfort and peace.*

--What does this tell us? I can be remembered by Him. I can be reconciled to God. I can be His, fully His, at the last. How? By faith alone. *This thief had no baptism, no communion, no works, nothing but faith in the Person of Jesus Christ and the promise of salvation.*

--But it is easy to forget the other thief in the wonder and beauty of this exchange! We must not, because Luke places both of them in front of us. Jesus is silent to the mocker and Savior to faith.

--One man is dying alone, condemned, without hope, with no savior, no king, no promise.

--Two men, in equal proximity to Jesus Christ, reacting to Jesus Christ in opposite ways. Why? God only knows! The mystery of it all is the same as we see in life all around us!

--We are shown these two men not to explain, but to illustrate and instruct. They illustrate how men have always responded to the cross of Christ. They instruct when we allow them to inform us personally on how we respond to Christ crucified.

--What were they thinking when they watched the Roman soldiers approach to break their legs? What were they holding onto in that moment?