

Good Friday

And Pilate asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” And he answered him, “You have said so.” (Luke 23:3 ESV)

Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!” And having said this he breathed his last. (Luke 23:46 ESV)

Walking With Jesus To The Cross

April 7th, 2023

Luke 23:26-56

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Introduction:

Good morning. I count it a great privilege to open God’s Word with you this morning. Please turn with me in your Bibles to Luke 23. As you do that, I want to share with you a quote from Thomas F. Torrance. He said:

The cross is a window opened into the very heart of God.

Do you believe that? I do. The cross represents the very centre of our faith. It is the place where the holiness, and the love, and the justice, and the mercy of God come together in a powerful, mysterious, GLORIOUS display. Do you want to know God? Then look here. As the Apostle Paul declared:

we preach Christ crucified (1 Corinthians 1:23a ESV)

To that end, look with me to Luke 23. We will be reading verses 26-56. Hear now God’s holy, inspired, inerrant, living and active word to us today:

²⁶ And as they led him away, they seized one Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, and laid on him the cross, to carry it behind Jesus. ²⁷ And there followed him a great multitude of the people and of women who were mourning and lamenting for him. ²⁸ But turning to them Jesus said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. ²⁹ For behold, the days are coming when they will say, ‘Blessed are the barren and the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!’ ³⁰ Then they will begin to say to the mountains, ‘Fall on us,’ and to the hills, ‘Cover us.’ ³¹ For if they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?”

³² Two others, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. ³³ And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. ³⁴ And Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” And they cast lots to divide his garments. ³⁵ And the people stood by, watching, but the rulers scoffed at him, saying, “He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!” ³⁶ The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine ³⁷ and saying, “If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!” ³⁸ There was also an inscription over him, “This is the King of the Jews.”

³⁹ One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, “Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!” ⁴⁰ But the other rebuked him, saying, “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? ⁴¹ And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.” ⁴² And he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” ⁴³ And he said to him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

⁴⁴ It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, ⁴⁵ while the sun's light failed. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. ⁴⁶ Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!” And having said this he breathed his last. ⁴⁷ Now when the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God, saying, “Certainly this man was innocent!” ⁴⁸ And all the crowds that had assembled for this spectacle, when they saw what had taken place, returned home beating their breasts. ⁴⁹ And all his acquaintances and the women who had followed him from Galilee stood at a distance watching these things.

⁵⁰ Now there was a man named Joseph, from the Jewish town of Arimathea. He was a member of the council, a good and righteous man, ⁵¹ who had not consented to their decision and action; and he was looking for the kingdom of God. ⁵² This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. ⁵³ Then he took it down and wrapped it in a linen shroud and laid him in a tomb cut in stone, where no one had ever yet been laid. ⁵⁴ It was the day of Preparation, and the Sabbath was beginning. ⁵⁵ The women who had come with him from Galilee followed and saw the tomb and how his body was laid. ⁵⁶ Then they returned and prepared spices and ointments.

On the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment. (Luke 23:26-56 ESV)

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Our text this morning invites us to walk with Jesus to the cross. As we do that – as we catch a glimpse in our minds’ eye of the onlooking soldiers, and the mocking crowds, and the hours of darkness and the gruesome crucifixion, I want to invite you to lean in with me and to listen to the words of Jesus. What did he say in these his final hours?

Consider first Jesus’ words to the women who wept at the side of the road as he made his way to Calvary. They looked at this broken and tormented teacher and they saw a man so disfigured that he could not bear the weight of his cross. He had a crown of thorns on his head and the soldiers who accompanied him spurred his weak and broken body forward. They saw a weak and wounded Jesus.

And they wept.

In the face of such senseless evil – such horrific injustice – I suspect we would join them in their weeping. And yet, Jesus looked up at these weeping women and he said:

“Daughters of Jerusalem, **do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves** and for your children. ²⁹ For behold, the days are coming when they will say, ‘Blessed are the barren and the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!’³⁰ Then they will begin to say to the mountains, ‘Fall on us,’ and to the hills, ‘Cover us.’ ³¹ For if they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?” (Luke 23:28b-31 ESV)

Do Not Weep For Me, But Weep For Yourselves

Do you hear what Jesus is saying? “Don’t weep for me! Weep for yourselves! If this is what happens to the righteous one – if this is what happens to the King at the time of his visitation – if this is what happens while the branch is green – then what lies in store for you; the unrighteous, the unclean, the dry branches? Don’t weep for me. Weep for yourselves. Weep for your children.”

Jesus was certainly pointing forward to the day when Jerusalem would be besieged and ransacked by the Romans in A.D. 70. But he was also pointing *beyond* that earthly siege to the final judgement that was to come. Jesus looks at these women who are heartbroken over his condition,

and he attempts to redirect their attention to the scene *that ought to be breaking their hearts*. They ought to be weeping over the coming judgement. That judgment, Paul describes:

when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels ⁸ in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.⁹ **They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction**, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might (1 Thessalonians 1:7b-9 ESV)

That is a fate worse than crucifixion. Jesus went to the cross so that none of us would ever have to endure it! And yet, many choose to subject themselves to the flames of hell spurning the gracious invitation of their King. And Jesus weeps. So too should we. Leon Morris observes:

At this moment, as he goes out to execution Jesus thinks not of himself but of them. He wants their repentance, not their sympathy.

We saw this same compassion as Jesus approached Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. As he drew near to the city – as he drew near to the people who would go on to reject his invitation, we read:

And when he drew near and saw the city, **he wept over it**,⁴² saying, “Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. (Luke 19:41-42 ESV)

Friends, the day is coming when every knee will bow before the throne. The wrath of God will be poured out against every sin. And that wrath will either land on the cross, where Jesus has born it in our place, or it will land on those who chose to carry their sin and to reject his invitation. The day of judgment fast approaches, and on that day, the crucified King will return as our Judge.

But until that day, Jesus weeps and pleads and extends his mercy! “Would that you, even you, had known the things that make for peace!” Look at how much love Jesus has for his enemies! Do you see it? Jesus came to save sinners! Sinners like you! Sinners like me! In Ezekiel 33:11 we read:

Say to them, As I live, declares the Lord God, **I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked**, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel? (Ezekiel 33:11 ESV)

And so, as Jesus staggered to the place where he would be brutally murdered – as he endured the taunts, and the laughs, and the insults – he looked out over his enemies with tears of mercy.

And as he reached his destination, the soldiers nailed him to his cross and they lifted him up between two thieves. At which point, he prayed aloud:

Father, Forgive Them, For They Know Not What They Do

I've read this passage countless times and, can I tell you something? It sure seems as if Jesus is being a tad too generous in this prayer. Just listen to the religious rulers! They stood at the foot of the cross and laughed amongst themselves saying:

“He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!”
(Luke 23:35b ESV)

It sure seems as if they knew what they were doing, doesn't it? Likewise, the soldiers seemed to know what they were doing when they taunted Jesus and shouted:

“If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!” (Luke 23:37 ESV)

“What kind of Christ is this? What kind of King is this? Powerless! Broken! Weak! Prove your greatness to us, Jesus!”

The more I meditate on this passage, the more I'm inclined to agree with G. Campbell Morgan who argues:

I submit that humanity has never been seen greater than in the Man Jesus, when he said, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.”

What kind of love is this? We struggle to forgive our spouse for failing to put away the dishes – we struggle to forgive our friend for failing to return our call – we struggle to forgive our co-worker for making a simple mistake – and yet here we see Jesus praying for forgiveness for the

people who nailed him to a tree! We see him praying for forgiveness for the people who were actively laughing at and making a mockery of his death!

“Father, forgive them.” And yet, they had not apologized. They had not stooped to ask for forgiveness. Even still, Jesus agonizingly pulled himself up with his nail pierced hands so that he could take a painful breath and then he used that breath to PRAY FOR HIS ENEMIES!

How dare we hold onto our grudges! Shame on us! Look at him! Hear him!

“Father! Forgive them! They don’t know!”

They don’t know that the power of the Christ is displayed in his suffering. They don’t know that the role of the King is to save his people at the cost of his own life. They don’t know that the hands that they’ve pierced are the same hands that lovingly fashioned them together in their mother’s womb. Forgive them. They don’t know.

And, while Jesus used his final, painful breaths to pray blessing on his enemies, the criminals with him used their breath to curse him.

In Matthew and Mark’s gospels, we are told that initially both robbers opposed Jesus. But Luke informs us that, at some point, one of the criminals came to his senses. Perhaps he was taken aback by Jesus’ prayers for his enemies. We don’t know what prompted the change in him, but we do know that he eventually turned to his fellow criminal and said:

“Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? ⁴¹ And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.” ⁴² And he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” (Luke 23:40b-42 ESV)

To this request, Jesus replied:

Today You Will Be With Me In Paradise

This thief – this criminal – this man who only moments ago had reviled Jesus – came to an awareness of his sin. He acknowledged it. He affirmed that he was suffering rightly for the things that he had done. And then he looked to Jesus, and he asked for help.

He didn't even know what to ask for! As far as we know, he had never listened to any of Jesus' sermons. He doesn't immediately strike us as one who would have been a frequenter of the temple. He was a criminal.

But he heard these leaders and guards mocking Jesus, and he saw the sign on Jesus' cross that said "King of the Jews" and his eyes were miraculously opened to see that he really was hanging next to royalty. So, he looked to Jesus, and in a profound act of faith, he asked the King to remember him in his kingdom.

And in that moment, a lifetime of sin was removed from the thief on the cross. With that simple, faith-filled request, a place was prepared for him in glory. As Richard Sibbes once wrote:

There is more mercy in Christ than sin in us.

Now, we know that true faith is evidenced by a transformed life – as I understand it, you would have heard a sermon on that topic here at Cornerstone just last week. We are not saved by empty words with no faith and no follow through. Real faith is accompanied by real change.

But what happens when a person is saved in their dying moments, and there is no opportunity for follow-through? Consider this man.

There is a famous clip of a sermon by Alistair Begg that is currently making its way around the internet¹ and I would commend it to you. He observes that this thief on the cross had never been baptized, and he had never been to a Bible study, and he had never taken communion, and he had no grasp of theology, and yet, he was allowed into heaven! What did this man say when he stood

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xk9wgJBoEd8>. Accessed on April 3, 2023.

before heaven's gates? What did he say when the angel at the door asked, "On what basis are you here?"

"The man on the middle cross said I could come."

Brothers and sisters, did Jesus say that you could come? Have you heard his invitation? Have you turned away from your sin? Have you looked to Jesus and – with as much or as little theological understanding as you possess – have you asked in faith, "Lord Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom"?

Then I don't care who you were, and I don't care what you've done, and I don't care what lies and accusations the Devil is whispering in your ear! If you have truly looked in faith to Jesus for salvation, then – LISTEN – YOU WILL BE WITH HIM IN PARADISE!

So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. (John 8:36 ESV)

Amen? Amen.

And then, after that glorious display of mercy, Jesus proceeded to pay the price that made it possible for sinners like that thief – and sinners like you and me – to enter the Kingdom.

There were three hours of darkness. Jesus drank the cup of wrath. God's just and righteous abhorrence of every sin was placed on Jesus, and he bore it perfectly and finally for us.

And the veil in the temple was torn. Because, through Jesus, a way had finally been made for sinful humanity to enjoy the presence of our Holy God. And with a loud voice, Jesus declared:

"Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!"

Father Into Your Hands I Commit My Spirit

In my studies this week, several commentators directed my attention back to the first recorded words of Jesus in Luke's gospel. His parents had made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem to worship and, when they departed, they didn't realize that Jesus wasn't with them. As they rushed back to search for him, they found him in the temple. Jesus looked at them and asked:

“Why were you looking for me? **Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?**” (Luke 2:49 ESV)

See, from the beginning of his earthly ministry to the end, Jesus was committed to doing the will of His Father. Moment by moment, he communed with Him in prayer seeking His will and direction. And here, after having endured the Father's holy wrath against our sin – Jesus turns to his Father and commits his spirit into the Father's hands.

Our God is love! It was the love of God that put this redemption plan into motion. Jesus was not *forced* to the cross – he *chose* the cross! Why? So that *through* the cross, a way could be made for us to enter into and to enjoy the breadth, and the width, and the height and the depth of the love of God! As Stephen Charnock explains, in the cross of Christ:

An infinite abhorrence of sin, and an infinite love to the world march hand in hand together.

Stephen Charnock

How can sinful people like you and me enter into a relationship with our perfect, holy God? Good Friday is the answer. Having born our sin and having settled our debt – drinking our cup of wrath to the dregs – Jesus committed his spirit into the Father's hands because it was finished.

It IS finished.

The door is open. The way has been made.

So, come. Come to the Saviour who weeps for sinners – to the King who prays forgiveness over his enemies – to the man on the middle cross who said you could come; come unto Jesus and be saved. Thanks be to God. Let's pray together.