



**Series: “His Hour”**  
**Week 6 Study Guide**

**Message:**  
**“Forgiveness: The Man in the Middle”**

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**SCRIPTURE**

<b>Main Text:</b>	<b>Cross References:</b>
<i>Luke 23:32–43</i>	<i>Isaiah 53:7, 12</i> <i>John 1:29</i> <i>1 Peter 3:18</i> <i>Romans 5:8</i> <i>Acts 3:17–19</i> <i>Hebrews 9:27</i> <i>Colossians 2:13–14</i> <i>Titus 3:5</i>

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**UNDERSTANDING THE STORY**

*(This section focuses on understanding what the text means —  
before jumping to what it means for us.)*

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## **Read Luke 23:32**

**Main Idea:** *Jesus is led to execution as a willing sacrificial offering, not merely a condemned victim.*

### **Commentary:**

Luke notes that Jesus is **“led out”** alongside criminals, a phrase that carries both historical and theological weight. In Roman practice, condemned individuals were publicly marched to their execution site as a form of humiliation and deterrence. This was not a quiet removal, but a public spectacle meant to reinforce Roman authority.

Yet Luke’s wording also echoes Isaiah’s messianic prophecy in **Isaiah 53:7**, where the savior is *“led like a lamb to the slaughter.”* This connection reframes the scene: Jesus is not simply being taken to death; He is being presented as a sacrificial offering.

In the Old Testament sacrificial system, a lamb was brought forward to bear the guilt of the people symbolically, its death functioning as atonement. By presenting Jesus in this way, Scripture reveals that His death is substitutionary. He is not dying for His own wrongdoing, but as a representative and substitute for others. This aligns with **John 1:29**, where Jesus is identified as *the Lamb of God who takes away sin.*

This moment, therefore, is not accidental or reactive. It is purposeful. Jesus is being led toward the cross as part of God’s redemptive plan, willingly taking the place of sinners to satisfy the justice of God and secure forgiveness.

### **Discussion Question:**

1. What is the significance of the phrase “led out” in both a Roman and prophetic context?

2. How does Isaiah 53:7 shape the way we understand Jesus' movement toward the cross?
3. In what way does the imagery of the "lamb" inform the meaning of Jesus' death?

**Takeaway:** *Jesus is not merely executed; He is willingly offered as a substitutionary sacrifice for sin.*

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### **Read Luke 23:33**

**Main Idea:** Jesus' crucifixion among criminals fulfills prophecy and reveals His identification with sinners.

#### **Commentary:**

Luke records that Jesus is crucified "*at the place called the Skull,*" (Golgotha) alongside two criminals. Luke's short description of crucifixion ("*they crucified him there*") reflects how well-known and horrific crucifixion was in the ancient world. It was a form of execution designed to maximize suffering, shame, and public exposure.

More importantly, Jesus' placement between criminals fulfills **Isaiah 53:12**: "*He was numbered with the transgressors.*" This phrase indicates that Jesus is counted among sinners, treated as though He were guilty.

This is central to the doctrine of *substitutionary atonement*. Jesus, though sinless, is positioned as a transgressor so that transgressors might be treated as righteous. **1 Peter 3:18** explains it as, "*the righteous for the unrighteous,*" highlighting the exchange taking place.

The scene visually communicates the Gospel: the innocent one hangs in the place of the guilty. Jesus does not remain distant from

human sin; He enters into its consequences, bearing its full penalty in the place of others.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. What does it mean that Jesus was “numbered with the transgressors”?
2. Why is the detail of Jesus being crucified between criminals significant?
3. How does this moment connect to the concept of substitution described in 1 Peter 3:18?

**Takeaway:**

*Jesus is treated as a sinner so that sinners can be treated as righteous.*

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**Read Luke 23:34**

**Main Idea:** Jesus’ prayer reveals divine mercy extended even in the midst of human rebellion.

**Commentary:**

In the midst of crucifixion, Jesus speaks His first recorded words from the cross: *“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”* This statement is remarkable given the circumstances. Rather than pronouncing judgment, Jesus intercedes.

This prayer reflects both the character of God and the purpose of the cross. Jesus is not only suffering for sin; He is actively securing forgiveness for sinners. His intercession aligns with His role as mediator.

The statement “*they do not know what they are doing*” does not mean the perpetrators are innocent of wrongdoing, but that they lack full understanding of the gravity of their actions. **Acts 3:17–19** later affirms that this ignorance becomes part of God’s redemptive plan.

Additionally, the soldiers casting lots for His clothing fulfills **Psalm 22:18**, reinforcing that these events unfold according to Scripture.

This moment demonstrates that divine forgiveness is not a response to human repentance alone; it is initiated by God even while sin is being committed (*see Romans 5:8*).

**Discussion Questions:**

1. What does Jesus’ prayer reveal about the heart of God?
2. How should the phrase “they do not know what they are doing” be understood?
3. How does this moment connect to the broader theme of God’s initiative in salvation?

**Takeaway:**

*Jesus prays for forgiveness as he’s dying to secure it.*

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**Read Luke 23:35–38**

**Main Idea:** The rejection and mockery of Jesus reveal both human blindness and the true nature of His kingship.

**Commentary:**

Luke presents multiple groups mocking Jesus: rulers, soldiers, and the general public. Their repeated challenge — “*save yourself*”— echoes earlier temptations (*see: Luke 4*), where Jesus was urged to use His power for self-preservation.

The irony is profound: Jesus is being mocked for not saving Himself, while in reality, His refusal to do so is the very means by which He saves others.

The inscription *“This is the King of the Jews”* is intended as mockery, yet it declares a deeper truth. Jesus is indeed King, but His kingship is expressed not through political dominance, but through sacrificial suffering.

This section highlights human misunderstanding. Those present interpret power through the lens of self-preservation, while Jesus demonstrates that true authority is exercised through self-giving love.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. What is the significance of the repeated command for Jesus to “save himself”?
2. How does the inscription above the cross function both as mockery and truth?

**Takeaway:**

*Jesus refuses to save Himself in order to accomplish salvation for others.*

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**Read Luke 23:39–41**

**Main Idea:** The contrasting responses of the criminals reveal two distinct responses to Jesus: rejection and repentance.

**Commentary:**

Both criminals experience the same circumstances, yet respond differently. One joins in the mockery, demanding deliverance without

acknowledging guilt. The other rebukes him, expressing fear of God and recognition of judgment.

The second criminal acknowledges three critical truths:

*God's judgment is real.*

*His own guilt is deserved.*

*Jesus is innocent.*

This progression reflects genuine repentance. It involves not only regret, but an accurate understanding of one's condition before God.

**Hebrews 9:27** underscores the urgency of this realization: judgment follows death. The criminal's response demonstrates a turning point—an awareness of accountability before God.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. What differences are evident in the responses of the two criminals?
2. What does the second criminal acknowledge about himself and about Jesus?
3. Why is the concept of “fear of God” significant in this moment?

**Takeaway:**

*Repentance begins with recognizing both our guilt and God's justice.*

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**Read Luke 23:42–43**

**Main Idea:** Salvation is granted through faith alone, based entirely on the work of Christ.

**Commentary:**

The second criminal turns to Jesus with a simple request:

*“Remember me when you come into your kingdom.”* This statement demonstrates faith in Jesus’ kingship and in life beyond death.

Jesus’ response is immediate and authoritative: *“Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”* Several elements are significant:

Certainty: “Truly” indicates absolute assurance.

Immediacy: “Today” removes any delay or process.

Relationship: “With me” emphasizes presence, not just place.

Restoration: “Paradise” recalls Eden — restored fellowship with God.

Jesus can promise this because as the criminal acknowledges his guilt, Jesus bears it. As the criminal faces judgment, Jesus absorbs it. Colossians 2:13–14 explains that the record of debt is canceled through the cross.

The man contributes nothing to his salvation but faith alone. He performs no works, completes no rituals, and offers no merit. His salvation rests entirely on faith in Jesus and the work Jesus is accomplishing.

**Titus 3:5** reinforces this: salvation is not based on righteous deeds, but on God’s mercy.

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. What does the criminal’s request reveal about his understanding of Jesus?
2. What elements of Jesus’ response emphasize assurance and immediacy?
3. How does this moment illustrate salvation apart from works?

**Takeaway:**

*Salvation is received by faith, grounded entirely in the finished work of Christ.*

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## **MAKE IT PERSONAL**

**This passage reveals what God is like toward us at our worst: not distant, but merciful; not condemning, but forgiving; not withholding, but giving Himself in our place.**

**Reflect honestly:**

1. Where do you tend to believe God is harsh, distant, or disappointed with you?
  2. How does the image of Jesus praying “Father, forgive them” challenge that view?
  3. In what ways do you see yourself in the responses of the two criminals?
  4. What does it mean for you to approach Jesus not with performance, but with faith?
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## **LIVING IT OUT**

**This passage is meant to reshape how we see God, ourselves, and the cross. This week, intentionally put that into practice:**

1. **Sit with the reality of Jesus taking your place.**

Spend time reflecting on what it means that Jesus took your place. Not abstractly—but personally. Consider specific sins, failures, and guilt, and remember: those were carried by Christ.

**2. Practice honest confession.**

The repentant criminal did not minimize or excuse his guilt. Follow that pattern. Speak honestly to God about your sin, trusting that His response is mercy, not rejection.

**3. Respond to failure by turning toward Jesus, not away.**

When you become aware of sin or weakness this week, resist the instinct to withdraw. Instead, turn immediately toward Christ in faith, remembering His posture of forgiveness on the cross.

**4. Reject performance-based thinking.**

Notice where you feel the need to “earn” God’s acceptance. Replace those thoughts with truth: *salvation is based on Jesus’ work, not yours.*

**5. Anchor your identity in being “with Him.”**

Jesus didn’t just promise paradise—He promised His presence. Let your relationship with Him shape your daily life, decisions, and priorities.

**6. Extend the mercy you’ve received.**

If Jesus responded to His enemies with forgiveness, consider how you can reflect that same mercy in your relationships this week.

*\*These practices can help move the truth of this passage from something we understand to something that shapes the way we live.*

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*For LifeGroups:*

## **ENCOURAGE EACH OTHER**

This passage reminds us that no one is beyond the reach of God's mercy. One criminal rejected Jesus; the other turned to Him and was immediately welcomed.

### **1. Encourage in truth:**

- a. Remind each other that salvation is based on Jesus' work, not personal performance.
- b. Reaffirm that God's posture toward sinners is revealed at the cross: mercy, not rejection.
- c. Help each other see that repentance is not about earning grace, but receiving it.

### **2. Encourage in practice:**

- a. Share areas where it's hard to believe God is truly merciful—and speak truth into those places.
- b. Pray for one another to respond quickly to conviction with faith.
- c. Support each other in living with confidence in what Christ has already accomplished.

### **3. Pray Together:**

- a. Thank Jesus for taking your place on the cross.
- b. Ask God to deepen your understanding of His mercy and grace.
- c. Pray for hearts that respond to Jesus with faith, humility, and trust.
- d. Ask for courage to live in the freedom that Christ has secured.