

EASTER 2024  
Today  
Luke 23:39-42

I love to talk about the Lord Jesus Christ! On this day in which we consider and celebrate his resurrection from the dead (a LITERAL event!), I believe it is important for us to think about just how things got to the point that he was crucified in the first place. When you read the gospels, you cannot help but see that Jesus was the most loving, gracious, kind, and helpful person that has ever lived. He never treated a single person in an unloving or evil manner. He always spoke the truth. He touched lepers, and he healed those that were sick. He acknowledged and accepted those that were pushed into the margins by society (women, the poor, children). He befriended those that the religious crowd rejected (prostitutes, criminals, and lawyers!), and he welcomed them into the Kingdom when they owned their wrongdoings. **The ultimate test of his character came when he was falsely accused and sentenced to die, though he was completely without fault.** How do YOU respond when you are falsely accused? **For that matter, how do you respond when you are RIGHTFULLY accused?** Christ's response confused everyone around him (including his own followers) because they expected him to OVERPOWER his enemies rather than to be KILLED by them. Their treatment of him was exceptionally brutal and shameful. We can see what others witnessed on that day in all of the gospel accounts. **Matthew 27:26-31, 38-44 NIV**

26 Then he released Barabbas to them. **But he had Jesus flogged**, and handed him over to be crucified. 27 Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers around him. 28 They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, 29 and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand. Then they knelt in front of him and mocked him. "Hail, king of the Jews!" they said. 30 They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again. 31 After they had mocked him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him . . . 38 **Two rebels were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left.** 39 Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads 40 and saying, "You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!" 41 In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him. 42 "He saved others," they said, "but he can't save himself! He's the king of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. 43 He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, 'I am the Son of God.' " 44 **In the same way the rebels who were crucified with him also heaped insults on him.**

What a tragic, sickening picture. It is one of those scenes that, had it happened in our day, we think we would have done everything in our power to STOP it. But we would not have done so. **In fact, I think that every one of us are perhaps pictured in this crowd on that fateful day.** Furthermore, the tragic events of that day **COULD NOT** have been stopped, because it was **DIVINELY** arranged by God to deal with the

**very sins that caused those events.** I want us to see that day through the eyes of those two thieves that hung on crosses on either side of Jesus. Their front-row perspective belongs to us as well as we read the gospels, and it can also help us to see what WE need to see about ourselves in the process.

**What they both saw:**

\*Jesus being condemned because of his claim to be the Messiah. [They KNEW the significance of that title and claim.]

\*They saw the sign over Jesus's head that proclaimed him, "**The King of the Jews.**"

\*Jesus being mocked by an angry religious crowd. [In spite of the fact that his reputation was only that of a man who healed people and did good deeds!]

\*Jesus asking John to take care of his mother. [A very intimate, tender moment!]

\*Jesus doing NOTHING to defend himself or shout back at the merciless crowd!

There is one other thing that that saw that most certainly shocked them and caused them to wonder who this man really was. It happened before their very eyes. Luke mentions the presence of these two men as it occurred. **Luke 23:33-34 NIV**

**33 When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals--one on his right, the other on his left. 34 Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.**

I don't know how long it was from the time that they nailed him to the cross to the moment when he spoke these words, but I have a feeling that it happened even as the crowd (and these two thieves) were mocking him, and as the soldiers were gambling for the clothes they stripped from Jesus's now naked body. How would the OFFER of FORGIVENESS have affected you when given in this setting? I can only imagine how it would have hit my GUILTY heart if I had been mocking Jesus. It would take a very HARD HEART to keep on mocking someone who showed that much kindness and love to his enemies, but one of the thieves just kept on shouting insults at Jesus along with the crowd.

**Luke 23:39 NIV**

**39 One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!"**

I have often thought about that man who spoke to Jesus like that while hanging on a cross next to him. He is the picture of a BLIND, ARROGANT FOOL. Think about it with me:

**" Aren't you the Messiah? Save YOURSELF, and US." This man was using his dying breath to "run with the crowd" and mock HIS ONLY HOPE! Not only that, his "request" of Jesus would simply have been so he could RETURN to the behavior that put him on his cross in the first place. How many times have "saviors" saved you from your foolishness to see you return to it?**

But there was another criminal hanging next to Jesus on the other side. This one actually “came to his senses” about this amazing man who was dying next to him. He shut his foolish mouth and opened his once-blind eyes to really SEE what Jesus was doing, and realize what it meant, even for him! Listen to his words: **Luke 23:40-42 NIV**  
**40 But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence? 41 We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong."** 42 Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

**\*His changed attitude:** He FEARED GOD and stopped mocking!

**\*His corrected perspective:** “This man has done NOTHING wrong!”

**\*His convicted heart:** “We are punished justly . . . getting what our deeds deserve!”

**\*His confession of FAITH:** “Remember me when you enter into your KINGDOM.”

This request is such a beautiful thing. We can learn from this repentant thief, if we choose to do so! Think of it: He is looking at a man hanging on a Roman cross dying, just like him, but he asks Jesus to remember him . . . WHEN (not IF) he comes into his Kingdom. **He is looking at Jesus by FAITH. He says this on FRIDAY, not on SUNDAY.** He actually BELIEVES the sign above Jesus’s head, and he asks him to look kindly on him when he enters HIS Kingdom. I long for so many who do not know Jesus to come to the same realizations. **The story of Jesus’s death and resurrection is not just some religious idea; it is the ANSWER to our MOST DESPERATE NEED!** Oh, that you would TASTE what this man tasted of God’s infinite and perfect forgiveness when you realize you have NO ABILITY to EARN it or DESERVE it either. **We are ALL that thief on the cross, if we will just realize it.** This intimate exchange between Jesus and this man was a picture of WHY Jesus came in the first place. He said it over and over to his disciples (“The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost!”), and God promised it over and over in the Old Testament (Genesis 3; Isaiah 53). Right after the resurrection, Jesus said it again to his followers: **Luke 24:44-48 NLT**

**44 Then he said, "When I was with you before, I told you that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and in the Psalms must be fulfilled."** 45 Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. 46 And he said, "Yes, it was written long ago that the Messiah would suffer and die and rise from the dead on the third day. 47 It was also written that this message would be proclaimed in the authority of his name to all the nations, beginning in Jerusalem: **'There is forgiveness of sins for all who repent.'** 48 You are witnesses of all these things.

There is forgiveness of sins for all who repent! **You do not have to stay covered with your own guilt, separated from a real relationship with God and going through life on your own power.** You can LIVE, because Jesus really lives! His death that day was not the end, it was the astonishing BEGINNING. This is why Jesus answered the thief that day with a PROMISE that filled him with hope and joy. **Luke 23:43 NIV**

**43 Jesus answered him, "Truly I tell you, TODAY you will be with me in paradise."**

**Did you hear Jesus? He said, “TODAY!”** When that man closed his eyes in death, he opened them in the presence of Jesus in his Kingdom. **Heaven is an unending day!** After this moment, the man saw the sun darken, he heard Jesus cry out, **“It is finished,”** and he felt the earth **QUAKE** under his cross when Jesus died. He heard the Roman soldier exclaim, **“Truly, this man was the Son of God!”** **I am sure that the forgiven thief shouted, “AMEN!” when he heard that!** We never hear another word about that man, but I believe that he probably died with tears of wonder on his face.

**I don't believe that the story of Jesus in the gospels was written to evoke EMOTION in us, but to create FAITH in those who will receive it.** That story is for us today. Within 3 days, Jesus rose from the dead to **PROVE** that everything he had promised was **TRUE** and would be fulfilled. **Some of you here today are still living in BONDAGE to sins and wounds that you could be FREE from. It is YOUR CHOICE.** You can be like the foolish thief who chose to ridicule faith in Jesus and die in his sins, or you can own your sins and failures and be like the man who tasted the love of Jesus in his dying moments. You will also be able to experience the power and presence of Jesus **TODAY**, because he will come to set up his Kingdom in your life as you follow him. If you do, you will be counted among those who were identified in an ancient prophecy about the coming Messiah. **Isaiah 53:11-12 NIV**

**11 After he has suffered, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities. 12 Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.**

Let's pray.

**FACILITATION GUIDE**  
**EASTER 2024**  
**Today**

**START TALKING:**

What is your favorite memory of Easter weekend?

**START THINKING:**

How did the reality of Jesus's life become evident in you right after your salvation?

**START SHARING:**

[Read Matthew 27:26-44](#). Talk about the details of how Jesus was abused and mocked during his trial and crucifixion. What stands out to you in this passage? Why did Jesus have to suffer this way?

[Read Luke 23:33-34](#). How do Christ's words here affect you now? Why is his forgiveness so stunning in this setting?

[Read Luke 23:39](#). Why was this man's "request" one that would never have really saved him from anything?

[Read Luke 23:40-43](#). Talk about the evidence of repentance you see in this passage. How did the 2<sup>nd</sup> thief demonstrate remarkable faith in this passage? How does this passage reveal the way that salvation is given to us?

**START PRAYING:**

Pray for those who heard the Gospel all over the world this week to receive Christ as their Lord and Savior TODAY!

**START DOING:**

Share the Gospel with someone this week.