

"Crucified, Dead, Buried"

Luke 23: 44-56

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It is Palm Sunday... One of my favorite days, because I find it often entertaining, and always encouraging to watch the children parade around the auditorium as we sing, "Hosanna, Loud Hosanna." Now, we are going to quickly move ahead five days from Palm Sunday to Good Friday. We will pick up where we were last week with Luke's narrative describing the events of that day. Jesus is on the cross, between two criminals. One of them turned to Jesus in faith, and was promised he would enter heaven that day. Our text this morning is Luke 23:44-56. If you have your bible you can turn there. Otherwise the verses will be on the screen. Remember, this chapter is describing the most significant time in the history of the world. Let's pause and pray the Lord will help us not miss what this portion of His word means for our lives today.

Luke 23:44, 45a It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three, because the sun's light failed.

The Christian Standard Bible interprets a little for us. Some of your verses say the 6th and 9th hour, which is, yes, noon to 3:00 pm. The supernatural darkness during this time pointed to the horror of what was happening on the cross as Jesus paid the penalty for our sin. **Then Luke notes 23: 45b the curtain of the sanctuary was split down the middle.** This is a curtain which separated the holy place in the temple, where the priests served, from the most holy place or holy of holies. This was where the Ark of the Covenant, the Ark of God, had been kept. The high priest was only allowed to enter the most holy place on the Day of Atonement to make a sacrifice for sins of the people. Now that Jesus has suffered and died, he has paid the penalty for our sins, once for all time. Thus, there is no longer a barrier, a curtain between God and His people. This allows us to **Hebrews 4:16 approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.** The curtain splitting is a powerful symbol God provides for us, to illustrate how we have been reconciled to God through the death of Jesus.

Luke 23:46a And Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I entrust my

spirit." Jesus' humble spirit, His soul would now return to God the Father. **Luke 23:46b Saying this he breathed his last.** This may imply Jesus chose the precise time to die. The bottom line is He dies at the exact moment God the Father ordained, when Jesus has completed His redemptive work on the cross. **Luke 23:47 When the centurion saw what happened, he began to glorify God, saying, "This man really was righteous!"** A centurion is an officer in the Roman army, in charge of roughly 100 men. He was the man responsible for carrying out Pilate's orders to flog and crucify Jesus. As a career Roman soldier, who has likely done this many times, it is unusual that he has any feelings or thoughts about someone he executed. Yet, observing what Jesus said and did over the past few hours, has convinced him Jesus was innocent or righteous. He did not deserve to die. The man also recognizes something very unique about Jesus and what was happening. He begins to glorify God, not one of the Roman gods, but the true God, the God of the bible. It is remarkable, that a Roman centurion becomes a worshipper of the true God.

Luke 23:48 All the crowds that had gathered for this spectacle, when they saw what had taken place, went home, striking their chests. This was a symbol of grief repentance. This is also an unusual response. When Jesus was put on the cross, most people were mocking. Yet, apparently what they saw and heard when He was on the cross caused at least some of them to change their attitude. **Luke 23:49 But all who knew him. Including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.** There were a number of people in this group. Including, probably, the apostles John and Peter, but Luke highlights the women from Galilee. They were some of Jesus' most loyal followers. And they would be the first to find His tomb empty on Easter Sunday.

Luke 23:50,51 There was a good and righteous man named Joseph, a member of the Sanhedrin, who had not agreed with their plan and action. He was from Arimathea, a Judean town, and was looking forward to the kingdom

of God. This is the first we hear about Joseph. He is a prominent leader, a member of the council. He is from Arimathea, which some think is also Ramah, about 20 miles NW of Jerusalem. And he believes in Jesus. However, John 19:38 tells us he was a “secret disciple,” because he feared his fellow council members. But now he is no longer a “secret disciple.” He is coming out of the closet. He is a believer in and follower of Jesus, and no longer cares who knows. The event of that day seem to have changed his priorities.

Luke 23:52 He approached Pilate and asked for Jesus’ body. As a member of the Sanhedrin, Joseph has more access to Pilate than other disciples. **Luke 23:53 Taking the body down, he wrapped it in fine linen and placed it in a tomb cut into the rock, where no one had ever been placed.** Matthew tells us the tomb belonged to Joseph. Eventually he and other family members would be buried in it as well. This is interesting fulfilment of the prophecy of Isaiah 53:9, which says the Messiah’s grave will be among the rich. For now, however, Jesus’ body is the only one in this tomb. **Luke 23:54 It was the preparation day,** (meaning the day before the Sabbath, Friday.) **and the Sabbath was about to begin.** At sundown, around 6:00 pm., this meant no further work could be done to prepare the body for burial. **Luke 23:55, 56 The women who had come with him from Galilee followed along and observed the tomb and how his body was placed. Then they returned and prepared spices and perfumes. And they rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment.** Luke records this information because the women are planning to return to the tomb after the Sabbath and finish their task. They won’t go out on Saturday night, but will go back to where Jesus is buried early on Sunday morning. That brings us to chapter 24 next week, and what the women find at the tomb, or more precisely, do *not* find.

Okay, what is the Lord saying to us today in this portion of His word? I would, again, note the precise details that reflect Luke had done some careful research about what actually happened before he composed his account. Combined, with the fact he is writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, this gives me great confidence as to the accuracy of everything Luke is telling us. But, today I want to highlight three lessons we learn that are tied to three of the characters in this passage.

Number 1 – Anyone who turns to Jesus Christ and trusts in Him will experience God’s salvation. We saw this last week with the criminal of the cross, a man who probably lived a pretty vile life until an hour or two before his death. And now we see the Roman centurion become a believer in Jesus. We do not know a lot about this man. There is a tradition that his name was Longinus, and that he was a blind soldier who pierced Christ’s side with a spear. Jesus’ blood then splattered in his eyes and he was healed and able to see. That is probably only a legend. The musical, “Bow the Knee,” which we did for a number of years at Chisholm Baptist, where Paul McNeal played the Roman centurion, Anthony, is probably more realistic in its speculation about how this man becomes a believer in Jesus. Almost as good as Paul McNeal was John Wayne playing the role of the centurion in the 1965 movie, “The Greatest Story Ever Told.” There he says, “Surely this man was the son of God.” That comes from **Mark 10:39 And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, saw how he died, he said, “Surely this man was the Son of God!”** So, Luke highlights the man’s statement about Jesus’ innocence, while Mark and Matthew highlight his belief in Jesus’s being who He claimed to be, the Son of God. Now, like the criminal on the cross I don’t think this man has real deep theological understanding, but again the fact he is glorifying the true God indicates his faith is real.

Yet, I would put him right up there with the criminal on the cross as least likely to be a Christian. Roman soldiers, including officers, were not nice men. A big part of this man’s job was to be an executioner, to kill. He also would make sure the prisoner was flogged or brutally beaten. This man was a Gentile, not a Jew, and his background was almost certainly pagan. He had likely grown up worshipping the Roman gods, but now he is a worshipper of the true God. Friends, I suspect you know someone who you consider very unlikely to ever be a Christian. She might be a vocal atheist, working on her Ph.D. in molecular biology. He might be a foul-mouthed drug dealer. She might be an LGBTQ+ activist. He might be the fellow down the street who is a registered sex offender. It might be your sister-in-law who is just the meanest, most vindictive person you have ever known. “Least likely to ever become a Christian.” But... for the grace of God. When God, though His spirit, opens the spiritual eyes of

someone to see the glory of God in face of the Christian, that person, no matter who he/she is, can turn in faith to the Lord Jesus. It happened to the criminal on the cross. It happened to the roman centurion. It happened to Saul of Tarsus, AKA, the apostle Paul. It happened to Augustine. It happened to John Newton. This is the epitaph on his tombstone, "John Newton, clerk, once an infidel and libertine, a servant of slaves in Africa (that all means a very nasty man) was by the rich mercy of our Lord Savior Jesus Christ, preserved, restored, pardoned and appointed to preach the faith he had long labored to destroy." It was that truth that inspired Newton to write his well-known hymn, "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me." And the list of least likely to become a Christian who became Christians, goes on and on. Marvin Olasky, raised by Marxist parents, went to college as a left wing radical, met Jesus and is now the long time editor of World magazine. The list includes some of you in this room. Least likely to trust and follow Jesus. But by God's grace that is exactly what you are doing.

There are two implications. First, if you happen to be listening to this message and you are one of those folks who think that this Jesus stuff is not for you, you are mistaken. As I sometimes say, there is no one, no matter how nasty and ungodly you may be, no one who is beyond the reach of God's grace through Jesus. And there is no one, no matter how good of a person he/she might seem to be, who doesn't need that same grace. If you are not a believer in Jesus Christ, I urge you to turn to Him and place your trust in Him. If you don't know what that means, please get in touch with me. Second, if you know someone who seems least likely to be a Christian, you may tend to keep your distance from that individual. That might be a mistake. You might be the one whom God intends to use to help that person become a believer in Jesus. If the Lord gives you opportunities to show the love of Christ and shine the light of the gospel in that person's life, that is something you should do. No matter who they are. Someone who is least likely to be a Christian need Jesus as much as anyone.

Number 2 – You can be a God honoring, faithful follower of Jesus, even if others don't respect and value you as you think they should. I am thinking of those women who were faithful followers of Jesus. Even as His body is being taken to the tomb,

they still are following. And then they are preparing to ensure His body gets a proper burial. We know some of their names from various part of the four gospels. There is Mary Magdalen, who would be the first person to see Jesus alive after the resurrection. Then there is Mary, the mother of the disciples, James and John; Joanna, the wife of an official in Heron's court; Susanna; Salome; Mary, the wife of Clopas; and likely some others. Mary Magdalen is the only one we have any information about except what I just gave you. Luke mentions the first three by name in chapter 24. In chapter 8 he notes that these women were financial supporters of Jesus and His disciples, which explains how they had food to eat, even when Jesus was not multiplying loaves and fish.

Now, you are probably aware that women in the ancient world did not usually enjoy very high status. There are many different factors, but Luke, as well as the other three gospels, makes it clear that in contrast to those around Him, Jesus treated women with respect and dignity. And women are full participants in the life of the early church, even under God ordained male leadership. Yet, I have a feeling that until after the resurrection, the 12 disciples, did not really view the women as fellow disciples. When they had their "discussions" about who would be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, I don't think the women were ever included in the conversation. When the women told the disciples about Jesus' resurrection, **Luke 24:11 they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense.** The report of a dead man being alive seemed incredible, and I think the male disciples assumed the women were very capable of talking nonsense. But, Luke makes it clear that at the culmination of Jesus' ministry, His death and resurrection, the most significant events in the history of the world, His female followers often demonstrate greater faithfulness than the far better known male disciples.

Yet, those gals did not follow Jesus because it would bring them fame, prestige or wealth. They followed Jesus because they trusted and loved Him. After being a pastor for almost 40 years, I have seen numbers of individuals who were primarily involved in church ministry not because they trusted and loved Jesus, but because they were trying to meet their own emotional needs. Of course, none of those people are a part of Chisholm Baptist today... they were all at my

previous church or former attenders here...maybe. Now Jesus is the only person who ever served with perfectly pure motives. All our motive, are to some degree, influenced by what we perceive to be our self-interest. My point is that we should not become angry or bitter when we don't think we are getting the credit we deserve for however we may be serving the Lord. Whether you are teaching a Sunday School class, washing dishes, in the church kitchen, or mowing your neighbor's lawn for them. Your focus must not be on getting proper credit for what you do. The women Luke mentions are a good example of faithfully following Jesus even if no one else is really applauding you for what you are doing. That is an important model to follow.

Number 3 – If you have not told many people about your faith in Jesus, right now, today, is a great time to start. Joseph of Arimathea, the man who donated his tomb so Jesus had a place to be buried, was a wealthy member of the Sanhedrin, who when Jesus was killed, stepped forward, asked Pilate if he could have the body, and let everyone know that he was a follower of Jesus Christ. That is how I think of Joseph. That is how most people who read the bible think of Joseph. We tend to forget that before Jesus was crucified he was a “secret disciple.” He apparently thought if he made his faith in Jesus public, the other members of the Jewish council would ridicule him, remove him from the council or worse. We don't know what he said that morning when the Sanhedrin had discussed Jesus' fate. He may have been silent as those men decided Jesus must die. Perhaps guilt for that silence was part of Joseph's reason to step up and volunteer to bury Jesus's body. We don't know.

And we don't know what happened to Joseph after the resurrection. He is not mentioned anywhere in Acts or the rest of the New Testament, but that doesn't mean he did not continue to be a faithful follower of Jesus. The women remind us that anonymity doesn't mean a lack of faithfulness. There are plenty of stories outside of the bible about Joseph, including that he traveled to France and Britain preaching the gospel. One legend is that he had possession of the Holy Grail and brought it to England... which probably has about 1% chance to be true.

My point is this: Joseph was a “secret disciple.” That was not a good thing. It didn't mean his faith

was not real, but it meant the Lord was displeased that he didn't stand up and speak up for Jesus. Yet, as Jesus died on that cross, Joseph, by the grace of God, decided it was time to step up and publicly identify himself as a believer in and follower of the Lord Jesus, and the gospel writers all honor Joseph as the man who took Jesus from the cross and brought him to his own tomb. Friends, may be you are a “secret Christian,” at least to some extent. Oh, the people at church, and folks in your family know you are a Christian, but at work or school it is a different story. You have pretty much been silent whenever the topic has anything to with Christianity. After all, many of your co-workers or fellow students ridicule Christians. Maybe you have convinced yourself it is best to keep quiet about your faith until you build closer relationships with these folks and then you can tell them about your belief in Jesus. Not a good idea. Jesus words in **Matthew 10:33** are very sobering, **Whoever denies me before other, I will also deny him before my Father in heaven.** But there is some great news in our text for those who have been “secret Christians.” It is not too late to stand up and speak up about your faith in Jesus. Through the Holy Spirit, the Lord will give you the boldness to be a faithful witness. He will also give you the grace and wisdom to speak with others in a gentle, winsome way, making you an effective witness for Jesus.

So, what lesson do you think you need to focus on today? Do you need that reminder from the Roman centurion that anyone who turn to Jesus, even those deemed least likely to be Christian, will experience God's salvation? Or do you need that reminder from the women that following and serving Jesus is about honoring the Lord, not getting recognitions or respect from others, or finding self-satisfaction? Or do you need the reminder that if there are people around you who don't know that you are a believer in and follower of Jesus Christ, it is time to tell them. Maybe, you need all three of those reminders. May the Lord give us the wisdom to recognize what He is calling us to do. And the strength to do it, by His grace and for His glory.