

Sunday, February 16, 2024 | Holy Week

Week 20 | Luke 23:39-56 | "The Crucifixion, Pt. 2"

READ: Luke 23:39-56 (ESV)

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.

So far, in Luke's version of the crucifixion, the Lord has *prophesied* about the destruction of Jerusalem (cf. 23:26-31) and *prayed* for the forgiveness of his torturers (cf. 23:32-38). These two scenes taught us two invaluable lessons: first, those who *reject* God's Son *invite* God's wrath, and second, just as the King of the Jews was self-sacrificing, so too ought we be selfless. If the Lord was not self-serving, neither should we be selfish.

Today, we'll delve into the rest of 'The Passion.' As we'll see, although crucifixions were a common sight at that time, this one was *unparalleled*. From Jesus' composed demeanor during the crucifixion to its unusually brief duration to the occurrence of multiple extraordinary events, never before had a man died in such a manner. This crucifixion was extraordinary, even to those who had become accustomed to its horrors.

At the crucifixion, three **unlikely** witnesses testify to Jesus' innocence:

i. **Vs. 39-43 – A Convicted Criminal**

Vs. 39 – We're told that "one of the criminals" who was crucified alongside Jesus said, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!" Luke says the man "railed" when he said this. The Greek term translated as "railed" is **βλασφημέω** (*blasphēmeō*) which usually means to belittle, demean, or slander someone (cf. Ac. 13:45; 18:6; Tit. 3:2; Rom. 3:8; 1 Cor. 4:13; 10:30); but it is often used about God (cf. 2 Ki. 19:6; Isa. 52:5; Mt. 9:3; Mk 3:29; Lk. 5:21; Ro. 2:24; Rv. 13:6).¹ This is the same Greek word used in verse 35, where we're told the religious leaders "scoffed (*blasphēmeō*)" at Jesus, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God." Thus, Jesus was ridiculed not only by those around the cross but also by those on the cross (cf. Matt. 27:44). The criminal said, "Save yourself and us," but he did not mean it. These words were spoken sarcastically. It is tragically ironic that this man could simultaneously say something *so right and wrong*. As we'll see, if this man had believed his words, Jesus would've saved him.

But notice that there is no contrition in this man's speech. He's impenitent, insisting that he **deserves** to be saved.

Vs. 40-41 – In a remarkable turn of events, rather than joining in the ridicule, the third man crucified that day "rebuked" his colleague, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?" In other words, how can this man mock Jesus when he is suffering in the same way? Amazingly, he even says that their crucifixion was "justly" administered. How so? The man explains, unlike Jesus, who "has done nothing wrong," they "are receiving the due reward of our deeds." Unlike the other criminal, this man does not make excuses; he confesses his guilt.

Vs. 42 – After rebuking his unrepentant companion, the repentant thief turns to the Lord and says, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.' The Greek word translated as

¹ BDAG (2000), p. 178.

'remember' is **μνάομαι** (*mnaomai*) and, when used in relation to God, it almost always signifies a gracious regard for someone (cf. Lev. 26:40-42).

EXAMPLE:

We use the term 'remember' in this way when we might say to a musician starting out in the music industry, 'Remember me when you're famous,' or, similarly, 'Don't forget us little people.' Such phrases aren't a request to be memorialized but a request for charity. These requests ask that should the artist achieve fame, they might consider sharing the wealth of their success with those who were loyal and supportive during those formative years.

The OT is full of examples of God remembering in this way: God “remembered” Noah (cf. Gen. 8:1); God “remembered” Lot for Abraham’s sake (cf. Gen. 19:29); God “remembered” Rachel (cf. Gen. 30:22); God “remembered” enslaved Israel in Egypt (cf. Ex. 2:24); God’s remembrance of the patriarchs stayed his hand from wiping out Israel after the golden calf incident (cf. Ex. 32:13).

God’s gracious remembering is also mentioned in the NT: Lu. 1:54, 72; Ac. 10:31.²

So, when that man said, “Remember me when you come into your kingdom,” he wanted mercy. Considering his confession (vs. 41), he begged Jesus to forgive him. This means that this man also viewed Christ as the Messiah and God himself. For whom else could he grant his request (cf. Lu. 5:21-24)? The so-called “thief on the cross” knew enough about himself that he knew he was a sinner, and he knew enough about Jesus that he knew the man crucified next to him was the Savior.

Vs. 43 – In another remarkable turn of events, the Lord tells the penitent thief, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.” The Greek term translated as “paradise” is **παράδεισος** (*paradeisos*) and, as the name suggests, it refers to a “transcendent place of blessedness.”³ The word shows up in the LXX many times, most notably in the creation account

² Quoting from Jer. 31:31-34, the writer of Hebrews states in 8:12 that God “will be merciful toward [our] iniquities, and [He] will remember [aka, *mnaomai*] [our] sins no more.” This is not to say that God forgets; being omniscient, he cannot forget, unlearn, or misremember anything. For God to say that he’ll not “remember” our sins is to say that, even though we are sinners, he’ll not *regard* us as sinners because of the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ. Our sins, past, present, and future, have been paid for by the cross. And because of that payment, the sins of believers are no longer *regarded* by God. It is as if he’s completely *forgotten* them. Conversely, God will “remember” the sins of those who do not put their faith in Jesus Christ (cf. Rev. 16:19). In other words, while God's "remembering" is almost always lenient, it can be punitive.

³ BDAG, p. 761.

of Genesis, where the term is translated as "garden," as in "the *Garden of Eden*" (cf. Gen. 2:8-10, 15; 3:1-3; 13:10; Isa. 51:3). In contrast, *paradeisos* is used only three times in the NT. According to Paul, *paradeisos* is the place where he "heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter" (2 Cor. 12:4). And, according to John, *paradeisos* is the place where "the tree of life" is located (Rev. 2:7b). Thus, given its usage in the NT, *paradeisos* is equivalent to οὐρανός (*ouranos*), aka, "heaven" (cf. 2 Cor. 12:2). All that to say, when Jesus said, "today you will be with me in paradise," he was promising eternal life in heaven. The impenitent man not only lost his life on a cross, but he also lost paradise. Meanwhile, though dying on the cross, the penitent man would live for all eternity in paradise.

So, what's the takeaway? The **unrepentant** soul is destined for eternal **punishment**, while the **repentant** soul is destined for eternal **paradise**.

READ: John 3:16-18 (ESV)

¹⁶ "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him **is not condemned**, but whoever does not believe **is condemned already**, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

The great misconception about eternity is that people go to hell because of their many transgressions. But a man does not go to hell because of his many sins. He goes to hell because of only one sin: **rejection of Jesus**. Our eternal destinies hinge on the singular issue of whether we believe Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and the life (cf. Jn. 14:6). If we don't, this existence is the only paradise we'll ever see. If we do, true paradise awaits.

ii. Vs. 44-49 – A **Roman Soldier**

Vs. 44-45 – Jesus had already been on the cross for about three hours by this point (cf. Mar. 15:25). By our reckoning, there was darkness over the "whole land" from the "sixth hour," aka 12:00PM, until the "ninth hour," aka 3:00PM.

This wasn't an eclipse for three reasons. **Firstly**, a lunar eclipse only occurs during the new moon phase, which didn't happen until later that month; the moon was in its "full" phase then.⁴ But, even then, a total eclipse still wouldn't have been visible in Jerusalem. **Secondly**, while an eclipse can last for hours, totality only lasts for 30 minutes, which is far shorter than the three-hour-long "darkness" described here. **Lastly**, Luke doesn't

⁴ ESV Study Bible (2008), p. 1886.

describe a lunar eclipse but says that “the sun's light failed.” Thus, what occurred is that the sun itself stopped emitting light.

Interestingly, God has darkened the sun before, albeit for three days rather than three hours, during the ninth plague in Ex. 10:21-29. Such an act represents both lament (cf. Amos. 8:9-10) and divine judgment (cf. Ezek. 32:7-8; Joel 2:31; Rev. 6:12).

A darkened sun wasn't the only odd occurrence that Luke recorded. He also says, “The curtain of the temple was torn in two.” The term “curtain” either refers to the tapestry that hung at the entrance of the Holy Place, separating it from the outer courtyard, or it relates to the drapes that separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place.⁵ Either way, the symbolic act illustrated an important principle: the way to God has been opened. No longer would the locus of God's presence be the Temple Mount. To worship God the Father, one must come to God the Son.

READ: John 4:21, 23-26 (ESV)

²¹ Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father.

²³ But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. ²⁴ God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” ²⁵ The woman said to him, “I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things.” ²⁶ Jesus said to her, “I who speak to you am he.”

Vs. 46 – After the darkened sun and the torn curtain, Luke says that Jesus yelled, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!” Having said this, we're told that Jesus “breathed his last.” The time of his death coincided with the end of the 3-hour-long darkness. In total, Jesus was on the cross for roughly 6 hours. As mentioned last week, crucifixions typically lasted days. But Jesus was in control; he died when he wanted to die. Matthew makes this point explicit when he says that Jesus “yielded [emphasis added] up his spirit” (Mat. 27:50).⁶

Vs. 47 – Like the penitent thief on the cross, another unlikely advocate vouches for Jesus Christ. Luke says that “when the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God, saying, “Certainly this man was innocent!” This “centurion” was likely one of the soldiers who not only crucified Jesus but also gambled away the Lord's clothes (cf. Lu. 23:34; Jn. 19:23-24). No doubt,

⁵ Bock (1996), p. 1860.

⁶ The Greek term translated as “yielded” is ἀφίημι (*aphiēmi*), and it means to “send away,” “permit,” or “depart.” Such a verb highlights the Lord's volition. It was his choice when and where he would die.

he'd participated in multiple crucifixions. But Jesus' crucifixion was unusual. He did not curse everyone; the Lord asked God to forgive his torturers (cf. Lu. 23:34). Rather than lingering for hours or even days, Jesus died sooner than most who were crucified. And, on top of everything else, his death coincided with the end of a 3-hour-long darkness. This wasn't this soldier's first rodeo; he had experienced many things. But all of these strange occurrences were enough to signify that Jesus did not deserve to die, especially by crucifixion. Luke tells us this man "praised God" because of these things.

Vs. 48-49 – Unlike the religious leaders who "scoffed" at Jesus and relished in his death (cf. Lu. 23:35), once the Lord was dead, Luke tells us that "all the crowds that had assembled for this spectacle...returned home beating their breasts." Rather than cries of triumph, the people mourned. Such a reaction is confirmed by multiple eyewitnesses since, as our narrator points out, "And all his acquaintances and the women who had followed him from Galilee stood at a distance watching these things."

So, what's the takeaway? Proclaiming Christ crucified produces praise from improbable places.

READ: Matthew 5:14-15 (ESV)

¹⁴ "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

Jesus said about his crucifixion, "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself" (Jn. 12:32).

iii. **Vs. 50-56 – A Sanhedrin Official**

Vs. 50-51 – When Luke says Joseph of Arimathea "was a member of the council," he's saying that he was a member of the Sanhedrin (cf. Mar. 15:3). But though he was a member of the Sanhedrin, Joe disagreed with the majority. This is why Luke says that Joseph was "a good and righteous man, who had not consented to their decision and action; and he was looking for the kingdom of God." This means that not everyone in the upper echelons of the Jewish aristocracy opposed Jesus.

In fact, according to John, we learn two additional details about this moment. First, Joseph of Arimathea was a secret disciple of Jesus (cf. Jn. 19:38). And two, Nicodemus,

also a member of the Sanhedrin (cf. Jn. 3:1; 7:50-51), donated a seventy-five pounds of spices to anoint the Jesus' body for burial (cf. Jn. 19:39).⁷

Vs. 52-53 – Luke tells us that Joseph of Arimathea went to “Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.” This is somewhat surprising. Usually, after someone was crucified, they’d be placed in a “common grave reserved for that purpose.”⁸ Instead, we’re told that Joseph took Jesus’ body “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” (cf. Jn. 19:41). Matthew tells us that this tomb was owned by Joseph (cf. Matt. 27:60). Admittedly, we might be tempted to breeze by these details. However, a better understanding of first-century funerals makes these facts significant.

Burial practices varied in the ancient world. The Romans used cremation, while the Egyptians embalmed their dead.⁹ For the Jews, there were two phases in the burial process. The first phase, what John calls the “custom of the Jews” (Jn. 19:40), consisted of the deceased being wrapped in multiple layers of spice-soaked white bandages, and then the body would be laid in a cave-like tomb.¹⁰ This phase is intended to *hasten* decomposition while minimizing the stench from such a process. The second phase occurred later, once the body had entirely broken down and only the skeletal structure remained. At this point, the bones would be placed into stone jars called “ossuaries” and then put on shelves alongside the tomb's walls.¹¹

Why does all this matter? In the first century, graves like the one that Jesus was buried in were like family burial plots, housing multiple generations.¹² Hence, it is significant that Luke mentions that the tomb in which the body of Jesus was placed was the sort “where no one had ever yet been laid.” Joseph of Arimathea had this tomb made for his family (cf. Mat. 27:60), and yet instead of him or one of his relatives using it first, he gives it to Jesus. Such a gesture bestowed great honor on the Lord.

⁷ Jn. 19:39 states the mixture of myrrh and aloes weighed “seventy-five pounds.” If *one pound* of spikenard cost Mary “three hundred denarii” (Jn. 12:5)—i.e., what a laborer could earn in a year—then *seventy pounds* of myrrh/aloë doubtless cost even more. After all, as spikenard had to be shipped from the Far East, myrrh and aloë also had to be imported, likely from the Arabian peninsula in the Far South. Theoretically, assuming the cost of these spices is equivalent, Nicodemus could've paid upwards of *30,000 denarii*. Such a sum was more than a working man could earn in a *lifetime*.

⁸ Keener (2003), 2:1157.

⁹ Köstenberger (2008), p. 555.

¹⁰ Köstenberger (2008), p. 555-556, “Remarkably, the washing of Jesus' body, the most important service rendered to a dead person, is not mentioned by any of the evangelists.” He explains in the footnote that this is likely due to the lack of time.

¹¹ Gower, Ralph, *The New Manners & Customs of Bible Times*, (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2005), p. 69.

¹² One of the most elaborate graves discovered in Jerusalem is the “Sanhedrin,” aka the “tombs of the Sanhedrin.” Inside, sixty-three alcoves were found, indicating that it was quite a large burial site.

But the most surprising aspect about Joseph was that, before this moment, John tells us that Joseph of Arimathea was *secretive* about his devotion to Jesus (cf. Jn. 19:38). But now he's not only officially requesting custody of the Lord's body but his putting the Lord in his own family tomb (cf. Matt. 27:60). **Such an act would've taken no small degree of courage (cf. Mar. 15:43) as it would've made Joseph's loyalties explicit to all.**¹³ As Carson explains, "Joseph's act doubtless made him a pariah in some quarters of the Sanhedrin; it was doubly courageous since the charge under which Jesus had been executed was sedition."¹⁴ Thus, Jesus' body wasn't handed over to one of the apostles or even to Mary but into the hands of a coward turned courageous.

Vs. 54-56 – Luke says it was "the day of Preparation, and the Sabbath was beginning." The Sabbath began at sundown on Friday. This means the Lord sometime around 3PM that same day (cf. Mar. 15:34). Again, the "women who had come with him from Galilee" reappear (Lu. 23:51), and we're told that they "followed and saw the tomb and how his body was laid." After seeing Jesus' interment, "Then they returned and prepared spices and ointments. On the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment."

So, what's the takeaway? Fully embracing the gospel makes cowards courageous.

READ: Acts 5:40-42 (ESV)

⁴⁰ They called the apostles in again. They beat them and told them not to speak anymore using the name of Jesus. Then they let them go free. ⁴¹ The apostles left the council meeting. They were happy because they were given the honor of suffering dishonor for Jesus. ⁴² The apostles did not stop teaching the people. They continued to tell the Good News—that Jesus is the Messiah. They did this every day in the Temple area and in people's homes.

At one point in *the Fellowship of the Ring*, Frodo finds it difficult to be brave. And a friend says to him, "Courage is found in unlikely places. Be of good hope!"

¹³ Kruse (2017), p. 434.

¹⁴ Carson (1991), p. 629.

Video Description:

Holy Week | Week 20 | “The Crucifixion, Pt. 2” (Luke 23:39-56)

SPEAKER: Ben Hyrne, Pastor

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