

Luke 23 (Part 2): 26-56 • The Crucifixion and Burial of Jesus

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Luke chapter 23 and verse 26. Skip down to verse 26. I'm going to be reading here out of the ESV, and we'll be talking about it as we go. Luke 23:26. And it says,

“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.” (ESV)

I want you to stop there if you could just for a moment. Crucifixion, as I know that you are aware, was a particularly brutal form of execution devised by the Roman Empire. It was considered to be so cruel, so painful, that it was actually unlawful to crucify a Roman citizen. It was only for those who were non-citizens. But prior to actually being nailed on the cross a criminal would first be forced to carry his cross throughout town in a sort of parade, I suppose, for lack of a better word.

And that whole process of parading his cross through town was intended, by the Romans, to be a warning of sorts, to all who would come by and watch that the crimes for which this individual was being executed would not be tolerated by the Roman government. And the route that Jesus took is today called, the Via Dolorosa, and that means literally, the sorrowful way.

And speaking of Good Friday, this coming Friday, there will be Christians from many different flavors of the Christian faith who will walk that Via Dolorosa and commemorate the journey that our Lord made to the cross.

I'm given also to understand that the Romans would choose the longest route possible, and that a soldier would walk in front of whoever was condemned, and that soldier would be carrying a sign, and written on that sign would be a list of all of the crimes that had been committed.

But because Jesus had already lost so much blood from the flogging and just the pressure of carrying the sin of mankind, we're told that He had stumbled under the weight of the cross. And so a man named Simon from Cyrene in North Africa, by the way, that's modern Libya in the far north coast of Africa, was

pulled out of the crowd and forced to carry the cross of Jesus at least a portion of the way to the site where He was to be crucified.

And that was just outside the gates of the city. You can probably imagine what was going through Simon's mind. He had come from Cyrene, no doubt, to celebrate the Passover, and I imagine probably with his family. And now here he was thrust into this whole gruesome scene. It goes on in verse 27 saying,

“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?’”

Stop there please, for a moment. Relieved of the burden of the cross for just a bit, Jesus was able to converse with some of the women who were following Him along the road, and He told them not to weep for Him, but rather to weep for themselves.

And then He began to speak prophetically about the devastation that would come to the city of Jerusalem in the year, A.D. 70, give or take some 35 years from when these events are taking place. And He said that those days would be so desperate that women would actually be happy that they had not born children.

And that describes a pretty desperate time because in those days for a woman not to bear children was considered to be a curse from God. And yet the situation will be so dire, Jesus said, the women without children will actually be happy for having been barren, and we're told that He ended His words with a proverb.

He said, if they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry? And that kind of a proverb, I suppose, could mean many things but in this case, Jesus is likening Himself to the green tree, and unbelieving Israel is the dry branch.

And his message is basically, if the Romans are willing to kill the sinless, innocent son of God, what do you think they will do to unbelieving and rebellious Israel?

And then we're told in verse 32 that, “*Two others, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him.*” And actually, this was foretold in Isaiah's incredible prophecy of the suffering servant. Let me show you this on the screen from Isaiah 53:12, it says,

Isaiah 53:12 (ESV)

...he...was numbered with the transgressors;

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And the word numbered, simply means, counted alongside. Jesus was counted alongside the transgressors. And that statement that Isaiah prophesied 700 years before Christ was born and that we read today about Jesus being put to death alongside these two individuals, means so much more than just what we're seeing here in Luke.

When the Bible tells us that Jesus was numbered with the transgressors, it's speaking in a larger sense of how He has been numbered with all of us. He has been numbered in the sense that all of us have transgressed the Law of God and He was numbered with us right alongside us. He identified Himself with sinful people. And it began, frankly, at His incarnation.

Let me show you some Scriptures here. First, beginning in the Book of Galatians. It says,

Galatians 4:4 (ESV)

...when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law,

...when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, (but I want you to notice here how) born of woman, (and in that sense) born under the law,

And then Paul wrote to the Philippians, and he said this,

Philippians 2:7 (ESV)

emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant being born in the likeness of men.

(He) emptied himself, (speaking of Jesus) by taking the form of a servant being born in the likeness of men.

And this is all talking about how Jesus was numbered with the transgressors, us sinful man. And then in one of the most incredible ways Jesus was numbered with the transgressors was frankly at His baptism. Look at Matthew chapter 3, it says,

Matthew 3:13-15 (ESV)

Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he consented.”

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Now, this is a fascinating passage, and I think frankly, a lot of Christians read it and they're kind of confused as to why Jesus submitted to John's baptism, especially once they start studying their Bible and they realize John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. Why then would Jesus get baptized by John? What in the world did He have to repent of? Well, the answer is nothing.

What Jesus was doing by entering the waters of baptism and being baptized by John is He was numbering Himself with the transgressors. He was identifying Himself with those of us who are born into sin. He himself, sinless, innocent, but numbered with us right alongside us.

Then verse 33 goes on to say, “*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.*”

We're told here that the place where Jesus was crucified was called the skull, which in Aramaic is Golgotha. Let me show you a picture of why it is called the skull.



You can see from this photo that the side of the hill actually has this eerie representation or resemblance to a human skull, which can be seen to this day. So, they referred to it in this definite sort of a way, and it was there that they crucified Jesus. And 1,000 years, think about that, 1,000 years before Jesus was born, some words were written in the Psalms that gave us insight and a picture of what happened in that crucifixion. Let me show you this from Psalm 22,

Psalm 22:18 (ESV)

“...a company of evildoers encircles me; they have pierced my hands and feet - I can count all my bones - they stare and gloat over me; they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.”

“...a company of evildoers encircles me; they have pierced my hands and feet - I can count all my bones - they stare and gloat over me; they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.”

I want to bring out here very quickly, once again, that repeated 1,000 years before the birth of Christ, Psalm 22 was written. And did you notice how many insights about crucifixion are given in that passage, such as, they pierced my hands and my feet?

A thousand years before Christ was born, crucifixion was unknown in the known world, and yet a thousand years before, the Lord moved upon the psalmist to write about it in gruesome detail, even talking about how they divided His garments through the casting of lots.

Look what it goes on to say in verse 34 in our text here in Luke. *“And Jesus said, Father, forgive them for they know not what they do. And they cast lots to divide his garments.”* as we've already seen predicted.

But I want to take a moment to talk a little bit about this statement that we've heard so many times where Jesus speaks a word of forgiveness over the people who are crucifying Him. And of course, largely what He's doing for us is He's practicing what He preached.

Jesus taught us to forgive those who had hurt us. And if you've ever been hurt by someone very badly, you know that that is an incredibly hard thing to do. But here's Jesus looking upon those who are right now mocking Him. They have beaten Him within an inch of His life, flogged Him.

We've mentioned before that some people did not survive flogging because of the loss of blood. Jesus is looking upon these people who have now crucified Him by driving spikes into His hands and possibly also His feet. And yet here He is, praying about them saying, Father, forgive them. And you kind of has to have to ask the question, why is He asking His Father in heaven to forgive them?

Well, He told you, He told you why. *“Because they know not what they do.”* That's called being ignorant. They know not what they do. And that's the bottom line. They were ignorant of the full reality of what was going on.

Now, I'm not saying that their ignorance means they weren't culpable. I'm not necessarily saying that at all. I'm just saying, I mean, if they weren't culpable, Jesus wouldn't have had to pray, Father, forgive them. But what I'm saying is that whether we're talking about the religious Jews who accused Him, or the Romans who executed Him.

Neither of them really knew what they were doing. And that's what Jesus is saying here. They don't know what they're doing. Obviously, whether they were blinded by self-interest, or whether they were blindly following others, or whatever motivated them, the fact is they had no idea. They had no idea just how innocent this man really was.

And may I just say that this statement that Jesus makes here saying, Father, forgive them is more than just an expression of forgiveness for those who abused and tortured and crucified the Lord of Life. It goes far beyond that people. It becomes, for you and I a promise. Not just for our own forgiveness, but of our power to forgive others.

You might say, well, pastor, what do you mean by that? Well, as believers in Jesus, we have to understand, remember, Jesus to us is more than just someone we respect. Jesus to us is more than just someone we have embraced. Jesus is the One who lives in our hearts through His Holy Spirit. And because of that, He is the One who empowers us to live as He lived.

And that means that if Jesus forgave, and He did, that same power to forgive now dwells in you. Isn't that incredible? The power of Jesus to forgive. I'm not saying it's your power to forgive. And that's why you and I struggle with forgiveness because we're trying to do it in our own strength.

And a born-again Christian who is indwelt and empowered by the Holy Spirit can greatly struggle to forgive. Why? Because they're doing it in their own power, their own strength. In fact, sometimes as Christians, we think well, I'm a Christian. I'm supposed to forgive. And they put the pressure on themselves. I need to forgive.

Well, you know what? You can't. But Jesus proved His power to forgive. And if you will lay your power down, and if you will take up His, and if you will confess to Him, Lord, I am not able, but I know that your power resides in me, and I want to stand in that power today, that power to forgive.

I believe that the Lord will give you the power to forgive as you confess your personal weakness, as you recognize that He who forgave now lives in your heart and will give you that power. You can walk in that same forgiveness.

And people, let me remind you, to walk in forgiveness is to walk in freedom. To walk in unforgiveness is to walk in slavery. Slavery to yourself. And it is a horrible way to live.

Now in verse 35, we're told that, *"..the people stood by, watching, but the rulers scoffed at him, (and they were saying things like) "He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!"*

Check out this quote from Psalm chapter 22 verse 8 says,

Psalm 22:8 (ESV)

He trusts in the LORD. Let him deliver him. Let him rescue him for he delights in him.

He trusts in the LORD. Let him deliver him. Let him rescue him for he delights in him.

The same mocking voice that we hear Luke giving us in the narrative. And then in verse 36, we're told that, *"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!"* (verse 38 tells us) ³⁸ *There was also an inscription over (His head) him, (On the cross. And it said) "This is the King of the Jews."*

We know that Pilate had that inscription made. I think to spite the Jewish religious leaders, because Matthew tells us that Pilate knew that it was because of envy that they had delivered him up and wanted him dead. And then we have one of the most amazing exchanges that goes on during this time of Jesus suffering on the cross, and it has to do with Jesus and one of the thieves.

Check out verse 39 through 43 with me here. It says, *"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."*

This is powerful, powerful. Two criminals, two criminals hanging on either side of Jesus and each of them gives us an interesting picture, I think, of how people can respond to Jesus.

The first criminal is the one that we see here in verse 39. He joins in with the mocking, mocking Jesus. Hey, if you're really the Messiah, why don't you save yourself and save us while you're at it? And here he is literally dying. He is literally dying, this man. And next to him is the only person in the universe who has the power to save him and he's mocking. Isn't that crazy?

And the reason that he's mocking and the reason that he is carrying on just like the rest of the people there is because he's blind. He's blind to his own sinful condition. But amazingly, the other thief can see. Did you notice that? He can see. But what does he see? Well, first you'll notice that he sees that God is a righteous judge.

And look what he says again in verse 40 with me in your Bible. He said to his companion, *"do you not fear God since you're under the same sentence of condemnation?"*

In other words, this thief understood that all of mankind will stand before God and give an account of their lives. And so that is called the fear of God. When a person understands that they are accountable to God, it produces in them what the Bible calls the fear of God, right?

It's not fear as in shrink back terror. It's fear as in, I'm going to pay attention to the way I live because I know that I will give an account one day to God Almighty for the way that I have lived, and this man saw that, okay? He was able to see that. What else does he see? Well, you'll notice that he sees himself as a sinner and in need of God's mercy.

Look at what he says in verse 41. He says, "*we are receiving the due reward of our deeds.*" And that's an interesting way of saying it, but he's basically saying we're getting what we deserve. We're getting what we deserve. And believe me people, this is no small revelation.

I have met many people in my lifetime and in my time as a pastor who have not had this revelation. They don't see themselves as sinners. They don't recognize themselves as sinners. But this man saw his himself in that way.

And next, here's something else this man could see, he could see that Jesus was different and He didn't deserve to be there. Look what he says here, also in verse 41, "*but this man has done nothing wrong.*" Isn't that fascinating?

This thief knew, he could see. He could see the innocence of Jesus. He saw his own guilt. He knew that God was a God to be feared, and he knew that this one who was hanging on the cross next to him did not deserve to be there. And finally in verse 42, we learn that this man could see two other things as well.

Look at the last two things in verse 42. First, he could see that Jesus was able to save. And he said, "*Jesus, remember me, remember me.*" Even though Jesus was, at that moment, hanging on a cross, suffering intensely, this man could see that Jesus was someone who could save. And so he said, remember me. And finally, he could see Jesus was a King.

He not only said, remember me, he said, "*remember me when you come into your kingdom.*" And you know what, nobody speaks of someone having a kingdom unless they're a King. You have to be a King to have a kingdom. And this man saw it. He saw that Jesus was a King.

Now here's the crazy question that I want to ask you. How is it this man was able to see these things? I don't know if you've ever thought much about it. How

was he able to see? I mean, we really don't know that much about this guy other than he was a crook of his own admission. So how does this nobody in the Bible, who apparently has lived a less than honorable life and again, he admits it on his own. How does someone like that come to have such incredible insights into who Jesus was, and is, to have such insights into God, such insights into himself and his need for a Savior?

How is that possible? Well, I'm going to give you the answer. It's really very simple. It's God, the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the One who reveals these things in the hearts of men.

And really, it's very similar to what happened to Peter when Jesus got His disciples together on one occasion and said, who do the people, who are they saying that I am, and all the answers came forward. Well, some say, some say, some say. And then Jesus said, what about you what do you say? And you'll remember Peter stepped up and he said, you are the Messiah. You are the Son of the living God.

And you remember what Jesus said to him? He said, you're blessed Simon, because flesh and blood didn't pass that information along, it was revealed to you by My Father.

In other words, it was God who gave Peter the ability to see in that moment. And it was the same God. through the Holy Spirit who gave this poor thief the ability to see and to understand at this moment too. But this whole conversation begs one further question, and that was, why was this thief shown those things and the other was not?

Why this man? Well, it all centers around some very simple principles of God's Word, and I want to show them to you. The first one is from the Book of Proverbs. Check this out. Proverbs 1:7 says,

Proverbs 1:7 (ESV)

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.

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But those who fear the Lord, what happens? God gives knowledge. The fear of the Lord is the beginning. It starts there, but there's a second principle from James that I want to also show you from James 4:10 which says,

James 4:10 (ESV)

Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will lift you up.

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Now it doesn't specify there how he will lift you up, but many times through our humility, He will lift us up in revelation and understanding. And I believe that is how this thief was brought to this place of being able to see so clearly who God is, who he himself is, who this Jesus is hanging on the cross enough to say to him, you're a King, please remember me when you come into your Kingdom. It was because he humbled himself. He humbled himself and God imparted insight, knowledge, understanding.

It comes through humility. Humble yourself in the sight of the Lord. You want to learn more? You want to understand more about the Bible? Open your heart and humble yourself. Read the Bible with the eyes of a child and say, Lord, teach me. Lord, teach me. I need to be taught. And God will impart wisdom.

Verse 44 goes on. It says: “*It was now about the sixth hour, (and in the Jewish reckoning of time, that would be about noon) and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour,*” So about 3 p.m. Look at verse 45 it says, “*while the sun's light failed...*”

Luke is telling us that this was not just a cloudy day. This was not a day when it just became overcast. He literally says the sun's light failed. And that was his best explanation for an otherwise unexplainable event in the heavens.

And it's hard, maybe even impossible, for me as a Bible teacher to comment on the full implications of what that darkness signified, what it meant, why it even, why it happened I think we can probably guess. The Lord of Life was suffering for the sin of mankind and taking their darkness upon Himself.

But suffice it to say that as the Son of God suffered under the crushing weight of our sin, the sun was unable to shine. You know, we're told elsewhere in the Bible that He sustains all things by His powerful Word. Jesus sustains all things. And yet here He is suffering on the cross, and the sun cannot shine.

And then we're told that the curtain of the temple was torn in two, and this is another one of what we call the Calvary miracles, and perhaps, I don't know, maybe the most significant one, because it conveyed a radical shift in procedure for the people of God.

Back when Moses was given instructions on how to build the tabernacle, which of course later was the pattern for building the temple, he was told that the Ark of the Covenant, which had the mercy seat of God on top of it, and on which they would sprinkle blood once a year, that Ark, that Ark of the Covenant was to be set aside in a room called the Holy of Holies, and that room was to be entered by no one except the high priest. It was off limits to everyone else.

And in order to keep it off limits, the Lord commanded Moses to construct a thick curtain that stood between the holy place and the most holy place, or, if you will, the Holy of Holies. And the writer of Hebrews actually goes on to explain what all this means. This curtain, look at Hebrews 9:8 with me, and I'm reading this out of the NIV because I like the wording here. It says,

Hebrews 9:8 (NIV)

The Holy Spirit was showing by this that the way into the Most Holy Place had not yet been disclosed....

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And so, what the Hebrew, what the writer of Hebrews is saying is this curtain was meant to depict or to communicate to God's people, you can't enter, stay away, right? But then he goes on to say, if you check with me, then now in Hebrews chapter 4:14 and 16, reading now out of the ESV, it says,

Hebrews 4:14,16 (ESV)

Since then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Since then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

And why? Why are we able now? Why are we invited now to draw near to the throne of grace? Because Jesus opened the way. And how was that depicted? The temple, the curtain that separated in the temple, the most holy place from the holy place was ripped in two, to show the way is now open, the way is now open. But we're told that the curtain was a picture. It was a foreshadowing of the

body of Jesus Christ. And He is now the path, the way, into the Holy of Holies. What a wonderful thing, Christians, that you and I can come to God anytime we want.

We can come into His presence, whereas in the Old Testament, the message was stay away, keep back, don't touch. When God met Israel on Mount Sinai, the mountain of God, when He echoed forth the 10 Commandments. He told the people, don't go toward the mountain, stay back. Even if an animal touches the foot of the mountain, it must be killed.

The message through the Old Testament is stay back, keep your distance. The message of the New Covenant is, let us now enter with confidence and draw near to the very presence of God.

Verse 46 goes on to say that, *“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. And all the crowds that had assembled for the spectacle when they saw what had taken place returned home beating their breasts.”*

Which was a sign of grief and mourning. And we're told in verse 49 that, *“And all his acquaintances (and I would assume that included the 11 apostles and several others) and the women who had followed him from Galilee stood at a distance watching these things.”*

“Now there was a man, (verse 50) named Joseph from the Jewish town of Arimathea, and he was a member of the council, a good and righteous man who had not consented to their decision and action concerning Jesus. And he was looking for the kingdom of God.”

And that statement means that he was expecting the coming of Messiah. He was expecting God to make good on His promises to establish His Kingdom on earth. And *“⁵² This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.”* A very bold move on his part. So that he might give that body a proper burial.

And it says, *“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.”*

And we know from other biblical accounts that he actually laid Jesus in his own tomb. One that was to be his own. And this was all foretold in the prophecy of Isaiah Let me show you this from Isaiah chapter 53 verse 9,

Isaiah 53:9 (ESV)

And they made his grave with the wicked and with the rich man in his death, although he had done no violence and there was no deceit in his mouth.

And they made his grave with the wicked and with the rich man in his death, although he had done no violence and there was no deceit in his mouth.

Verse 54 of our text says, “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.”

And what that means is that they saw how Jesus was hurriedly, or the body of Jesus was hurriedly prepared for burial, and they knew that it was not consistent with their burial traditions and so they decided to prepare all of the things that would be necessary to give His body a proper burial, and they would return after the Sabbath, and they would finish the job.

And that, of course, is where we are going to stop in our story of this narrative. But I want to end with one final quote from the most incredible prophecy of Isaiah 53. And this is going to be appropriate for going into our time of communion as well. Look at this with me.

Isaiah 53:5 (ESV)

But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.

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