

The Powerful Cross

- 23:26** Then 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.
- 27** 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?”
- 32** Two others, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him.
- 33** 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.
- 34** And Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” And they cast lots to divide his garments.
- 35** And the people stood by, watching, but the rulers scoffed at him, saying, “He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!”
- 36** 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!”
- 38** There was also an inscription over him, “This is the King of the Jews.”
- 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.

Luke 22:54, 63-23:25

The Cross: The Henge of History

There's no way to know just how many words have been written on the death of Jesus Christ, nor just how many aspects or implications of his death those words contain. We could spend the rest of our lives talking about this subject and not begin to scratch the surface of what it all means and entails.

From *predictions* like Moses', "You shall bruise his heel" (**Gen 3:15**), or Isaiah's, "It was the will of the Lord to crush him; he has put him to grief; ... his soul makes an offering for guilt" (**Isa 53:10**), to David's, "They have pierced my hands and feet" (**Ps 22:16**), or "None of his bones would be broken" (**Ps 34:20**), and Zechariah's, "They look on me, on him who they have pierced," to *laws* such as *anyone hanged on a tree is cursed* (**Deut 21:23**) or the laws of the scapegoat (**Lev 16**), to *types* such as Jacob's "ladder" (**Gen 28:12**), Moses' serpent-pole (**John 3:14-15**), the near sacrifice of Isaac on Mt. Moriah (**Gen 22**), the Passover Lamb (**Ex 12**), mankind was told about this event since the very beginning. Then there are *four inspired individual accounts in the NT* (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) that give us the story as it

happened. From there we have [all of church history](#) and even [pagan history](#) discussing, reflecting, thinking, worshipping, and even mocking the events that took place on that cruel Good Friday 2,000 years ago.

In a word, along with the resurrection, [this is the seminal moment of all human history](#). It is the pivot, the henge upon which literally everything turns. It is the *axis mundi*, the very center of the world, of mankind, of even of angels—fallen or otherwise. Angels long to look into these things. God and man come together here. Heaven and earth intersect here. Justice and love, wrath and mercy meet here. Here, God dies. Here, man lives. It is the great tragedy of all world literature. It is the epic moment when sin and death are undone.

The Atoning Death of Jesus

Therefore, it is impossible to say everything about this event in a single sermon. Of all the things, therefore, that I could address at the beginning, I want to look at one of the most discussed and I think for many people confusing aspects of the cross. This is the idea of Jesus' death as an "[atone-ment](#)." By the end, it may feel like this really wasn't a focus

of the sermon, but it is related in a few important and fascinating ways to Luke, and I'll show you this as we go along. But first, we need to understand the subject.

For all the hubbub about this, it is certainly fascinating that the **ESV** doesn't use the word "atonement" in the NT even a single time. The **KJV** uses it only once, and it does refer to Christ's death. This is **Romans 5:11**, "And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the *atonement* (*tēn katallagēn*)." The **NIV** is one of the most generous, using the idea a total of four times Jesus' death—his "atonement" (*to hilaskesthai*; **Heb 2:17**), "sacrifice of atonement" (*hilastērion*; **Rom 3:25**), and "atoning sacrifice" (*hilasmos*; **1Jn 2:2**; **4:10**).

There are only two Greek words that are being translated as atonement by English translations. The first is *katallage*. This is the word used the LXX uses to translate the Hebrew word *kaphar*. Ordinarily, this means "reconciliation," as the ESV renders it in Rom 5:11. To be reconciled means to no longer be at enmity or war with someone. Since two parties are brought together, this is a *subjective* experience, personal to any individual at hostility.

The other is the word-group *hilasmos*, which the LXX uses for the related word *kippur* (and sometimes *kaphar*). This is usually translated as “[propitiation](#).” To be propitiated means the wrath of someone appeased. If they are propitiated, then they are no longer full of wrath. Since the two parties are not necessarily reconciled, this is an *objective* state takes place outside of the relationship.

A third Hebrew word is also related. It is the word *kōphar* (note the similarities: *kaphar*, *kippur*, *kōphar*, they are each part of the three letter word-group *kpr* in Hebrew).¹ *Kōphar* is usually translated as “[ransom](#).” The Greek word is *lutron*.

It is into this that I want to tell you briefly about several theories of Christ’s atonement that the church has thought about. These help us understand exactly the work that Christ was doing on the cross. For conservative Evangelicals and Reformed people, by far and away the best known theory is called the [Penal Substitutionary view](#) of the atonement. This was the view of Calvin and, before him, Anselm. A penal substitution deals [with the legal realm](#) of [courts](#) of law. These courts were held not by mere judges, but kings.

¹ All Hebrew nouns are built upon a three-letter group like this.

The court gives it the idea of being “penal.” A penal substitution means that Christ’s death was a vicarious (substitutionary) sacrifice that satisfied the demands of God’s justice upon sin. Jesus paid the legal penalty of man’s sin. Men deserve death for breaking God’s law. Jesus died, paying the penalty. Jesus died in our place and because he was the perfect law-keeper who willingly decided to do this for others, God looked upon his death as satisfying justice. He died to take our punishment so that any who look upon him might be given his life as an exchange.

Improperly, many people confuse this with a **commercial transaction**. Commercial transactions deal not with law-courts, but with commerce, such as when you buy breakfast at a restaurant or a dress at a department store. At its best, in a commercial atonement, Christ’s death brings infinite honor to God. As a reward for his “payment,” **God gives Christ his purchased agreed upon transaction**: the elect. Now, they aren’t all brought right away, because many weren’t born then. So this gift comes in history one person at a time. Now, some want to say that these are mutually exclusive. However, the penal substitution has in mind *sin* while the commercial transaction has in mind *the elect*. The

penal substitution hypothetically could include anyone, while a commercial transaction can only have in mind those who are purchased. These are not mutually exclusive, but do create a lot of heated (and I think unnecessarily heated) debate amongst the confused and bewildered.

But let's not stop here. The view making the biggest comeback in our day, at least in conservative Christianity, is also **the oldest view**. This is called *Christus Victor* with a variation being the Ransom View. Basically the idea is that Christ's death was the **culmination of a great war between good and evil**. In this war, Jesus brought release of the saints, freeing them from the captivity of Satan. A minor position here is that Christ's death was actually a ransom paid to Satan, an idea that does not have a lot of support among conservatives, but when the divine council is taken into consideration, makes some sense. It is very popular to force Christians to pick-and-choose on these things. His death must either be a penal substitution or a ransom, but it can't be both. But I say, why not? Penal substitution deals with God's *justice*. The ransom deals with *Satan's legal claim* over humanity thanks to the Tower of Babel and the inheritance of the sons of God. These aren't mutually exclusive ideas.

Might as well give a couple more. Some see Christ's death as what's called the *Governmental Theory* of the atonement. Here, Jesus' death, like the penal substitution, shows high regard for God's law. It also shows God's attitude towards sin. God's governmental rule of this world will be preserved morally, at all costs, even the cost of his Only Begotten on the cross. Because of this, God has a legal rationale to forgive the sins of those who repent and accept Christ's death. Unfortunately, this view has its roots in a man named Grotius who insisted that Christ's death did not bear the full penalty of human sin, nor did he propitiate God's wrath. This, of course, renders it effectively powerless given a biblical view of the human will. For it necessitates that humans aren't actually in bondage to sin or Satan and their will, totally apart from God's effectual power in the Gospel, would ever choose him. But at its core, if we don't assume such things, this view preserves an important point about God's governing of the universe, and stated a better way, it also has nothing necessarily mutually exclusive to the other views.

The last one I'll mention is called the *Moral Influence theory*. It also has a kissing cousin view called the *Example Theory*. In these, God's love is on full display in the death of

Christ. Because of this love, Christ's death becomes both a demonstration that softens our hearts towards repentance, and an example through which we view our own lives and how we ought then live. Of all the views as they were originally formulated, this view is the most liberal, as it completely denies human depravity. For most who hold it, all we needed was a little example to set us on the right path. And if we are forced to pick and choose, most would never have this along with the other views. But again, there's nothing inherently wrong about saying Christ's death is an influence or a moral example. In fact, that's biblical.

The fact is, [Christ's death is like a finely cut diamond](#).² You can look through the different facets to see the light refracted in different ways, each shining with its own luster and brilliance. So long as you realize that Christ's death must in unique ways contain all of these things (no single one tells it all and some by themselves are quite insufficient), that it is in some sense effectual to save, that it did satisfy God's wrath, that justice is upheld, that Jesus died in our place, that it works both objectively and subjectively, all of these views

² The only work I know of that really tries to see the benefit of all of these views without moving into great error is [Gordon R. Lewis](#) and Bruce A. Demarest, *Integrative Theology: Our Primary Need: Christ's Atoning Provisions*, vol. 2, Integrative Theology (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 371-410.

can help us to see something different and important about the death of Christ and the love of God for us.

But this isn't a treatise on the atonement. Rather, we are going through Luke's Gospel. But I think this fairly sets the stage for the heart of what Luke would have us to see, and if we are thinking broadly like this, then any one of these beautiful refractions of light might come into our view as we think about his telling of this central event and singular moment of human history.

The Crucifixion in Luke: Structure

Just as we've come to the singular moment of human history, so we've come to the **heart and soul** of Luke, and the **climax** of his first book. In fact, this last section can be viewed chiastically, with the crucifixion as the very center: It's really **quite an amazing structure** which binds the chapters 22-24 together. It begins with Satan **entering** Judas (**22:3**) and ends with the promise of Holy Spirit entering the rest of the Disciples (**24:49**). Jesus then **feasts** with his disciples at the Lord's Supper (**22:14ff**) and before the prediction, he also feasts with them again (**24:42-43**). He takes **bread and**

- a Satan enters into Jesus' betrayer who plots His betrayal in return for silver (Luke 22:1-6).
- b Jesus feasts with His disciples (Luke 22:7-22).
- c They discuss who is the greatest, but learn that they are rather to be servants, for which reason they will sit at His table with responsibility for His people (Luke 22:23-28).
- d Jesus comes to the Garden of Gethsemane where He shuns what He has to face but submits to His Father's will. In contrast Peter is revealed to be empty and as lacking the power that will later come in fulfilment of Christ' words (Luke 22:29-62).
- e Jesus is exposed to the mockery of the soldiers and the verdicts of the chief priests and then of Pilate and Herod (Luke 22:63 to Luke 23:25).
- f Jesus is crucified (as the King of the Jews, the Messiah) and judgement is forecast on Jerusalem (Luke 23:26-33).
- e Jesus is exposed to the mockery of the chief priests (the rulers) and to the verdicts of the two thieves and the Roman centurion (Luke 23:34-49).
- d Jesus is brought to the Garden where He is buried, but defeats death, the tomb when opened proving to be empty in fulfilment of Christ's words (Luke 23:50 to Luke 24:10).
- c The risen Jesus sits at table with two of His disciples a prelude to their future (Luke 24:11-35).
- b The risen Jesus feasts with His disciples ([Luke 24:36-47](#)).
- a God's Power will enter into His faithful disciples and they are to be His witnesses to His glory and triumph (in contrast with Satan entering His betrayer who sought His downfall) ([Luke 24:48-53](#)).³

breaks it (22:19) and then tells them how they will sit at his table judging the twelve tribes of Israel (22:30). Similarly,

³ Peter Pett, *Pett's Commentaries on the Bible: Luke, Study Light*, last accessed Feb 20, 2024, <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/eng/pet/luke-24.html>.

after the resurrection he takes bread and breaks it while at the table (24:30). He comes to the Garden of Gethsemane before he dies (22:39). He is taken to the Garden of the empty tomb after (23:53).⁴ He is mocked by the soldiers and verdicts are rendered by the priests and Pilate and Herod (22:63-23:25). He is mocked against while hanging on the cross by the priests and the thieves and centurions render their verdicts (23:34-49). In the middle of it all is the crucifixion and judgment prediction that is unique to Luke (23:26-33).

As for our passage itself, we are going to view it from the perspective of the people that surround Jesus on both sides of his cross. There are a lot of them, for it was a very public event witnessed by many people. Among these are Simon of Cyrene (23:26), a multitude of people and women (27), “daughters of Jerusalem” (28), two criminals (32), one on the right and the other on the left (33), the on-lookers (35), the soldiers (36), a centurion (47), the crowds (48), his acquaintances and the women who had followed him from Galilee (49), Joseph of Arimathea (50), and of course, Jesus himself.

⁴ These are brought out more clearly by the other Gospels.

When you do this, something amazing can be seen. **Two different structures** can be identified. In the first, on the ends you have Simon and Joseph, one carrying Jesus' cross (23:26), the other carrying Jesus' body to his tomb (50-56). Then you have the women beating their breasts (27-31; 44-49). You have the criminals being crucified with Jesus (32-33) and then one mocking while the other believes (39-43). In the middle, we have **Jesus' forgiveness** of the whole cruel ordeal (34-38).

- A. Simon of Cyrene carries Jesus' cross, 23:26
- B. Women follow Jesus, beating their breasts, 23:27-31
- C. Criminals crucified with Jesus, 23:32-33
- D. Jesus forgives mockery and abuse, 23:34-38**
- C'. One criminal mocks Jesus, the other believes, 23:39-43
- B'. Events of Jesus' death lead crowd to beat their breasts; women stand at a distance, 23:44-49
- A'. Joseph of Arimethea puts Jesus in his own tomb, 23:50-56⁵

A second structure appears when we focus our attention on **the people mocking Jesus**. Here we have first the Jewish rulers (35), then the Roman soldiers (36-37), and finally the criminal (39). However, the whole thing turns in the very next verse where one of the criminals confesses Jesus (40-

⁵ Peter Leithart, "Chiasm of Luke's Crucifixion Account," *Leithart* (April 3, 2004), <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/leithart/2004/04/chiasm-of-lukes-crucifixion-account-2/>.

43), then a centurion does the same thing (47), and finally a Jewish ruler does the same thing (50-53)! Again, this brings atonement front and center, because something real and something powerful happens at the cross.

- A. Jewish rulers (v 35)
 - B. Roman soldiers (vv 36-37)
 - C. Criminal (v 39)
 - C'. Criminal (vv 40-43)
 - B.' Centurion (v 47)
 - A.' Jewish ruler--Joseph of Arimethea (vv 50-53).⁶

Viewing these together is where it becomes stunning, for what we see is that **the forgiveness of Jesus literally results** right there on the cross, of the **turning of his very enemies to faith in God** and in his Messiah. Their hostility, his forgiveness, and many turning to him bring our attention to various ideas of the atonement. And this is my hope for all who hear this good news. For indeed, the cross itself is a power beyond all comprehension, able of its own power by the grace of God and through its proclamation to forgive and turn people's hardened hearts to salvation itself. Indeed, all these theories of the atonement have their source in the Gospels' accounts of Jesus' death on the cross.

⁶ Peter Leithart, "Another Chiasm in Luke 23," *Theopolis* (April 3, 2004), https://theopolis-institute.com/leithart_post/another-chiasm-in-luke/.

Simon and the Cross (Luke 23:26)

Our story begins at the **end of the three monkey trials**, where Pilate—who has repeatedly found Jesus innocent of the charges brought against him, nevertheless for his own political expediency and kiss-up to Caesar and Herod, hands Jesus over to the chief priests. And so we read, “**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**” (Luke 23:26).

In the way Luke has written his account, **Simon seems to parallel Joseph of Arimathea** at the end of the chapter. Now, Joseph is very clearly depicted as a man of faith, even though he is a religious leader. He’s a beautiful example of God’s care and love even of these nasty horrible class of priests of the crucifixion. But the question becomes, is Simon being depicted as a man of faith or something in opposition to that?

Let’s look at what very little we know about him. First, he clearly **shares a name with Simon Peter**. So in that regard, they can play on one another. Peter, Jesus’ right-hand man

and Rock upon which the very church is built, is nowhere to be found now. But this new Simon is. That's interesting.

Second, we do not know if he was **Jewish or a pagan Gentile**. He's from Cyrene, which was the capital of the North African province of Cyrenaica (modern Libya). The city was itself **a Greek colony** planted in the late seventh century BC. However, there was a very large **Jewish community** there which had a synagogue in Jerusalem where many went to for annual feasts. Perhaps because he was from Africa, some traditions have him as **a black man**, as you can see when you watch the old *Greatest Story Ever Told* movie where Sidney Poitier plays Simon. Curiously, in 1941 a family ossuary (bone box) was found in the Kidron Valley outside of Jerusalem dating to the first century which contained this name. Some think this was the actual tomb of this man and his family,⁷ including his sons **Alexander and Rufus (Mark 15:21)**, one of whom may very well be the same Rufus mentioned at the end of Romans (**16:13**).⁸ But none of this really helps us identify what role he plays here.

⁷ **Charles Joshua Parrott**, "Simon of Cyrene," in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. John D. Barry et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

⁸ Tradition holds that Mark was written from Rome.

Christians have disagreed on whether Simon is being depicted as good or bad here. While most have probably seen him as the only disciple who actually obeyed Jesus and literally **took up his cross and deny himself** (**Luke 9:23; 14:27**; etc.), some have viewed him in **a negative light**.⁹ It seems to me that if we just read the text, that Simon is little more than an innocent bystander who happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. Luke tells us that they “**seized**” him. Matthew and Mark add that he was “**compelled**” to carry the cross.

Other than the obvious, that he carried Jesus’ cross, there’s **two ideas** about why Simon is chosen to carry the cross. The first is a fascinating idea **related to Cyrene**.¹⁰ This city had one of the largest temples in the ancient world to **Zeus** and was closely associated with the Dioscuri—half-brothers **Castor** and **Polydeuces** (Pollux), two sons of Zeus, via a great festival held annually in their honor.¹¹ The names Alexander and Rufus also became associated with Cyrene and Zeus because Alexander the Great visited the cult center

⁹ **Mark DelCogliano**, “[Gregory the Great on Simon of Cyrene: A Critique of Tradition](#),” *ASE* 28.1 (2011): 315-24.

¹⁰ This comes from a Quora page: **Dick Harfield’s** answer to, “[What’s the Spiritual Significance of Simon the Cyrenian Bearing the Cross for Jesus?](#)” *Quora*, nd.

¹¹ **John Murray**, “[Dioscuria](#),” *A Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities* (London, 1875).

in Cyrene and later demanded to be known as the sons of Zeus, as reported by Quintus Curtius Rufus in the first century. So the idea is that educated Greeks could have seen a kind of metaphor of Simon, father of Alexander and Rufus and carrying Jesus' cross as a kind of metaphor of Zeus carrying the cross for Jesus because the crucifixion would end the cult of Zeus. **And with Zeus being Baal begin Satan, with all the satanic war-imagery going on in this part of Luke's Gospel, this idea is quite fascinating.**

This leads to **a second related thought**. This story with Simon coming in from a field/country (**Luke 23:26**) being conscripted to do something for Jesus has a parallel to the people cutting branches from the field/country at the triumphal entry (**Mark 11:8**) where a donkey is conscripted for Jesus. In the first, the people cut branches and full of joy and hope, they start to yell hosannas to the king. The cross story is a kind of **anti-procession**, an **“ignominious [humiliating] trudge to the cross, characterized by mockery and derision.”**¹² This has caused scholars to suggest that Simon is here in part as a kind of antitype of the Roman Triumph Story, where the king is enthroned and becomes a god. In

¹² **Helen Bond**, [“Paragon of Discipleship? Simon of Cyrene in the Markan Passion Narrative,”](#) *Academia* (2016).

these stories, there is a gathering throng, a Capitol Hill, a refusal to drink wine, a casting it upon the alter, a placing of two characters given a sense of enthronement, and a triumphant shout to the new king. All of these elements are present in what we are about to read, but in a reversal, mocking, anti-enthronement story that ironically ends up producing the very thing the people were mocking. The true King becomes king through his suffering triumph.¹³

Women and Crowds Beating their Breasts (27-31; 48-49)

Vv. 27-31 take us to the first of Luke's unique takes on this part of the story. It focuses in on a great multitude of people and of women who were following Jesus and were mourning and lamenting for him (**Luke 23:27**). These both return in **vv. 48-49** where "all the crowds that had assembled for this spectacle, when they saw what had taken place, returned home beating their breasts. And all his acquaintances and the women who had followed him from Galilee stood at a distance watching these things." So one is before

¹³ The classic study of this is **T. E. Schmidt**, "Mark 15.6-32: The Crucifixion Narrative and the Roman Triumphal Procession," *New Testament Studies* 41 (1995): 1-18.

Jesus is crucified; the other is after he has died. The focus on the latter is how bewildered all of his followers are at the events they have just seen unfold before their eyes. Surely, this could not be possible. He was the one who would save Israel. Now, he was dead.

But the focus on the former is a very interesting prophecy that returns us to Jesus' earlier prediction. **But turning to them Jesus said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. 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!' Then they will begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall on us,' and to the hills, 'Cover us.' For if they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?'"** (28-31).

In seeing the women, Jesus calls them, **"Daughters of Jerusalem."** But he's also looking at the crowds. And this phrase "daughters of Jerusalem" actually has a very specific meaning in the Scripture. A city (Heb: *'ir*) is a feminine word that is related to the word *y'ir* (protect). A city was **to protect**

its people.¹⁴ Thus, the larger cities would have walls. What? Walls to protect its citizens from invasions? Couldn't be.

Jerusalem is also a feminine word, so we sing about “Mother Jerusalem” in the old hymns. Outside the walled city is where the poor farmers lived in hamlets or villages. These villages were called the “daughters of ____ (Jerusalem).” Because they had no protection, when an enemy invader came to destroy the city, it was these daughters that suffered first and the worst, because they were just massacred mercilessly by the army.¹⁵

Now, when Jesus was led to his crucifixion site, in the first century, this was outside the walls of Jerusalem. This puts Jesus squarely in the land of these “daughters.” Jesus is using a play on words, even at this late stage in his life, and he does it to make a prediction. Don't weep for me. I'm doing what I must do. But weep for yourselves. Because of what you've all done here today, **judgment is coming**. You are going to wish you never had children. The invader is coming and he will not be stopped. You are putting the very Son of God to death and God will not leave it unpunished.

¹⁴ There's a possible play going on here, given Luke's consistent supernatural flavor. The word for a Watcher is identical to the word for a city!

¹⁵ “[Daughters of Jerusalem](#),” *Fig Tree Ministries* (Jan 14, 2023).

The old covenant is going to be destroyed, once-for-all. This is exactly what he has predicted with the fall of Jerusalem in previous chapters, and we know that it happened in 70 AD. You can hear the old way of interesting this from Ephraim:

The Lord said, “If they do that to the green wood.” He compared his divinity with the green wood and those who received his gifts to the dry wood. What is green bears fruit, as these words that he spoke testify: “*For which of my works are you stoning me?* (John 10:32). If I suffer to this extent, although you have found no sin in me, *which of you will convict me of sin?* (John 8:46). Since you have invented a pretext to dispose of me, how much more will you suffer?” Perhaps he was referring the green wood to himself, because of the miracles he had done. He called the righteous who were without virtue, the dry wood. They ate the fruit of this green wood, and they rejoiced beneath its foliage. Then they took it in hatred and destroyed it. What more will they do to the dry wood, which does not even have a sprout? What more will they do to the ordinary righteous people who do not work miracles?

(Ephrem the Syrian, *Commentary on Tatian’s Diatessaron* 20.21)

Criminals Crucified with Jesus (32-33)

At this point, we are introduced to [the two criminals](#). “Two others, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him” ([Luke 23:32](#)). It is possible that these two men were part of Barabbas’ rabble, since he was going to be put to death that very day, but Pilate freed him.

They come to a place “[that is called The Skull](#)” ([33](#)). Now, in Matthew and Mark, this is called “[Golgotha](#).” What’s the point of telling us this? Besides possibly reminding some of [Capitoline Hill](#) in Rome where the Triumphal Procession took place, it seems to me that it continues the whole [supernatural trajectory](#) of the story that began with Satan entering Judas. While there is a place today call Skull Hill (it is just east of the Garden Tomb, an Evangelical-run site giving you a good feel for what the original may have looked like), named after the side of a cliff that looked kind of like a skull,¹⁶ most scholars believe that the location of this place was where the Church of the Holy Sepulcher now sits. Back in Jesus’ day, as we saw a moment ago, *this* was outside

¹⁶ The “skull” itself suffered a great loss on Feb 20, 2015 when the “nose” fell off during a storm. It makes you wonder what it would have looked like before 2,000 years of erosion! See [Todd Bolen](#), “[Nose Falls Off the Skull of Gordon’s Calvary](#),” *Bible Places* (Mar 2, 2015).

the city walls (the Garden Tomb is *still* outside the city walls), but today it is in the middle of the bustling city.

So how does this continue the supernatural storyline? It is almost certain that the hill is not named for a geological feature, but for **a person** whose skull was once-upon-a-time buried there. But whose skull? Early Church Fathers, following even older Jewish traditions, had heard and/or believed that **Adam** was buried on Golgotha. Therefore, the skull must have been his. Jerome said, “I have heard Calvary ex-pounded as the spot in which Adam was buried, as though it had been so called from the head of the old man being buried there. A plausible interpretation, and agreeable to the ears of the people, yet not a true one.”¹⁷

A much better option is that it was **the head of Goliath**. Here’s how it works. In **1Sam 17:51**, after David knocks down the giant, he decapitates him with his sword. We know that David eventually retained the sword (**1Sam 21:9; 22:10**). But what happened to the head? 1 Samuel tells us that he took the head of the Philistine and “**brought it to Jerusalem**” (**17:54**). What happened to it then? Where exactly

¹⁷ Quoted in **Thomas Aquinas**, *Catena Aurea: Commentary on the Four Gospels, Collected out of the Works of the Fathers: St. Matthew*, ed. John Henry Newman, vol. 1 (Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1841), 948.

did he put it? Did he keep it in a collection in some trophy room? Where did it go?

This is where the word Golgotha becomes important. *Golgotha* is an Aramaic term that means, “Place of the Skull.” The Latin equivalent is Calvary (it means not a bunch of horses in a war, but a skull). But where did it come from? Through a series of interrelated Hebrew words ([Jer 31:39](#)’s *Goata*, a place near Jerusalem; *gelal*; stones or skull, and *Goliath* (none of which have vowels in the Hebrew), stones and skull became confused by those who had forgotten the story.

The idea is that when [David brought the skull to Jerusalem](#), the place where it was put was then called “[Mount Goliath](#)” or “heap of Goliath.” Over time, this begins to get confused with “choice stones” or *Goata*. But they are all talking about the same place so that in the NT it becomes Golgotha (*glgtha*), the place of the skull. Whose skull? [Goliath’s](#).¹⁸ Warren Gage summarizes, “[While Golgotha is derived from the Hebrew word for skull, this Aramaic name resonates with vocalic sounds reminiscent of the name of Goliath of Gath. Indeed, Golgotha and Goliath of Gath have a similar sound. David, we are told, was a prophet \(Acts](#)

¹⁸ See [W. F. Birch](#), “[Golgotha on Mount Zion](#),” *The Palestine Exploration Fund* (Jan 1907): 140-47.

2:29–30). The text reporting David’s delivery of the head of the giant to Jerusalem seems to have seen in David’s triumph over Goliath an even greater triumph of the Son of David that was to come.”¹⁹ So, in being crucified here, we have a direct attack on Satan and the spawn that came from the Genesis 6 (and later) storyline.

Jesus forgives Mockery and Abuse All in Fulfillment of Prophecy (34-38)

Why had they come here? **To crucify him**, which they did, with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left (**33b**). Crucifixion was one of the most **brutal acts** of torture leading to death that has ever been invented. And they would do it with ropes or nails, through hands and feet or in some cases, through genitals. You would spend hours on the cross, gasping for breath, trying to pull yourself up, each time having your back racked anew with splinters as your body cooked by the sun and having not ultimate way to find relief. Eventually, sometimes after days, you suffocated to

¹⁹ **Warren Austin Gage**, *There Is No Greater Love: How Jesus Is Greater than All Who Came before Him* (Fort Lauderdale: St. Andrews House, 2013), 65–66. See **my discussion** in *Giants: Sons of the gods Tenth Anniversary Edition Revised and Expanded* (Dacono: Co, Waters of Creation Pub., 2023), 207-09.

death. Someone has said, “Crucifixion was a punishment in which the caprice and sadism of the executioners were given full reign.”²⁰ But, the cross was by nature not only an act of deterrent, but also provided a spectacle and even entertainment to the onlookers.²¹ It was a public spectacle of the worst kind of voyeurism. And it led to much mockery of the criminals.

Yet, it is at just this moment, before we see any mockery or anything like that, that we read the central words of our story. “And Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do’” (Luke 23:34). Many have seen these as a fulfillment of Isaiah 53 where the Suffering Servant intercedes for the people. And, Jesus is embodying his Prayer, where God forgives us *as we forgive our debtors*. It all happens right here, as Jesus is making atonement for sin.

You must understand how powerful and important this is. For your eternal soul depends upon it. Ryken says, “With these words, King Jesus shows his mercy and declares that he is in the business of forgiving sinners. As the King of the Jews offers his royal pardon, he gives the clearest proof of

²⁰ Martin Hengel, *Crucifixion in the Ancient World and the Folly of the Message of the Cross* (London, SCM, 1977): 25.

²¹ Bond.

his divine and saving grace. To err is human, we often say, but to forgive is divine. Here, then, is a divine forgiveness. In crucified love, the Savior announces the forgiveness that he was dying to give.”²²

Some think that Jesus could not possibly have forgiven everyone, because then no one would go to hell. But this is precisely why I brought up a commercial vs. penal view of the atonement. If the forgiveness is commercial, then yes, this is true. But if it is legal, then all that means is that the debt owed has been paid and the court is satisfied with that payment. But any single individual is still under the terms of their own judgment if and while they refuse Jesus’ substitution. The court is under no legal requirement to bring reconciliation to the parties on these terms. That’s what election is all about and election is not the penal substitution.

At any rate, what we are going to see as we continue is that this forgiveness, this **objective legal forgiveness**, like when a debt is forgiven by a creditor, actually becomes the very power of God to salvation, even to some present at this very event. But first, the fulfillment continues in the verse

²² Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke*, ed. Richard D. Phillips, Philip Graham Ryken, and Daniel M. Doriani, vol. 2, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2009), 587.

as “they cast lots to divide his garments.” This fulfills **Ps 22:18**, “They divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.” It is very important to see that none of this is accidental or outside of God’s plan. Rather, he told us about it all long ago. It is the greatest story ever told.

The Mocking Rulers (35), Soldiers (36-37), Criminal (393)

Just as the words of forgiveness are leaving our Lord’s lips, “The people stood by, watching, but *the rulers* scoffed at him, saying, ‘He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the christ of God, his Chosen One.’” This is **the first of the three mockings** that Luke describes for us. Again, Psalm 22 is close by, “All who see me mock me; they make mouths at me; they wag their heads; ‘He trusts in the LORD; let him deliver him; let him rescue him, for he delights in him!’” (**Psalm 22:7-8**). Everything happening at this moment is unfolding exactly as predicted. Even those who stand there at the very moment mocking Jesus as he speaks of forgiveness. But now think. This is the same thing anyone who hears the Gospel does to Jesus when they refuse to believe and come to him. Unbelief, especially in the face of Jesus death and the good news offered to

you, is this very sin. **Come to Jesus and stop mocking him**, for you do not understand what you are doing.

Further, we Christians not see that what Jesus does is **something to be emulated** by those who do the same to us? And yet, so much of our interactions with people are full of revenge and hatred and getting even. And as Paul says, this is a reason people stay in mockery and blasphemy ... because of us (**Rom 2:24**). Not Jesus. Learn the power of God and the compassion he has for his enemies.

After the rulers, “*The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine and saying ‘If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!’*” (**36-37**). Many people think the wine mixed with gall was for the purpose of deadening the pain and was an act of clemency. But this is completely “**out of character with the jeering cohort [and] more importantly, it was part of the torture.**” In fact, myrrh made the wine **impossible to drink**, and to offer it to a man suffering from excessive dehydration could only be with the purpose of enhancing, not diminishing, his suffering.²³ These men are not being kind. They are being criminals.

²³ **E. Koskenniemi**, K. Nisula and J. Toppari, “Wine Mixed with Myrrh (Mark 15.23) and Crurifragium (John 19.31-32): Two details of the Passion Narratives,” JSNT 27 (2005): 379-91.

Criminals to whom? “There was also an inscription over him, ‘This is the King of the Jews.’” That inscription was written by Pilate himself (John 19:19). And the Jews didn’t like what it said. They wanted it to say, “This man said, ‘I am the King of the Jews’” (21). But Pilate would not be deterred. For this mockery must in fact be totally rooted in the truth. For they were in fact murdering the King of the Jews and the King of kings! They just didn’t believe it. But since when does not believing something make it untrue. That’s on them. But what they thought was going to lead to his demise, in actuality through their jeering assembly on this royal hill as he refused their wine was actually the coronation of the most powerful Rule that the world has ever and will ever know. God’s ways are not our ways.

Finally, we see “one of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, ‘Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!’” (Luke 23:39). The three-fold mockery is complete. Even a criminal dying on the cross right next to Jesus enters into the fray. He can’t help himself. What a pathetic, pitiful sight it must have been.

One Criminal Believes (40-43)

But then, “The other rebuked him, saying, ‘Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?’” (40). In other words, *you fool*. You’ll be dead in just few short hours and then you will have to meet your Maker. And you hang there mocking this man, after what *you’ve* done? For “We indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds” (41). Yes indeed, *the wages* of sin is death. This man got it! “But this man [Jesus] has done nothing wrong” (41b). He knew Jesus wasn’t involved in an insurrection. He was present the whole time as the morning unfolded and the people turned on him, even to the point of freeing Barabbas. What must he have been thinking at that moment?

We aren’t left to guess, for of all the Gospels, Luke alone tells us. “And he said, ‘Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom’” (43). He has seen the events. He has seen Jesus. He has seen the insurrection. He is now hanging on a cross, his life hanging by a spider’s web over the fires of hell. And *he turns to the Christ*, while all others mock or run or weep, in faith. *The first believer of the new age of the*

world. Nameless, just like it should be. For what matters here is not the man, but the King.

Incredibly, Jesus said, “**Today you will be with me in paradise**” (43). This greatly misunderstood line is not what you think, and we will spend some or all of next time trying to understand it. But for now, all you need know is that **Jesus extends not merely forgiveness, but *reconciliation***. You and me will be *together* in Paradise. A Viking might have said, “**Tonight we dine in the halls of Valhalla,**” and this would not have been far off the mark. The emphasis for now is on the forgiveness that comes, to this criminal, this enemy of good, as Jesus is offering the sacrifice on the cross that takes away sin. Yes, friend, there is great, truly inconceivable power here. Do you see it? Do you know it? Have you experienced it yourself? Turn to Christ.

Jesus' Death (44-46)

“**It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour**” (44). **Darkness** is also associated with the death of great men in both Greco-Roman and Jewish traditions.²⁴ This incredible

²⁴ **Mark Strauss**, “Luke,” Clinton E. Arnold (ed.), *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 494. Darkness is

event, whatever it was, could **not have been an eclipse**, for their darkness only lasts a few handful's of seconds. But the darkness that really should come to your mind is **that of hell itself**. It is as if the Underworld itself has been vomited out on the land, and the demons, the fallen angels, the mockers, the scoffers, they all together now surrounding Jesus, have their moment, just as C. S. Lewis depicted it in the *Lion, Witch, and Wardrobe*. All is darkness. The creeping shadow has reached its full length. Even “**the sun's light failed.**”

And the curtain of the temple was torn in two (45). This is an almost inconceivable event, given how gigantic this curtain was. Woven from blue, purple, crimson, and white thread, and embroidered with cherubim, both Antiochus and Titus took a veil when they tooted the temple (1 Macc 1.21-2; Josephus, *War* 7.162). It was some **two hundred square meters** of fabric and when it contracted uncleanness and had to be washed, **three hundred priests** were needed for the job (m. Shekalim 8.4-5).²⁵

reported with reference to the deaths of Alexander the Great (Ps-Callisthenes 3.3.26); Caesar (Virgil, *Georgics* 1.463ff.), Aeschylus (Aristophanes, *Ael. Aristid.* 32.32), and others (see BAGD, 757; H. Conzelmann, “σκότος,” *TDNT*, 7:439; for rabbinic parallels see Str-B 1:1040–41).

²⁵ **Margaret Barker**, “[Beyond the Veil of the Temple. The High Priestly Origin of the Apocalypses.](#)” *Society for Old Testament Study* in Cambridge January 1998, first published in the *Scottish Journal of Theology* 51.1 (1998).

Most focus on the physical event, which is itself inconceivable. But the idea here is much deeper. For in the ripping, there are probably at least three things to understand. 1) It was a symbol of **judgment** against Israel for what they had now done—going all the way to murdering their own Messiah. 2) It now meant the end of **temple sacrifices**. Remember, it was only the High Priest who could go through the curtain, and only once a year—to make atonement! Now, it is being ripped, just as Jesus dies. For the dead Priest-King is now doing something out of his death in the spiritual places beyond. He is making full atonement, as Hebrews tells us. 3) Finally, with no more curtain, **a new way is open for all**, Jew and Gentile alike, to come into the presence of God (**Heb 10:19-20**).²⁶ All are welcome.

“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” (46). **Our Lord’s last words were Scripture.** One might say, The Word’s last were came from the very word of God, “**Into your hand I commit my spirit; you have redeemed me, O Lord, faithful God**” (**Ps 31:5**).

²⁶ Strauss, 494.

And with that, God died. Not God in his essence, of course. But God, the Second Person of the Trinity, who took on human flesh in the womb of the Virgin. **He didn't cease to exist**, as we will see next time. But he died. His body expired. He gave up the ghost. The Son of Man and the Son of God, was dead. And everyone standing there in this very public event knew it. It couldn't be faked. It was not an hallucination. The darkness truly now shined its black rays upon the world of men.

The Centurion Believes (47)

But behold, “**Now when the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God, saying, ‘Certainly this man was innocent’**” (47). The reversal which first begin with the criminal now makes its way outward to **a Roman centurion**. A Gentile! He knew Jesus was innocent. And he praised God! He had faith. Something has happened now that the first known convert to Jesus after his death is a Gentile who was responsible for murdering him. This is a power one can scarcely understand, for he could not have done this of his own accord. It is the seed of the Gospel now planted in the

ground of the dead Jesus that sprouts to life its first of billions of branches.

Meanwhile, the crowds assembled for the spectacle, did not believe, but rather **beat their breasts** (48). Jesus acquaintances and **the women** who had followed him for the last three plus years, stood far off at a distance.

Joseph of Arimathea: The Jewish Ruler Who Believes (50-53)

“Now, there was a man named **Joseph**, from the Jewish town of Arimathea. He was a member of the council...” (50). Joseph reminds us of Jesus’ adopted father! But wait. He’s not here. He’s dead. His Joseph is a member of the Sanhedrin? A Jewish ruler? Hadn’t they all put him to death? No. 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**” (51). God always has a little light shining, even in the darkness of the blackest politics. This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus (52). What’s he going to do with it?

“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” (53). He was going to take care of it? A Jewish ruler? A man of faith? Yes! **The power of God knows no bounds**. How interesting that he becomes the climax of the story.

Luke tells us, “It was the day of Preparation, and the Sabbath was beginning. The women who had come with him from Galilee followed and saw the tomb and how his body was laid. Then they returned and prepared spices and ointments. On the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment” (54-56). Why would he end with **the Sabbath day**? Get ready for it.

I think it’s because the Sabbath is the day, going all the way back to **Genesis 2:1-3**, where God—the King of his creation, **became enthroned over his creation**. “Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool; what is the house that you would build for me, and what is the place of *my rest*?” (**Isa 66:1**). This is Luke’s way of subversively showing that in fact, Jesus has become enthroned, not in the memories of people who knew him, but **in reality**. The whole scene is the sharp contrast to those Roman Triumph stories of old. Yet,

ironically, it does something even greater. For Jesus is the greater king and his death means a powerful atonement performed in our place, so that **justice is met** against sin, **the elect are given to Christ**, **Satan is defeated**, God's kingdom **government justice is on full display**, and **our Lord's example** is ready for all his followers to pick up their own crosses and follow him.

Why would God do this? Because of his great love for us. Because of his great glory for himself. He must gain maximum glory in this world for his grace, mercy, and love, for they are attributes along with justice, judgment, and wrath. Anyone who hears the word that Jesus did this for them, and turns to Christ in repentance and faith, will be saved.

Do not let this moment slip away, for it may never come again for you. **Turn to the Lord Jesus** who will openly embrace you, whether you are a rich Jewish ruler, a Gentile dog-scum, or a common petty criminal. It doesn't matter who you are or what you've done. All is forgiven when you turn to Christ who has made the perfect satisfaction and sacrifice for your sin. What sin? All your sin. Once and for all.

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