

Message #120

Luke 23:33-35

We begin this today by turning to John 10:11-18. **In these eight verses Jesus Christ emphatically states that He willingly laid down His own life four times (John 10:11, 15, 17, 18). He states that no one took His life but that He had total and complete authority Himself over His own death.**

So we know that the horrible things that happened to Jesus Christ, including His death were no surprise to Jesus Christ. He knew everything that was going to happen to Him. He knew precisely what would occur long before He arrived to the actual moment of His crucifixion.

During the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, the only person who had even the remotest idea as to what was really taking place was a criminal. The rest were in total ignorance.

WHEN JESUS CHRIST WAS ON THAT CROSS HE WILLINGLY ENDURED HORRIBLE HUMILIATION AND PAIN SO THAT HE COULD PROVIDE SALVATION FOR SINNERS LIKE US.

If a person can walk away from this passage of Scripture and reject what Jesus Christ did for him, he deserves to go to hell because He went through every bit of this for us.

This passage is sacred. I don't even know if we can do justice to expounding it; but we will do our very best.

There are five crucifixion facts brought out in this text:

CRUCIFIXION FACT #1 – What was done to Jesus Christ. 23:33

Jesus Christ was led to an area known as “The Skull” and He was nailed to a cross, which was located between two criminals. This is what happened to the innocent Son of God.

Some texts read Christ was led to “Calvary.” “Calvary” comes from a translation of the Latin word that means “skull.” The Hebrew word for skull is the word “Golgotha.” The Greek word that is written by Dr. Luke in this verse is the word “kranion” (kranion). This is the word from which we get our English word “cranium” which means skull.

So no matter what English word is used, the place of crucifixion was known as the place of “The Skull.”

Many Bible scholars have remarked that there is a bare, rounded hill located just outside of Jerusalem that does resemble a skull. It is specifically located about 250 yards NE of the Damascus Gate.

It is somewhat of a lonely, ugly, eerie looking place and it is a lousy place to die. To people who gaze at this mountain, it looks like a skull. Now when we think of a “skull,” we think of a skeleton and death.

But when one looks at this skull mountain outside of Jerusalem, one needs to think about a life giving Savior and not the skeleton of a dead corpse.

Now we may notice from **verse 33**, that two times in the verse there is the pronoun “they.” So one obvious question is what is the antecedent of the pronoun “they”? Another way to ask this is who are the “they”?

Matthew and Mark make it clear that the Roman soldiers are the “they.” They are the ones who specifically crucified Jesus Christ (Matt. 27:27-34; Mark 15:16, 29). However, Luke seems to generalize this in the context making many people responsible for this action.

For example, in Luke 23:13 he mentions Pilate, the chief priests and the rulers of the people. In Luke 23:18, he seems to include all those who were present who cried out the name Barabbas. In Luke 23:21, he seems to include the entire mob who was yelling “crucify Him, crucify Him.” In Luke 23:48, Luke seems to incorporate all of the people who were present.

We know that when Luke wrote Acts 4:27, he mentioned Herod, Pilate, Gentiles and people of Israel who wanted to kill Jesus Christ.

So from this we may safely and grammatically conclude that the pronoun “they” refers to all involved in agreeing to Christ’s crucifixion—Herod, Pilate, the soldiers, the chief priests, the rulers, the Gentiles and the people of Israel.

All were responsible and accountable for killing Jesus Christ.

Verse 33 says that when they came to the “place called The Skull,” there they crucified Him. Crucifixion was a horrible way to die. It has been said that a person who was crucified was one who would “die a thousand deaths.”

One commentator observed that only the people who had been damned and were burning in hell would understand the type of pain involved in a crucifixion.

Large nails were driven into the hands and feet. Just that causes instant piercing pain. The area would become inflamed and would begin to swell. Tendons would be torn and while one hung under the hot sun, he would develop a burning thirst and throbbing headache. It would become very difficult to breathe. Blood was continually draining from the wound areas and dehydration was a continual painful process. This death was so gruesome that Rome outlawed it as a death penalty for any Roman citizen. In fact, Cicero once said, “Even the mere word cross must remain far, not only from the lips of a citizen of Rome, but also from their thoughts, their eyes and their ears.”

This is what this mob crowd did to Jesus Christ. They took Him to “The Skull” place and nailed Him to a cross between two criminals.

CRUCIFIXION FACT #2 – What Jesus prayed for the people. **23:34a**

This prayer comprised of twelve words in English and eight words in Greek are words we will never fully grasp.

This specific prayer is a fulfillment of Biblical prophecy as Isaiah predicted in his final words of Isaiah 53 that the One who would be crushed for our guilt “interceded for the transgressors” (Is. 53:12).

The feasibility of God the Father forgiving transgressors was contingent upon His own sacrifice and death (Heb. 9:22; 13:12). The actual utterance of this prayer by Jesus Christ is a tremendous demonstration of grace.

Christ is hanging on a cross in horrible pain and looking down at people who have nailed Him to that cross and who are mocking Him, and yet He prays this prayer. It is indeed a tremendous demonstration of grace.

To understand this as best as we can, we want to ask and answer four questions concerning this prayer:

Question #1 - For whom is this prayer actually made?

The direct object of this prayer is “them.” The pronoun “them” is anarthrous (no article) which means He is praying for the people who have the character and quality of ignorance and have no idea what they are doing.

There were people there who did know what they were doing. This prayer is not for them. In the aftermath of this event, Peter addressed many Jews and included them as not knowing what they were doing here (Acts 3:12-19). When the Apostle Paul referred to this crucifixion, he included both Jews and Gentiles who did not know what they were doing (I Cor. 2:6-8).

So as Christ is hanging on that cross, He is praying for those Jews and Gentiles who had no idea as to what was actually happening in making their salvation possible.

Question #2 - What does the prayer actually mean?

This is not a prayer for universal salvation and forgiveness of everyone in the world. In fact, Jesus has already told the Pharisees and Scribes that they are going to hell (Matt. 23:13, 33). Obviously this prayer does not eliminate the responsibility to believe in Him for salvation.

Christ is not praying that God won't ever send anyone to everlasting fire and that He will just forgive everybody in the world. In fact, Christ, Himself, could have forgiven everyone while hanging on that cross, for He did have the power and authority to do that and as you will see, did in fact save one (Luke 23:43).

What we may conclude is that Jesus Christ is requesting that God will still permit those who are ignorant of what is going on to come to salvation. He is praying that God will not abandon all of the people who were there for this terrible action. Jesus knew of the wrath of God and He knew that His Father typically destroys those who do evil things. Jesus was there when God flooded the world. Jesus was there when God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. When 42 young people mocked Elisha, God sent two bears out of the forest to rip those kids to shreds.

Now what we have here is God's own Son being mocked while He is hanging and dying on a cross. God is not going to bless those who do that to His Son. What Jesus is praying is that God will still permit those who are ignorant to come to salvation and have their sins forgiven. It is a request to God the Father not to immediately send His violent wrath and abandon them. He is praying that God will permit them to repent.

Question #3 - How does ignorance become a basis for forgiveness?

It is clear that ignorance makes the sin of mocking God's Son forgivable and knowledge makes it damnable.

A person who rejects Jesus Christ is guilty but is still savable if the rejection is based on ignorance. On the other hand, if a person actually knows the truth and rejects the truth that one may be abandoned by God.

There were many people at the cross scene who had no clue as to what was going on and it is for these people Jesus prayed. Their presence by association made them culpable with the rest of the people who did know what they were doing.

Let me see if I can illustrate this point. When I was about 15 or 16 years old, I was in a Baptist church and I distinctly remember asking a question. My question was this—why does Matthew say that blessed is the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 5:3) and yet we hear week after week that you need to invite Jesus into your heart to be saved. If a person is humble and poor in spirit do they go to heaven or not? I was asking an honest question and there is a very simple answer to it that I learned years later, but the teacher didn't know and instead of saying, "I don't know" he made fun of me for asking the question. So I immediately thought these people don't have a clue what they believe and away I went. It would be about ten years later that I would believe on the Lord and be saved. So my unbelief was based in part on ignorance and in the end God's grace saved me. Now the answer to the question is that in Matthew, Jesus is not talking about grace salvation, he is talking about Israel's kingdom and what will exist in the nation when He is reigning as King.

Once a person has knowledge, it would be better not to have known the way of righteousness than to have known it and turned from it (II Pet. 2:20-21; Rom. 1:18, 24, 26, 28).

Question #4 - Did God the Father answer His Son's prayer?

God did answer the prayer and many of these people were permitted to come to repentance.

Three passages specifically answer this:

- 1) Acts 2:22-23, 36-41 - 3,000 souls in Jerusalem repented.
- 2) Acts 4:4 - 5,000 more Jewish men repented and believed.
- 3) Acts 6:7 - Many Jewish priests actually came to faith in Jesus Christ.

God did answer Christ's prayer and did not abandon all people and He did save many.

CRUCIFIXION FACT #3 – What the soldiers did with Christ's clothes. **23:34b**

According to Roman law, the garment of one being crucified belonged to the soldiers. It was common for the soldiers to gamble for it.

Typically, a person was clothed with some form of head gear, sandals, a belt, an outer garment and a seamless tunic or coat type of garment. Most of the garments were torn and divided among the soldiers; however, the seamless coat was valuable and the soldiers decided to cast lots for it. So the soldiers decided to cast lots for it.

This was a very clear fulfillment of O.T. prophecy - John 19:23-24/Ps. 22:18. In most pictures depicting the crucifixion, usually some loin cloth is placed upon the Lord, but many historians have concluded that most of those crucified were crucified without any clothing.

Crucifixion was the most humiliating form of death known to man for many reasons. When we execute prisoners today, we try to do it in a decent and honorable way; when Jesus was executed it was done in the most degrading way.

CRUCIFIXION FACT #4 – What the people were doing with Christ on the cross. **23:35a**

The people "stood by looking on." The people stood by gazing at the spectacle. The majority of people stood by gawking at Jesus Christ.

I appreciate the words of Dr. C. I. Scofield, who said, "Jesus crucified is the touchstone revealing what the world is: 'The people stood by, looking on' in indifference" (NASV, p. 1450).

Jesus Christ is dying for the sins of these people and these people love their religion more than Him. Most look upon Jesus as a public spectacle.

How do you view His crucifixion?

- 1) Do you look at it?
- 2) Do you mock it?
- 3) Does it change your life?

CRUCIFIXION FACT #5 – What the religious leaders said about Jesus Christ. **23:35b**

The religious leaders used this moment to publically degrade and discredit Jesus Christ. The rulers were “sneering” at Christ. This word is only used here and in Luke 16:14. It is a word that means they were holding up their nose in derision.

The imperfect tense of the verb indicates that this attitude and mockery had been continually going on for a long time. They had an arrogant look about Jesus Christ.

But this mockery was more than just visual, it was also verbal. The religious leaders want to discredit Christ on the cross in front of the people so they said, “He saved others, let Him save Himself.”

If He is the Messiah, let’s see Him save Himself.

Now by publicly making this statement they are getting those who believe on Him to perhaps second guess their faith. They are also trying to keep people from believing on Him.

They assume that if He cannot save Himself, He cannot save anyone.

The problem is Jesus Christ did not come here to save Himself. Jesus Christ came here to save sinners. He is hanging on that cross to save them. He did not need to be saved. If He weren’t on that cross, no one could be saved.

What these leaders should have been saying is Lord save us.

Have you personally by faith been to that cross? How do you see that cross?

- 1) Do you gawk at Christ?
- 2) Do you mock Christ?
- 3) Do you accept Christ?