

Message #121

Luke 23:36-43

When people today watch an execution, they are usually taken into a viewing room and seated and quietly watch as the person is executed. There is no yelling or screaming and most people just quietly and somberly just sit and watch. That was not the way it was when Jesus was dying on a cross.

When Jesus Christ was nailed to the cross, the whole scene appeared to be totally out of control. The soldiers are gambling, people are yelling and the rulers are sneering. No one there had any idea as to what was really happening.

Most people thought that Jesus was a failure and loser. Some thought He was some well-meaning but misguided Jew. The fact is very few people believed in Him and even those who did weren't quite sure. The vast majority of people rejected Him. But there was one guy there who got it. There was one guy there who understood. He was a guy hanging next to Jesus Christ.

That point is very clear from this text. What we see here is this:

WHEN JESUS CHRIST WAS HANGING ON A CROSS, HE ENDURED TERRIBLE PAIN, HUMILIATION AND MOCKERY IN ORDER THAT HE MIGHT PROVIDE SALVATION AND THE ONLY PERSON WHO REALIZED THIS WAS ONE CRIMINAL.

It has never been, nor will it ever be the proud majority who comes to terms with Jesus Christ. It has always been the humble minority. We have been analyzing this text in the last weeks by looking at the various actions that occurred:

ACTION #1 – What the people did to Jesus Christ. **23:33** - They dragged Christ to the skull place and nailed Him to a cross between two criminals.

ACTION #2 – What Jesus prayed for the people. **23:34a** - That His Father would still permit those who did not know Him to have an opportunity to be saved.

ACTION #3 – What the soldiers did with Christ's clothes. **23:34b** - Ripped up His garments and gambled for His last amount possession, His clothing material.

ACTION #4 – What the people did with Jesus Christ. **23:35a** - They passively stood by gawking at Him and did nothing.

ACTION #5 – What the religious rulers said about Christ. **23:35b** - They visually and verbally derided Christ and tried to discredit Him.

Now we come to the final three actions that occur:

ACTION #6 – What the soldiers did to Jesus Christ. 23:36-38

The Roman soldiers, at this execution, were ruthless. Not only were they responsible for mocking the Son of God after His trials (Mark 15:16-18), for nailing the Son of God to the cross (Mark 15:24), but they also were responsible for mocking Christ while He was hanging on the cross.

According to J. Dwight Pentecost, four soldiers were assigned to each criminal being executed (*The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, p. 482). This would mean that there were at least 12 soldiers present at this execution.

It is not certain whether the soldiers made a habit of mocking the dying criminal hanging on the cross, but they certainly mocked Jesus Christ.

There were three ways these soldiers mocked Jesus Christ:

Mockery Way #1 - They mocked Him by their offered mockery drink. 23:36

Some Biblical scholars think that the offering of “sour wine” was a normal drink to offer as some form of pain killer that was offered to one hanging on a cross. J. W. Shepherd, in his book “*Christ of the Gospels*” says that this drink was a form of narcotic that was prepared to alleviate some of the suffering of the victim, by deadening the senses.

However, according to this context and according to the prophecy of Psalm 69:21 that says, “for my thirst, they gave Me vinegar to drink,” it is clear that this drink was not offered as a medicinal help, but as a mockery. The Greek word used here for “sour” indicates it was very sour, like vinegar.

This was a mockery that takes mockery to a new level. Jesus Christ would have been very thirsty. He would have been dehydrating through the loss of fluids while hanging in the hot sun nailed to a cross.

So as a joke, these soldiers offer Jesus Christ a drink of vinegar or sour wine to drink. They would not even offer Him a drink of water.

Jesus Christ was hanging on that cross for us. What will we offer Him? What will we give Jesus Christ? Will we offer Him a life of sweet fellowship or a life of sour rebellion?

Mockery Way #2 - They mocked Him by their verbal mockery speech. 23:37

The soldiers do not think that Christ’s claim to be the Jewish Messiah was as funny as Him claiming He was the King. The Jews got a big laugh out of Jesus’ claim to be the Messiah (23:35); but the Romans got a big laugh out of His claim to be King (23:37).

All of this mockery clearly proves these people had no clue as to the program of God. The thinking of both groups is if He really was the Messiah or the King, He would get Himself out of these horrible circumstances. They viewed the fact that He was hanging on the cross as a failure.

Of course they are missing the whole point. Christ is not hanging there because He is a failure or loser; He is hanging there because we are sinful failures and losers. Not one of the people at the cross asked Christ to save them. But they are all crying out let's see you save yourself. He is the only One there who does not need saving. He is the only Person who can save them. If He would have opted to do what they are requesting, no one could ever be saved. Thank God He stayed on that cross.

Mockery Way #3 - They mocked Him by their unscripted mockery sign. **23:38**

The sign they hung up was originally designed by Pilate (John 19:19). It was written in all of the main languages: Hebrew, Latin and Greek. So whomever was there could read it in their language (John 19:20).

Matthew called this sign a charge or accusation (Matt. 27:37). John calls it an inscription or title (John 19:19-20). Mark and Luke call this sign an inscription or writing (Mark 15:26; Luke **23:38**). Combined, this sign represents a charge against Christ (Matt. 27:37), the title of Christ (John 19:19-20) and a visible writing about Christ (Mark 15:26; **Luke 23:38**).

The sign was put up in total mockery, but the sign did tell the total truth. The One who was hanging on that cross was, in fact, the King of the Jews. In fact, He was the King of Kings!

These soldiers are mocking the truth of Jesus Christ; many people today make the same mistake.

ACTION #7 – What one criminal did with Jesus Christ. **23:39**

Two criminals went to Calvary with Christ. There were many similarities between the two:

1) They were both Jewish criminals and robbers (Matt. 27:38; **Luke 23:39, 42**).

We base the fact they are Jewish because they want the Messiah to save them and also mention He can take them to the Kingdom, which is Jewish.

2) They had both been caught.

3) They had both been found guilty.

4) They had both been condemned.

5) They had both mocked Jesus Christ (Matt. 27:44; Mark 15:32) - same words about saving self.

6) They had both been crucified with Jesus Christ.

7) They had both talked to Jesus Christ.

8) They both died with Jesus Christ.

But at the moment of death, the similarities ended. One of the criminals, at the moment of death, went to be with the Lord and the other went to hell.

The main difference was not what they had previously done in life; the main difference was what they did with Jesus Christ before their death.

The first criminal was hurling abuse at Jesus Christ (**23:39**). The Greek word refers to a very proud, slanderous type of speech against God. In fact, we get our English word “blaspheme” from this word.

When this criminal asked Jesus to save Himself and them, he was not serious; he was mocking Christ. He is basically saying, “Hey you are supposed to be the Messiah so get us out of here.”

What a stupid man this is. He is hanging and dying right next to the only Person who can save him and he is mocking Him. Here is a guilty sinner heading full steam toward hell and he is mocking the One Person who can save him and keep him out of hell.

We have many things in common here today.

- 1) We are all getting older.
- 2) We have all sinned.
- 3) We are all heading to death.
- 4) We will all face God.

But there is a major difference in how this will end for one who believes in Jesus Christ and one who doesn't.

ACTION #8 – What the other criminal did with Jesus Christ. **23:40-43**

The pronoun “other” means another of a different kind. Although this criminal was also guilty, he had a completely different view of Jesus Christ.

That fact is clearly brought out by his reaction to the other criminal (**23:40**), his evaluation of himself (**23:41a**), his recognition of Jesus Christ (**23:41b**) and his request he makes to Jesus Christ (**23:42**).

There are four responses he had on that cross dying:

Response #1 - He rebuked the other criminal for what he said to Jesus Christ. **23:40**

The one criminal rebuked the other criminal. The word “rebuke” is one that means he handed out exactly what was due to the other criminal. This criminal pointed out that in view of the fact that the other criminal was heading to condemnation, it was very foolish not to fear God and to mock Jesus Christ.

The same judgment was on all three of them in that they are all hanging on a cross, but this criminal knew something about the subject of just condemnation because he admits it concerning himself and the other criminal.

He challenged the other criminal with the fact that at this moment there should be a fear of God. When you are condemned and dying, it is foolish not to fear God. Some fools never do fear God even in the face of their own death.

Response #2 - He honestly evaluated himself and the criminal in front of Christ. **23:41a**

Here is a critical point to see; this man evaluated himself honestly and admitted the truth about himself and what he had done. He said “we” deserve this penalty because our works have been evil and we are guilty. What is happening to us is “just and right.”

This was an honest man who admitted he was getting what he deserved to get for his life of sin.

This is a truly repentant heart—it does not try to excuse sin or even escape the consequences. This is the way true repentance always works. It does not try to excuse sin, it admits it.

Response #3 - He truly believed the identity of Jesus Christ. **23:41b**

This criminal realized Jesus Christ had done nothing wrong ever. He did not deserve to be hanging on this cross. That word “wrong” means this man is stating that Jesus Christ never did one thing out of place. He never once got off the track of righteousness. His life was perfect and pure. He never failed nor did one thing unrighteous.

Response #4 - He requested that Jesus Christ remember him and save him. **23:42**

In order for one to be saved, one must personally ask Jesus Christ to save him. It is important to see the chronology here. This criminal does not ask Jesus Christ to save him until he has admitted his own sin, admitted that he deserves condemnation and accepted the fact that Jesus Christ is the only One who can save.

When this criminal asked Jesus Christ to “remember me when You come into Your Kingdom,” he is a Jew who has come to truly believe Jesus Christ is the Messiah, the King, The Savior and the Lord who can take him into that Kingdom.

The request is more than just a request to remember him, but also permit him to be part of the Kingdom.

The response of Jesus Christ is seen in **verse 43**—“Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise.” By the way, the word “truly” is amen. The Greek reads—truly... you shall be with Me today in the Paradise.

This is amazing grace given to a condemned sinner in the final moments of his life. He has lived a sinful life. He has not kept any religious ceremonies or ordinances. He was not involved in religion. He was not baptized. He wasn’t even interested in life in God. But at this one moment of time by believing in Jesus Christ, his sin case is settled, guaranteeing him everlasting life.

Now the word “paradise” is rare. It is used three times in the New Testament: 1) **Luke 23:43**; 2) II Corinthians 12:4; 3) Revelation 2:7. This refers to a wonderful blessed place for believers. Paradise is a beautiful park like place that features the glory and the presence and the comfort of God.

What Jesus says to the criminal is that you do not have to wait until I set up My kingdom, I am taking you to Paradise today. Your faith in Me and what I am actually accomplishing on this cross right now is that which will save you here and now.