

Foothills Christian Assembly Sermon July 25, 2021
Luke 23: 32 – 43 “Crucified Between Two Criminals”

24 So Pilate gave sentence that it should be as they requested. 25 And he released to them the one they requested, who for rebellion and murder had been thrown into prison; but he delivered Jesus to their will. 26 Now as they led Him away, they laid hold of a certain man, Simon a Cyrenian, who was coming from the country, and on him they laid the cross that he might bear it after Jesus. 27 And a great multitude of the people followed Him, and women who also mourned and lamented Him. 28 But Jesus, turning to them, said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. 29 For indeed the days are coming in which they will say, 'Blessed are the barren, wombs that never bore, and breasts which 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 in the green wood, what will be done in the dry?" 32 There were also two others, criminals, led with Him to be put to death. 33 And when they had come to the place called Calvary, there they crucified Him, and the criminals, one on the right hand and the other on the left. 34 Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do." And they divided His garments and cast lots. 35 And the people stood looking on. But even the rulers with them sneered, saying, "He saved others; let Him save Himself if He is the Christ, the chosen of God." 36 The soldiers also mocked Him, coming and offering Him sour wine 37 and saying, "If You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself." 38 And an inscription also was written over Him in letters of Greek, Latin, and Hebrew: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS 39 Then one of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed Him, saying, "If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us." 40 But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, "Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? 41 And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong." 42 Then he said to Jesus, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom." 43 And Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise." 44 Now it was about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. 45 Then the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was torn in two. 46 And when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said, "Father, 'into Your hands I commit My spirit.' " Having said this, He breathed His last. 47 So when the centurion saw what had happened, he glorified God, saying, "Certainly this was a righteous Man!" 48 And the whole crowd who came together to that sight, seeing what had been done, beat their breasts and returned. 49 But all His acquaintances, and the women who followed Him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.

I. Introduction

- a. In the OT, God gave some of His prophets messages about the future, and some of those Divinely Inspired messages were about Jesus Christ, and some of those about Jesus Christ were focused upon His crucifixion. Listen to the words of Isaiah 53, written about 750 years before our Lord was crucified on that spring day, AD 30, in Jerusalem:
 - i. “Who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? 2 For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, And as a root out of dry ground. He has no form or comeliness; And when we see Him, There is no beauty that we should desire Him. 3 He is despised

and rejected by men, A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. 4 Surely He has borne our griefs And carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, Smitten by God, and afflicted. 5 But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed. 6 All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. 7 He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, And as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth. 8 He was taken from prison and from judgment, And who will declare His generation? For He was cut off from the land of the living; For the transgressions of My people He was stricken. 9 And they made His grave with the wicked-- But with the rich at His death, Because He had done no violence, Nor was any deceit in His mouth. 10 Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, And the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand. 11 He shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, For He shall bear their iniquities. 12 Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, And He shall divide the spoil with the strong, Because He poured out His soul unto death, And He was numbered with the transgressors, And He bore the sin of many, And made intercession for the transgressors.”

- ii. Note in verse 12, the Father states that Jesus Christ will be exalted (“divide Him a portion with the great”) after His humiliation, which is described in 4 ways:
 - 1. He poured out His own soul to death upon the cross
 - 2. He was numbered with the transgressors – Lk 23 emphasizes
 - 3. He bore the sin of many
 - 4. He made intercession for the transgressors
- b. Today, as we listen to Luke’s description of the crucifixion, we will focus our attention upon the two criminals, seeking to observe Christ’s suffering and death from their perspectives. What was it like for these two men to watch Jesus, from such a close vantage point, even experiencing crucifixion simultaneously with Jesus? How did they each respond? Why did each man respond so differently? What if you had carried a cross that morning on that road with Jesus? What if you had been nailed to the cross-beam, hung up and stretched out in agony alongside Him that morning? Would you have blasphemed or believed?
- c. Luke 23: 32 – 43 “Crucified Between Two Criminals”
 - i. Background: Numbered With The Transgressors
 - ii. On the Road to Death with Two Criminals v32
 - iii. Crucified Between Two Criminals v33
 - iv. Jesus Prays to His Father v34

- v. Christ's garments divided by lots v34
- vi. The Crowd looking on v35
- vii. The Sneering Rulers v35
- viii. The Mocking Soldiers v36,37
- ix. The Inscription Written Over Jesus v38
- x. The Blaspheming Criminal v39
- xi. The Believing Criminal v40-42
- xii. Jesus Speaks Salvation to the Believing Criminal v43
- xiii. Questions to know, love and obey God

II. Background: Numbered With The Transgressors

- a. Isaiah 53:12 "Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, And He shall divide the spoil with the strong, Because He poured out His soul unto death, And He was numbered with the transgressors, And He bore the sin of many, And made intercession for the transgressors."
- b. At the close of the Last Supper, the night before:
 - i. Lk 23:37 "For I say to you that this which is written must still be accomplished in Me: 'And He was numbered with the transgressors.' For the things concerning Me have an end."
- c. Part of Christ's humility, His submission to His Father, was to voluntarily allow Himself to be "numbered with the transgressors". Thus, when the general masses looked at Jesus on that day, they saw Him as a humiliated, shameful criminal and wanted nothing to do with Him.
- d. Luke 23: "And they all cried out at once, saying, "Away with this Man, and release to us Barabbas"-- 19 who had been thrown into prison for a certain rebellion made in the city, and for murder. 20 Pilate, therefore, wishing to release Jesus, again called out to them. 21 But they shouted, saying, "Crucify Him, crucify Him!" 22 Then he said to them the third time, "Why, what evil has He done? I have found no reason for death in Him. I will therefore chastise Him and let Him go." 23 But they were insistent, demanding with loud voices that He be crucified. And the voices of these men and of the chief priests prevailed. 24 So Pilate gave sentence that it should be as they requested. 25 And he released to them the one they requested, who for rebellion and murder had been thrown into prison; but he delivered Jesus to their will."
 - i. Christ was not only numbered with the transgressors, He was despised as worse than a murderous traitor. In the eyes of those people on that day, Jesus was the worst imaginable criminal, thrown away like trash in exchange for a man like Barabbas.

III. On the Road to Death with Two Criminals v32

- a. 32 "There were also two others, criminals, led with Him to be put to death."
- b. Let's recall what has already occurred on this road to death. What have these criminals already observed up to this point?
 - i. "Now as they led Him away, they laid hold of a certain man, Simon a Cyrenian, who was coming from the country, and on him they laid the cross that he might bear it after Jesus. 27 And a great multitude of the

people followed Him, and women who also mourned and lamented Him. 28 But Jesus, turning to them, said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. 29 For indeed the days are coming in which they will say, 'Blessed are the barren, wombs that never bore, and breasts which 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 in the green wood, what will be done in the dry?"

- ii. Jesus has been scourged and at some point and became too weak to carry his own cross-beam. So, Simon a man from Cyrene (Lybia region), is conscripted to carry Christ's cross. The criminals are surrounded by a great multitude, not to see them die, but because of Jesus. Similarly, the women have mourned Jesus' plight, but apparently have not mourned over the two criminals. The criminals have listened to Christ's warning about the coming destruction of Jerusalem.
- iii. In addition, because of what the believing criminal says later, it appears these two malefactors knew enough of Christ's trial before Pilate to know that Jesus was innocent (from Pilate's perspective).

IV. Crucified Between Two Criminals v33

- a. 33 And when they had come to the place called Calvary, there they crucified Him, and the criminals, one on the right hand and the other on the left.
- b. Upon arrival at the place of crucifixion, the three men were nailed to their cross-beams and lifted up onto the pre-positioned vertical poles. Jesus was placed in the middle of the two criminals. Jesus and the two criminals may have been completely naked, or they may have had loincloths. Roman history shows the crucifixion victim was almost always naked, except if requested by local custom. It's possible the Jews would have requested a loincloth. The answer to this question is uncertain.
 - i. About crucifixion Dr. Terasaka "The procedure of crucifixion may be summarized as follows. The patibulum was put on the ground and the victim laid upon it. Nails, about 7 inches long and with a diameter of 1 cm (roughly 3/8 of an inch) were driven in the wrists. The points would go into the vicinity of the median nerve, causing shocks of pain to radiate through the arms. It was possible to place the nails between the bones so that no fractures (or broken bones) occurred. Studies have shown that nails were probably driven through the small bones of the wrist, since nails in the palms of the hand would not support the weight of a body. In ancient terminology, the wrist was considered to be part of the hand. Standing at the crucifixion sites would be upright posts, called stipes, standing about 7 feet high. In the center of the stipes was a crude seat, called a sedile or sedulum, which served a support for the victim. The patibulum was then lifted on to the stipes. The feet were then nailed to the stipes. To allow for this, the knees had to be bent and rotated

laterally, being left in a very uncomfortable position. The titulus was hung above the victim's head."

- c. Nailed to the cross: Jn 20 "19 Then, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, "Peace be with you." 20 When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. 21 So Jesus said to them again, "Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." 22 And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." 24 Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 The other disciples therefore said to him, "We have seen the Lord." So he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." 26 And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, "Peace to you!" 27 Then He said to Thomas, "Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing." 28 And Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!"

V. Jesus Prays to His Father v34

- a. 34 Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do."
- b. In the midst of this most intense ~6 hrs of suffering (the crucifixion began at around 9am "the third hour" Mk 15:25 and ended around 3pm "the ninth hour" Lk 23:44), Jesus asks His Father in heaven to forgive these people who are doing this horrible thing to Him.
- c. Think of being there on a cross next to Christ and hearing Him ask God to forgive these hateful, angry people.
- d. What did Jesus mean by this astonishing request? We will look at this question in a future sermon. For now, we can say without question that Jesus was demonstrating Divine mercy and compassion in the midst of the most wicked mistreatment.

VI. Christ's garments divided by lots v34

- a. "And they divided His garments and cast lots."
- b. Bock "Gambling for clothes is customary at crucifixion and is the final humiliation one suffers upon execution. One dies in shame and largely unclothed."¹
- c. Jesus, like His garments, is treated like a throw-away item to be recycled and re-used without any thought. In spite of being treated this way, He shows compassion to the very end.
- d. How would you have responded as you watched this unfold, nailed to a cross, dying next to Christ?

VII. The Crowd looking on v35

¹ Bock, D. L. (1996). [Luke: 9:51-24:53](#) (Vol. 2, p. 1850). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.

- a. 35 And the people stood looking on.
 - b. We hear no description of anyone speaking up for Jesus from the crowd. On the contrary, from verse 35, it appears the people were joining in with the sneering.
- VIII. The Sneering Rulers v35
- a. But even the rulers with them sneered, saying, "He saved others; let Him save Himself if He is the Christ, the chosen of God."
 - b. Sneer: to deride by turning up the nose, to sneer at, to scoff at
 - i. Like a bad smell when it strikes your nose. Totally disgusted with Jesus.
 - c. Note their continued misunderstanding of their Messiah. The apostate Jewish leaders and people did not understand that the Messiah must suffer and die. (Lk 24:46 "Then He said to [His disciples], "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day...") Their rejection of Jesus was based upon their unbelief, pride and ignorance of God's Word.
 - d. In addition, note the belief that their Messiah would use His power to deliver Himself. No Messiah would ever be so humiliated as Jesus.
 - e. The criminals probably both heard this sneering, this rejection of Christ as the Messiah.
- IX. The Mocking Soldiers v36,37
- a. 36 The soldiers also mocked Him, coming and offering Him sour wine 37 and saying, "If You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself."
 - b. Similarly, the Roman soldiers deride Jesus, laughing at His suffering, mocking His claims to be the King of the Jews. Again, note the focus upon Jesus saving Himself.
 - c. Humanity demands self-salvation, not self-sacrifice. Jesus brings us salvation through His self-sacrifice.
 - d. All along, the criminals are being offered the path of the world screaming the loudest, from the people, to the Jewish leaders, to the Roman soldiers.
- X. The Inscription Written Over Jesus v38
- a. 38 And an inscription also was written over Him in letters of Greek, Latin, and Hebrew: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS
 - b. Even Pilate has joined in with the mocking, primarily aimed at the Jewish leaders, but also serving as a mocking final gesture toward Christ. It was common for the criminal to have such a tablet inscribed to define their crime for all to see.
- XI. The Blaspheming Criminal v39
- a. 39 Then one of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed Him, saying, "If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us."
 - b. Here we see the response of unbelief, the response of the fallen flesh. Angry with God for his own suffering, this blaspheming man joins in with the chorus of mockery toward Jesus Christ. Instead of reflecting upon his own soul, and his own crime, he rails on Jesus.
- XII. The Believing Criminal v40-42
- a. 40 But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, "Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? 41 And we indeed justly, for we

receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong." 42 Then he said to Jesus, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom."

- b. This man is different. Something has occurred inside this man, so that he sees himself and Jesus through the eyes of faith. Note how many words this dying, breathless man spoke in praise of Christ.
 - i. Defends Jesus by correcting the blasphemer: "Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation?"
 - ii. Confesses his sin: "And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds"
 - iii. Confesses Christ's innocence: "but this Man has done nothing wrong"
 - iv. Asks Christ to save him: "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom."

XIII. Jesus Speaks Salvation to the Believing Criminal v43

- a. 43 And Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise."
- b. Here we see our Lord using His failing breath to speak salvation to this repentant criminal. Even to the very end, Jesus came to seek and to save the lost.

XIV. Questions to know, love and obey God

- a. What distinguished these two criminals from one another?
 - i. God's sovereign grace: Ephesians 2: 1-10 "And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, 2 in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, 3 among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. 4 But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast. 10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them."
- b. Have you considered Christ's humility to be numbered with the transgressors? To be so humiliated?
 - i. Jn 5:19 "Then Jesus answered and said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner."
 - ii. Andrew Murray "Hence it follows that nothing can be our redemption, but the restoration of the lost humility, the original and only true relation of the creature to its God. And so Jesus came to bring humility back to earth, to make us partakers of it, and by it to save us. In heaven He

humbled Himself to become man. The humility we see in Him possessed Him in heaven; it brought Him, He brought it, from there. Here on earth "He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death"; His humility gave His death its value, and so became our redemption. And now the salvation He imparts is nothing less and nothing else than a communication of His own life and death, His own disposition and spirit, His own humility, as the ground and root of His relation to God and His redeeming work. Jesus Christ took the place and fulfilled the destiny of man, as a creature, by His life of perfect humility. His humility is our salvation. His salvation is our humility. And so the life of the saved ones, of the saints, must needs bear this stamp of deliverance from sin, and full restoration to their original state; their whole relation to God and man marked by an all pervading humility. Without this there can be no true abiding in God's presence, or experience of His favor and the power of His Spirit; without this no abiding faith, or love or joy or strength. Humility is the only soil in which the graces root; the lack of humility is the sufficient explanation of every defect and failure. Humility is not so much a grace or virtue along with others; it is the root of all, because it alone takes the right attitude before God, and allows Him as God to do all."

- c. How is God's work of humility proceeding in your life?
 - i. Philippians 2:1-13 "1 Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, 2 fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. 3 Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. 4 Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. 5 Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, 7 but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. 9 Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, 11 and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. 12 Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; 13 for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure."