

**THE CRUCIFIXION – vv.32-34**

As Jesus is led to His crucifixion, we are told that there are two criminals who have also been condemned and are with Him. We are not told of their crimes, but it is clear that they are guilty for what they are accused of, and are going to the cross as a display of Rome's just execution.

The place of that the crucifixion would take place was is here translated Calvary. Actually, the Greek word is the same as is translated "skull." It is the word kranion, from which we derive our word cranium. This was a place North of the city of Jerusalem, outside the city gates. Some have said that the place is called that because of the skulls of the dead lying around. Others believe that the hill itself was a kind of bare white rock resembling at that time the top of a skull or even in the side something of the frontal of a skull.

I am again struck by the simplicity of the narrative. Luke simply tells us "there they crucified Him." We do not have a detailed, "slow motion" depiction of the event. The original readers were quite aware of what crucifixion was, and did not need a description. For us, we are by this time typically informed enough that we don't need the details either. The basics are enough. The condemned arrived with his cross or cross-beam. If it was a full cross, then the man was secured to it either by tying the arms or nailing through underneath the wrist bones. It seems also in Jesus' case that His feet were nailed through.

It was there, hanging between heaven and earth, one would die. If one didn't die from their wounds inflicted before the actual crucifixion, then they would begin the process of a slow and agonizing death. Most often the death would be a result of the buildup of fluid in the lungs. The victim would eventually begin to drown.

This was intended to be a public display of justice, as a deterrent to others who would rebel against Rome. "Defy us, and this is what will happen to you."

Very simply we are told that the other two criminals were also crucified. One on each side of the Lord Jesus. In God's providence, there was Jesus at the center of the two. He is still the one who is at the center of humanity, and is the dividing line between people.

**Excurses – Textual Variant**

It is here in v.34 that we have what is known as a textual variant. What this means is that among thousands of copies of the NT (we don't have the originals) there is a difference in the text in this place. The difference is basically whether this saying of Jesus was originally there and a scribe removed it or whether it was not written by Luke and later added by a scribe. Some of the older manuscripts exclude it, and yet there are many other witnesses for it. In what is known as textual criticism it isn't a simple matter of finding the oldest copy. We also try to construct the scenario and consider what is most likely based on a guess as to a person's motivation.

Contrary to what is often propagated in our day through books and movies like the DaVinci Code, there wasn't a secret group of people trying to make a Christianity to their own liking by manipulating the text. It was much more mundane than that. It is more likely something like this: A scribe, in copying the text, comes to this passage and sees that Jesus requested "Father, forgive them..." It seems to him like this contradicts the reality (from his historical perspective) that God brought judgment on the Jews as a nation in 70AD. A bit embarrassed, he takes it out. It seems less likely than the next possibility. The scribe is copying along and comes to this passage. Remembering similar words spoken by Stephen in the book of Acts (7:59), he also remember what has become an oral tradition in the church, or perhaps in some written tradition that Jesus said the same thing on the cross. So he writes it in the text. I think this is more likely, though we don't know for sure.

As a general rule, one should not build a major doctrine on a questionable passage. The encouraging thing is that no central doctrine of the Christianity hangs on one of these disputed texts. So in handling a text like this, I assume, because of its early and widespread tradition, that while it might not have been in Luke's original writing (because of his not knowing it), God directed and inspired another to include it in the text.

Making this assumption, and considering it as a saying of Jesus, let's consider what it actually says.

Notice that this is not a statement, but a prayer. Jesus is not granting forgiveness, something demonstrated the authority to do (Matthew 9:6). He is not saying "I forgive you." Here it seems Jesus is acting as an intercessor before the justice of God. He is asking for God to forgive them, and to do so because of their ignorance. They don't realize just what they are doing in crucifying Him. They think they are doing the right thing, but they are wrong. They weren't lacking information. There was a spiritual blindness that kept them from really understanding what they were doing.

A question to be asked is "who is Jesus interceding for?" It could be the Jewish leaders, the Jewish nation, the Roman soldiers, or the whole group. Another question closely connected to this one is to be asked is "were they forgiven?" A good bit of discussion can be generated by these questions, without specific answers (as the text does not give them to us). In summary, I would say that assuming that Jesus' intercession meant an effective (not just potential) forgiveness, the specific thing that is being asked for is related to this specific event. The request is based on their ignorance of what they are doing, not a blanket forgiveness of all of their sins. They are still accountable before God for the sins that they do knowingly and willingly, their own conscience bearing witness against them.

The main thrust of the text, regardless of the particular outcome, is the amazing heart of Jesus towards those that were killing Him. He recognized spiritual ignorance, and displays a love for those who hated Him. He is showing love by blessing those who, as we will see, curse Him.

In the second part of v.34 (moving past the variant), we are told that the soldiers divided Jesus' garments. The Romans did not have the same disdain for things defiled by blood as did the Jews, and this verse conveys something of the precious nature of garments and cloth in those days. By this time Jesus has drenched those garments with His blood, and this men intend to take them and reuse them. We are told that they gamble over the garments, casting lots to see who will get them. This, we are told by Matthew, is a fulfillment of Psalm 22:18. John gives us the additional detail that this garment was seamless, conveying the sense that it was special, so they didn't want to tear it in pieces.

What this means is that at this point Jesus is either naked, or nearly so (with a possible loincloth). He now hangs on the cross, pathetic and pitiful.

### THE UNIFIED RESPONSE – vv.35-39

As in the previous passage, there is more information and concern about what they did to Him verbally than physically. We are told specifically of four groups of people, and their response to this situation.

First, we are told about the people. There was a crowd of those in the margins comprised most likely of those who had accumulated during the procession to the cross. We are told they are simply looking on. While we could take this to be a bare statement of fact, perhaps we could also speak of their indifference. Not willing to cry out for justice, to cease killing an innocent man. But they say nothing.

Second, we are told that the rulers were sneering at Him. This term indicates more than just verbal abuse, but facial contortions as well. They are giving proud looks and ridiculing Jesus. They verbally taunted Him referring to the specific charge that they had found Him guilty of. But they don't seem to be addressing Him, but rather others. "So he said He is the Christ, the chosen of God. He is the one who is doing God's work and have His support of what He is doing. He said He could save others? If so, let Him perform the miracle of saving Himself. We'll see how powerful and great He is. Here is His final test!"

Third, we are told of the soldiers, words, joining in the chorus of condemnation by mocking Him, even offering Him sour wine. As we saw a couple of weeks ago, they entered into the mock inauguration of Jesus as King (the crown, the robe, the scepter). They now continue to mock Him, offering a royal toast to this so-called King of the Jews. They address Him by saying "If You are the great deliverer of Your people, the Jews, then go ahead and deliver Yourself." In addition to this mocking and as an added dig to the Jewish people, Pilate had an inscription made which was hung over Jesus' head proclaiming "*This is the King of the Jews.*"

I believe in all of this there is an implicit statement being made. They are saying that if He will deliver Himself, they will believe all the things that He said about Himself. They don't keep their promise, because on the third day He will deliver Himself from death. The Jews will know it, the people will hear of it, some of the soldiers will be witness to it, and rather than believe they will try to cover it up as a scandal.

We see a fourth example of how people responded to Jesus' crucifixion. This time it is not one of those who are "free", but one of the very ones crucified with Him. He is described as "one of the criminals who were hanged. Here is this wretched man, condemned to die, suffering intensely with no hope. He response to the scene is sad. He uses some of his last breathes to blaspheme the Lord Jesus. Do not be surprised at the depravity of man in what one can do even on their death bed. He, like the others, taunts Jesus. He is not original here. "If you are the Christ, save Yourself." "And", he adds, "while you're at it, why don't you save us?"

Don't miss that there is an unbelieving request here. It is a request for salvation, but it is prefaced with an unbelieving "if." Jesus does not answer such responses, and He does not even respond to this man.

### THE DISSIDENT RESPONSE – vv.40-43

Out of the throng comes a single solitary voice of dissent. There is one who disagrees with the common public opinion of the crowd. There is one voice crying in the wilderness. And it comes from a surprising place. He is known to us simply as "the other." He is the other hanging in the final moments of his life. And his is a voice of rebuke to his fellow criminal. "What is wrong with you? Do you realize what is happening? Do you realize that we are about to face God in our death." Do you not fear this? You are mocking Him in His death, but you aren't an outsider, one of those people standing out there who think their whole life is in front of them. You are about to die man."

Not only this, but this single voice is being transformed. He doesn't just fear death, but he himself is having a change of heart. According to [Matthew 27:44](#), it was both of the robbers who originally reviled Him. But something has happened. Probably with a knowledge that Jesus is an innocent man, and particularly a response to Jesus prayer for God to forgive His enemies, and ultimately a work of amazing grace in this dying man's heart, there is confession.

He says to his fellow criminal "we are dying because we deserve to die. We have lived in criminality and evil, and now it is only just that we suffer and be rewarding according to our deeds." He sees something ultimate, that there is ultimate payment for good and evil, not only before men, but also before God.

He goes beyond personal confession of His own guilt and worthiness of death, but makes a positive confession about Jesus. "This man has done nothing wrong." We see another witness as to Jesus' innocence. Pilate declared Him innocent, Herod declared Him innocent, even Judas declared Him innocent. Now another witness is added. Even this man recognized the spotlessness of the Lamb of God.

And these words, given by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, go far beyond what this man probably understood at the time. This Jesus has, in the fullest sense, done *nothing* wrong. In thought, word, and deed He is innocent before God.

Now, for the first time, our friend addresses the Lord. He turns to Him, viewing His battered, abused, and dying form hanging from the tree. With all other voices ridiculing, mocking, scorning, he asks something from Jesus. He says "Lord..." what a powerful word in the midst of this situation. Despite everything he sees, despite all that can be sensed, this is His Lord. But notice he is also the only one in the passage that calls Him by name, "Jesus." What intimacy is conveyed here.

His request is that Jesus would remember him. He asks that Jesus would take him, a wretched, condemned sinner into His memory. "Don't forget me...don't let me fade from your mind...don't overlook me...don't pass me by." This in reference to when Jesus comes into His kingdom. He is the single one noted out of this crowd who actually believes what others are using to taunt Him. The Christ? The Chosen of God? The King of the Jews? The Son of God? "Despite everything I see, despite what all others say...Lord, I believe." You are He, you have the words of eternal life. Death will not have dominion over You. You will yet live. You will return again in Your glory and Your Kingdom. You will bring judgment on the earth. You will create a new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. Lord, remember me when You do that!

He does not hope for immediate deliverance. While others are saying "save yourself" as proof and evidence and we will believe, this man does not ask it.

Here is this man, with no hope but Christ. Not a single work will he be able to do in this world as a demonstration of His Love for Jesus. Nothing other than His dying act of worship. And this Jesus receives.

The Lord does more than assure Him that his request will be answered. He goes beyond saying "Yes, I will remember you in the future when I come in my Kingdom." Jesus brings this man's request and desire to immediacy. Jesus is going to do something for Him not just in the future, but today. What is going to happen is that this man, a new believer in Jesus Christ, is going to be with Him. And He goes beyond the hard reality of being with Christ there, at the place of the Skull, of death. He will be with Jesus in Paradise. With this single word opens the Wardrobe through which little children pass into the place of joy and pleasure and worship and living with the King of kings and the Lord of Lords. In this word is summarized the loftiest concepts of a world without death, sorrow, pain and sin. It is a place with the tree of life, the presence of God, of the spirits of just men made perfect. It is the place from which men return and do not have words to convey their experiences there because it is so disorienting ([2Corinthians 12:2ff](#)).

He essentially says to the man "I give you more than you can ask or think. Today, you who are alone in this crowd, will be with me in Paradise." He says this to no one else.

Where do you fit in? Are you one of the silent crowd?

Are you one of the mockers who think that you are in good shape?

Are you one who realized your condemnation, and yet call out in unbelieving request?

Or are you one who, realizing your condemnation, the Lord's righteousness, in faith ask Him to remember you without hope of a single act of righteousness on your part being the basis of your salvation?

- We are all, like the criminals, already condemned to death and appointed to die
- Thanks be to God that He did not do what everyone requested Him to do: to save Himself from the death of the cross.