

Jesus' Crucifixion (Luke 23:33-43)

The crucifixion of Jesus Christ is both the most shocking event and the most wonderful event of human history. It is the most shocking event in that it is the creature murdering the Creator. It is the most wonderful event in that it is the Creator saving the creature.

Let me reword it and say that the crucifixion was the summit of sin and love. The crucifixion itself was the most horrible of deaths. There was the pain of the driven spikes forced through the flesh of Jesus' hands and feet or ankles. There was the weight of his body jolting and pulling against the spikes as the cross was lifted and rocked into place. There were the scorching sun and the unquenchable thirst gnawing away at His dry mouth and throat. There was the blood oozing from his scourged back, his thorn-crowned brow, his stick-beaten head. In addition, just imagine the aggravation of flies, gnats, and other insects. And for

Jesus, there was the piercing pain of the spear thrust into his side. On and on the sufferings could be described. There has never been a more cruel form of execution than crucifixion upon a cross.

The crucifixion took place on a hill called "*the Skull*" (in Latin, calvaria). We get the name Calvary from the Latin word. In the simplest of terms, Christ was crucified for our sins in order to bring us to God. We can find this in **1 Peter 2:24**, "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.

Note that two criminals were crucified with him. He was dying because of them and because of all other men. Why? Because all men are criminals against God, rebelling against him and breaking his commandments. Which is what we are told in **Romans 3:23**, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

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Then there was the prayer for his enemies—a picture of love and forgiveness to the end. The picture is of Jesus the Mediator. He had come for this very purpose, to stand as the Mediator between God and sinful man. Therefore, upon the cross, he prayed for those who stood below crucifying him. Note several things. **First**, it had been predicted that Christ would pray for transgressors (Isaiah 53:12). **Second**, he prayed to forgive those who were crucifying him. The very purpose for his coming was to make provision for forgiveness of sins. Because of his death, God would be able to forgive the sins of men, even those who were now crucifying him. **Third**, the men crucifying him did not know what they were doing. They did not know who he was.

The most wonderful truth in all the world is this: God will hold no sin against any man if that man will personally trust his Son. If God forgives the men who killed his only Son, God will forgive any man for

any sin—if that man will just ask. Which is what we can

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find in **Colossians 1:14**, “In whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”

Then there was the gambling for his clothes—a picture of being stripped by the selfishness, greed, and sin of men. Before I make note of two things, I want to say that it was only a few years ago that I finally realized that Jesus was totally naked while on the cross. I don't think it was naivete, I guess I just didn't want to think of Him in that way.

Now, let me make note of two points. **1.)** The custom seems to have been for the executing soldiers to claim whatever they wished of the clothes of crucified criminals. The soldiers stripped Jesus, dividing his clothes among themselves. However, his coat was valuable: it was seamless, one piece of cloth, woven from top to bottom just as the High Priest's coat or cloak was. The soldiers, therefore,

decided to gamble by casting lots for it. This event was foretold in **Psalms 22:18**. My **second** point is that Jesus was stripped by

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the soldiers—stripped of his mortal clothes. There is symbolism in this act: He allowed all of his mortality to be stripped so that he might abolish death and bring life and immortality to light.

Then there was the mockery, the misunderstanding of his salvation. Note those who mocked and taunted him. The people and the religionists mocked his claim to be the Savior and Messiah. They totally misunderstood God's Messiahship. Both the people and the religionists should have been above this kind of behavior. In addition, they had every opportunity to believe, for he had not hid himself or his message of salvation. But being part of a sinful crowd and their own unbelief, they led each other to do shameful things. Here's a quick thought. Leaders, civil and religious, are still men. It is not the position or profession that makes a man,

but the heart. A heart of unbelief and enmity, a heart willing to become a participant with the sinful crowd, will stoop to do shameful things, no matter the position or profession.

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The soldiers also mocked and taunted him. In particular they mocked his claim to be King, but they did not understand his claim.

Then there was the inscription on the cross—a misunderstood charge. The sign placed above his head, “The King of the Jews,” was intended to mock the Jewish authorities and to reproach his claim.

However, God overruled and used the sign to proclaim the whole truth to the whole world. The very charges against Jesus proclaim his deity and honor. We can find this in Scripture in **Philippians 2:8-11**, “And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore, God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of

Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

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Next, we look at the unrepentant thief—a picture of hardness even in death. The thieves heard the crowd mock Jesus about being the Messiah, the Savior of the world. Hanging there as criminals, guilty before God and men, they should have been searching to see if there was any chance that Jesus could have been who he claimed. They needed to be saved and forgiven. One criminal showed enormous hardness of heart. He mocked the very thought that Jesus was the Christ.

Then there was the repentant thief—a picture of true repentance. The second thief demonstrated the steps to salvation and true repentance. **First**, he feared God. **Second**, he declared that Jesus was righteous. **Third**, he asked Jesus to remember him. Note that Jesus promised him eternal life; the

repentant man was to be with Christ in paradise that very day. Which is what we can find in **John 12:26**, “Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant will also be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.”

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On this, we are exactly where we belong. In the presence of our Savior, who still marches into the middle of all our misguided expectations, who still offers his life for the sake of those who don't know what they are doing. It's here, at the cross of our King, that we too must challenge all the voices that demand we prove who we are. For the only voice that matters has already spoken. The King of kings has given his life to call us beloved. May we have the strength to remember it—wherever the road carries us.

So, what lessons can we learn from the Scripture reading from Luke?

Key lessons from this Scripture reading from Luke include that mercy is extended to all, even sinners, as shown by the repentant thief. Also, we can learn that Jesus' true power is not in worldly authority but in fulfilling his mission of salvation, which he

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accomplished through humility and suffering. This passage also highlights that a person's eternal destiny is not determined by proximity to Jesus but by their response to him, as seen in the contrasting attitudes of the two thieves.

Please bow your heads as I pray.

Lord Jesus, on the cross you prayed for those who were crucifying you, and you promised paradise to the thief beside you. We thank you for your mercy and we pray for the grace to forgive those who have wronged us. We give you our lives, Lord, and we

believe that you died for us and rose again. Forgive us of our sins and save us. We turn from our past and turn to you as our Savior. Into your hands, we commit our lives, our future, and our spirit. Help us to trust you, especially in our moments of suffering and guide us to live a life

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that honors you. We ask this in the name of your Son and our Savior, Jesus Christ. **Amen.**