

It's All About Jesus

Session 4

March 24, 2024

The Death of Jesus

Session Point: Jesus died to pay the debt of our sin.

Session Passage: Luke 23:32-49

Luke 23:32-34

Connection to the Point. Jesus forgave others even as He hung on the cross.

Setting for Luke 23. Luke 22 concludes with Jesus before the Sanhedrin and that group declaring He deserved to die because He claimed to be God. However, the Roman government would not allow the Jews to execute a person unless that person had been found guilty by Roman trial. Pilate was the Roman prefect (governor) of Judea from AD 26-36. He frequently insulted the Jewish religion, governed Judea harshly, and was easily manipulated.

Luke 23 opens with Jesus before Pilate. After questioning Jesus, Pilate found no fault in Him (vv. 1-5). Upon learning that Jesus was from Galilee, Pilate sent Jesus to Herod Antipas, who ruled Galilee (the same Herod who had killed John the Baptist). After questioning Jesus, Herod returned Him to Pilate (vv. 6-12), who questioned Jesus again and told the Jewish religious leaders and crowd that he found no fault in Jesus (vv. 13-15). When Pilate offered to release Jesus, the crowd demanded he release Barabbas instead, a murderer and revolutionary (vv. 16-19). Pilate was manipulated by the Jewish religious leaders to crucify Jesus (vv. 20-25). Although Jesus started to carry His cross (John 19:17), apparently He was too weak from abuse by the soldiers and was unable to carry it any longer. The soldiers forced Simon of Cyrene to carry Jesus's cross (Luke 23:26). Verses 27-31 record Jesus's words to the women who were following Him to the place of crucifixion.

Two others — criminals — were also led away (v. 32). Not until verses 39-42 did Luke tell us anything about these two except they were criminals. They probably carried their crosses as well. Scholars estimate the entire cross would have weighed about two hundred pounds, too much for a normal person to carry. Likely the person to be crucified carried just the cross beam and the stake remained in the ground at the execution site. However, we can't be sure because the Bible does not provide those details.

To be executed with him (v. 32). The Roman government executed violent criminals and murderers, not those who had merely stolen something. Crucifixion was the typical punishment for those who rebelled against the Roman government. In its years of rule, Rome crucified many thousands of people. Over six thousand rebel slaves were crucified in 71 BC after Spartacus's failed rebellion against Rome.

When they arrived at the place called The Skull (v. 33). Crucifixions took place outside of cities. No Gospel writer mentions a hill, but Jerusalem was surrounded by hills. The Latin name for this place is translated as Calvary; the Aramaic name is Golgotha. Both terms mean *skull* and may refer to the shape of the place (we get our English word *cranium* from the Greek word for *skull*). Archaeologists suggest two different places as possible locations of Jesus's crucifixion. It likely occurred about 9 a.m. on the Friday before Passover (possibly in early April, AD 30). Jesus's body was on the cross from about 9 a.m. until sometime after He died, about 3 p.m. The bodies of Jesus and the two criminals were buried before sundown (6 p.m.) when the Sabbath and Passover began.

They crucified him there (v. 33). Crosses were usually in the shape of T, I, X, Y, or the traditional ?. Gospel writers focused more on the meaning of Jesus's death than on specific details about His crucifixion. (Dr. C.

Truman Davis wrote about the medical details of Jesus's crucifixion in his booklet, *A Physician Looks at the Crucifixion.*)

Then Jesus said (v. 34). No one Gospel account has all seven of Jesus's last sayings on the cross; Luke has three of these sayings.

Father, forgive them (v. 34). Jesus began His prayer by addressing God as Father, His usual practice. He asked His Father to forgive *them*, although the New Testament does not clarify who *them* was. It could have referred to the Roman soldiers, the disciples who abandoned Him, the Jewish nation, or the religious and government leaders who pronounced judgment. All needed forgiveness.

Because they do not know what they are doing (v. 34). Jesus's rationale for His request appears to be compassion for those who were acting in ignorance. He was dying for them as well. This phrase (and the next) leads to the conclusion that *them* likely refers to the soldiers.

They divided his clothes and cast lots (v. 34). This was typical practice of the soldiers at a crucifixion (Ps. 22:18; John 19:23-24). This clothing included Jesus's outer garment (coat, robe) as well as His inner one (shirt, seamless tunic).

Luke 23:35-43

Connection to the Point. Jesus promised salvation to the thief who believed in Him.

The people stood watching (v. 35). From about 9 a.m. until 3 p.m. on the Friday before Passover began, some soldiers, some of the women who followed Jesus (including Mary, Jesus's mother), the apostle John, some religious leaders, and others ("all who knew him," v. 49) watched Jesus and the two criminals as they were crucified outside of Jerusalem at the place called "The Skull."

Even the leaders were scoffing (v. 35). Luke did not further identify which leaders were present, but likely they had been part of the crowd who demanded Jesus be crucified. Matthew and Mark identified these leaders as chief priests, scribes, and elders (Matt. 27:41; Mark 15:31). To scoff or "mock" meant to speak contemptuously, derisively, or make fun of someone. Luke may have had in mind Psalm 22:7: "Everyone who sees me mocks me; they sneer and shake their heads." Psalm 22 describes crucifixion and ends in victory.

He saved others; let him save himself (v. 35). Apparently, the Jewish religious leaders recognized what Jesus had done in His ministry. Perhaps they were referring to those whom Jesus raised from the dead: The widow of Nain's son (Luke 7:11-17), Jairus's daughter (8:40-56), Lazarus (John 11), or others Gospel writers did not include. In the New Testament, the word *saved* also referred to being made whole, being healed, and the Gospels record many instances of Jesus healing people.

If this is God's Messiah, the Chosen One (v. 35). These Jewish religious leaders also reflected Jesus's ministry by utilizing terminology that accurately described who Jesus really was, though they themselves did not believe it. Earlier in his Gospel account of Jesus's transfiguration, Luke had also recorded God the Father's words identifying Jesus as being chosen (Luke 9:35). The use of the particle *if* introduced the element of doubt about Jesus's identity in the minds of these leaders.

The soldiers also mocked him (v. 36). Although Matthew (27:39-40) and Mark (15:29-30) focused on the mocking of those who passed by, in this verse Luke mentioned the mocking by the soldiers.

They came offering him sour wine (v. 36). Matthew, Mark, Luke and John reported that the soldiers offered Jesus sour wine or vinegar. Scholars debate whether this offering was a part of the mocking (cheap wine for a king) or kindness (offering a thirsty man something to drink as He was dying). Luke may have been referring to Psalm 69:21.

If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself (v. 37). The soldiers repeated similar words the Jewish religious leaders had used previously to mock Jesus.

An inscription was above him (v. 38). Some scholars believe this inscription was part of the mocking the soldiers had begun at Jesus's trials (Luke 23:11) and continued as Jesus was crucified. Other Gospel writers reveal more details about this inscription. According to John, it was posted at Pilate's order and written in Aramaic (Jews' everyday language), Greek (the primary commercial language), and Latin (official government language of the Roman Empire).

This Is the King of the Jews (v. 38). Matthew recorded it as: "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews" (27:37). Mark recorded: "The King of the Jews" (15:26). John wrote: "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews" (19:19). Each Gospel writer under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit recorded essentially the same message.

One of the criminals hanging there began to yell insults at him: (v. 39). In their abbreviated accounts, Matthew (27:44) and Mark (15:32) recorded both criminals yelling insults. Luke (23:39-43) included more of the expanded story. Church tradition from other writings add details such as the names of these criminals.

"Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" But the other answered, rebuking him (vv. 39-40). One criminal's words were concerned only with his immediate fate, seeking simply to be removed from his cross. The other criminal is frequently called the penitent thief and according to church tradition was named Dysmas (or Dismas). His words indicated he was open to Jesus's message and opposed the message of the other criminal.

Don't you even fear God since you are undergoing the same punishment? (v. 40). These words imply this criminal had a change of heart based on fearing God.

We are punished justly, because we're getting back what we deserve for the things we did (v. 41). This criminal's evaluation of his situation revealed his assessment of the punishment he received. He acknowledged he deserved his fate.

But this man has done nothing wrong (v. 41). Luke did not indicate the basis for this judgment. Apparently, even in His crucifixion, Jesus bore witness to His righteous character.

Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom (v. 42). Although Luke did not record it, likely this criminal had heard about Jesus. His words indicate he responded positively to Jesus.

Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise (v. 43). *Today* indicated the immediacy of Jesus's promise. Paul expressed a similar idea (2 Cor. 5:8). Jesus's response to this criminal reveals several things. (1) Jesus had ultimate authority—even authority to give a person access to heaven. (2) Jesus demonstrated His concern for repentant people. (3) Jesus knew He would be in heaven after His death. (4) Jesus saves those who trust Him. The word *paradise* originally came from Persia and referred to an exquisite garden or park. Jesus used this word in referring to the final home of the righteous, heaven.

Luke 23:44-49

Connection to the Point. Jesus completed His earthly ministry with His death on the cross.

It was now about noon (v. 44). Jewish reckoning of time began at 6 p.m. Nighttime hours were divided into four watches of three hours each (the fourth watch of the night would be from 3 a.m. until 6 a.m.). Daylight hours were divided into twelve one-hour periods, beginning at 6 a.m. (noon was the sixth hour). Jesus and the two criminals had been on the cross for about three hours.

Darkness came over the whole land until three (v. 44). According to Matthew (27:45), Mark (15:33), and Luke, from noon until 3 p.m. (the ninth hour), it was dark. Since Passover occurred at a full moon, an eclipse was impossible. God caused this darkness to occur; neither Luke nor the other Gospel writers explain exactly how God did this. Some New Testament scholars believe this was creation's response to Jesus's crucifixion. In the Bible, darkness often reflects God's judgment (see Amos 8:9).

Because the sun's light failed (v. 45). Luke mentioned two historical facts in verse 45 surrounding Jesus's death. First, Luke listed the reason for the three hours of darkness as being because the sun's light failed but didn't give the specific cause.

The curtain of the sanctuary was split down the middle (v. 45). This was the second historical fact Luke mentioned in verse 45. This curtain separated the holy place from the most holy place (holy of holies) in the Jewish temple in Jerusalem. In the temple of Jesus's day, it was made from seventy-two panels of linen embroidered with twisted threads of purple, blue, and scarlet. The curtain was approximately sixty feet tall, thirty feet wide, four inches thick, and weighed so much that it took three hundred priests to manage it. Matthew (27:51) and Mark (15:38) indicated the veil was torn from top to bottom. An earthquake likely would have caused the curtain to split from the bottom to the top. This detail about the split in the curtain from top to bottom revealed God's action in tearing it. This tearing also revealed that access to God was changed. Prior to this splitting, only the high priest could enter the most holy place, and only once a year. With this splitting, access to God was made available through Jesus's death (Heb. 10:19-22).

Jesus called out with a loud voice (v. 46). Perhaps the reason Luke reported that Jesus used a loud voice was to counter detractors who said Jesus didn't know what He was saying.

Father, into your hands I entrust my spirit (v. 46). Either these words or those Jesus spoke as recorded by John ("It is finished;" 19:30) were His last words. This statement may be a reference to Psalm 31:5. Also it may have influenced Stephen's words at his death (Acts 7:59) and Peter's counsel in 1 Peter 4:19. Even on the cross, Jesus expressed His confidence in God the *Father* and His care.

Saying this, he breathed his last (v. 46). Following Jesus's final words, He died. His death occurred sometime after 3 p.m. and allowed time for Jesus's body to be buried before the Sabbath and Passover began at 6 p.m.

When the centurion saw what happened (v. 47). The centurion was the Roman commander of the soldiers who executed Jesus. On several occasions, the New Testament speaks positively about centurions (Matt. 8:5-13; Acts 10:22). One commentator explains the meaning of what happened in this way. *What happened* "involves such things as the darkness, Jesus' behavior against his enemies (23:34), his words to the criminal (23:43), his prayer to the Father (23:46), and his giving up of his life (23:46)."¹ Likely, all these actions as well as others the centurion observed caused him to praise God.

He began to glorify God (v. 47). To glorify God means to praise God for His actions, specifically the actions surrounding Jesus's crucifixion. The Greek form of the verb translated *began* implies a repeated or continuous action.

"This man really was righteous!" (v. 47). Luke's Gospel focuses on Jesus's righteousness and His innocence. Matthew's Gospel focuses on Jesus's fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies as the Messiah. Perhaps this was the reason Matthew recorded the centurion saying, "Truly this man was the Son of God!" (Matt. 27:54). However, since his praise was repeated or continuous (Luke 23:47), the centurion likely said both things. In Luke's account, the centurion observed actions that caused him to reflect on Jesus's innocence and righteousness. Not only did the centurion declare Jesus to be innocent, so did Pilate (three times: vv. 4,14,22), Herod Antipas (v. 15), and one of the criminals (v. 41).

When they saw what had taken place, went home (v. 48). The people present saw Jesus die. They knew it was over, so they went home to complete preparations for the Sabbath that would be observed beginning within a few hours.

Striking their chests (v. 48). This action reveals sadness and an expression of grief over a person's death. Perhaps some of these were a part of the three thousand whom Luke reported were saved about fifty days later on Pentecost (Acts 2:41).

But all who knew him (v. 49). This phrase likely refers to disciples who had come from Galilee, the Twelve (minus Judas), and Jesus's followers from the area around Jerusalem.

Including the women who had followed him from Galilee (v. 49). Throughout his Gospel, Luke made a point of mentioning women who had followed and supported Jesus. They also played important roles in Jesus's resurrection appearances as reported by Luke.

Stood at a distance, watching these things (v. 49). Luke separated the location of Jesus's followers from the crowds who apparently were closer to Jesus during His crucifixion. By His voluntary self-sacrifice on the cross, Jesus completed His mission of bringing salvation to all who would believe.

1. Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, vol. 24, "The New American Commentary," Vol. 24 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 596.