

# *Truth for Today*

## **The Bible Explained**

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## **Luke's Gospel cont'd**

### **Events at the Cross Chapter 23:26-43**

*[Please note: sections in blue type are not broadcast on every radio station.  
The English Standard Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]*

#### **Introduction**

Welcome to our second talk in the closing series on Luke's Gospel, "The events at the cross", Luke 23:26-43. The previous talk ended with Barabbas, a murderer, being released from prison and Jesus, an innocent man, being handed over to be crucified. Before proceeding further, I will just say that Scripture quotations will be from the English Standard Version unless otherwise stated.

#### **Simon a Cyrenian, v.26**

Three Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke mention Simon. In Mark we are told that he was the father of Alexander and Rufus. It may be that Rufus is the same person mentioned by Paul in Romans 16 and Alexander is mentioned in Acts 19. It would be good to think that, as a result of their father being compelled to bear the cross of Jesus, it had a positive impact on his children and they both trusted the Saviour. Let us read verse 26,

"And as they led him away, they seized one Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, and laid on him the cross, to carry it behind Jesus" (Luke 23:26).

When we read the Gospel narratives of the crucifixion, we do not fully appreciate the brutality that the Lord Jesus endured after being apprehended in the garden of Gethsemane. Isaiah 52:14 states,

"As many were astonished at you — his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the children of mankind."

The face and the body of the Lord Jesus was so battered and bloodied that Isaiah writes, that He looked no longer like a human being and as a consequence, His very strength was weakened. Therefore, the soldiers laid hands on Simon and made him carry the cross, following behind Jesus, to the hill called Calvary.

[Mrs A. R. Cousin \(1824-1906\) captures some of the horrendous treatment the Lord Jesus received both before and on the cross. We will quote four verses for our consideration.](#)

[O Christ, what burdens bowed Thy head!  
Our load was laid on Thee;  
Thou stoodest in the sinner's stead –  
To bear all ill for me.  
A victim led, Thy blood was shed;  
Now there's no load for me.](#)

Death and the curse were in our cup –  
O Christ, 'twas full for Thee!  
But Thou hast drained the last dark drop,  
'Tis empty now for me.  
That bitter cup – love drank it up;  
Left but the love for me.

Jehovah lifted up His rod –  
O Christ, it fell on Thee!  
Thou wast forsaken of Thy God;  
No distance now for me.  
Thy blood beneath that rod has flowed:  
Thy bruising healeth me.

The tempest's awful voice was heard,  
O Christ, it broke on Thee;  
Thy open bosom was my ward;  
It bore the storm for me.  
Thy form was scarred, Thy visage marred;  
Now cloudless peace for me.

### **The wailing women of Jerusalem, vv.27-31**

We now come to the crowd that followed the execution party. Let us read verses 27 – 31,

“And there followed him a great multitude of the people and of women who were mourning and lamenting for him. But turning to them Jesus said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For behold, the days are coming when they will say, ‘Blessed are the barren and the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!’ Then they will begin to say to the mountains, ‘Fall on us’, and to the hills, ‘Cover us.’ For if they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?” (Luke 23:27-31).

Luke writes that it was a great multitude of people and of women who came out of the city. The focus was upon the women who were mourning and lamenting the Lord. It is possible that some, if not all, of the women had witnessed the acts of healing that the Lord had done. However, the words “mourning” and “lamenting” indicate the kind of public grief often seen in some countries today where women, and sometimes men, give vent to their feeling with tears and beating of their heads and breasts at funerals. This has also been seen in this country, but it is usually expressed by the laying of flowers.

Amazingly the Lord Jesus takes up the occasion to speak to them, not about Himself but about events to come that will impact them in a very severe way. “Do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.” The Lord Jesus is indicating that extremely sad times are coming. These difficult times are stated in such a way that it would be better for women not to have the burden of children. To be barren and never to have nursed children after childbirth. This was a serious statement for the Lord to make as children are a blessing from God. This is highlighted in 1 Samuel 1:10-11, just one of many Scriptures, where Hannah prayed for a son, which states,

“She was deeply distressed and prayed to the LORD and wept bitterly. And she vowed a vow and said, “O LORD of hosts, if you will indeed look on the affliction of your servant and remember me and not forget your servant, but will give to your servant a son, then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life, and no razor shall touch his head.””

Also, it is stated in Psalm 127:3,

“Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward.”

Solomon in this psalm sees children as being a gift from God, something to be valued and treasured.

The Lord Jesus speaks of days to come when people “will begin to say to the mountains, ‘Fall on us’, and to the hills, ‘Cover us.’” We see from this that it would be preferable to die in this way than to experience the horrendous events the Lord is indicating that are coming upon Jerusalem. The Lord may well be referring to the siege of Jerusalem in 70A.D. by the Roman armies to put down a Jewish rebellion, the population was brought to the point of starvation that drove them to cannibalism. This had happened in the past and had been foretold in Deuteronomy 28:53-57.

However, the Lord may also have been thinking further into the future to the time when the church has been taken to heaven (1 Thessalonians 4) when judgments will fall on the whole earth, including the nation of Israel. In Revelation 6:16-17, similar words are used by the inhabitants of the world who want to hide from the wrath of the Lamb.

Finally, the Lord refers to a green tree and a dry tree. Let us remind ourselves of the verse 31,

“For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?”  
(Luke 23:31, AV).

The AV translation makes the contrast easier to see. The green tree is a tree which is full of life, with sap still moving through its stems and it is a picture of our Lord Jesus Christ as He was being led away to be crucified. In John’s Gospel 1:4 it states, “In Him was life.” This is contrasted with the dry tree and the Lord poses the question what will ‘they’ do to a dry and lifeless tree? Speaking of the nation of Israel. The ‘they’ no doubt referring to the Roman authority who was represented by the soldiers who were leading out the Lord Jesus to be crucified. So, whether we think of the Roman Empire in power in A.D.70, or the revived Roman Empire in power after the Lord has taken His church to heaven (1 Thessalonians 4), the Roman Empire is used to execute judgments in both situations.

### **Crucified with criminals, vv.32-33**

The next two verses, mention that the Lord Jesus was crucified along side two others, both criminals. The verses state,

“Two others, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. And when they came to the place that is called The Skull (Calvary), there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left”  
(Luke 23:32-33).

These two people were hardened criminals, they had no honest employment but preyed on others. Theirs was a life of crime and, as we will see later, one of them saw their punishment as a just reward for his crimes. Isaiah foretells this situation when he writes prophetically of the Lord Jesus that He was ‘numbered with the transgressors.’ Let us read the verse,

“Therefore, I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many and makes intercession for the transgressors” (Isaiah 53:12)..

R. C. Chapman's (1803-1902) hymn reminds us how we must appreciate the sacrifice at Calvary.

Oh, my Saviour crucified  
Near Thy cross would I abide,  
Gazing with adoring eye  
On Thy dying agony.

Jesus bruised and put to shame,  
Tells the glories of God's name;  
Holy judgment there I found,  
Grace did there o'er sin abound.

God is love I surely know,  
In the Saviour's depth of woe,  
In the Sinless, in God's sight,  
Sin is justly brought to light.

In His spotless soul's distress,  
I have learnt my guiltiness;  
Oh how vile my low estate,  
Since my ransom was so great!

Rent the veil that closed the way  
To my home of heavenly day,  
In the flesh of Christ the Lord,  
Ever be His name adored!

Yet in sight of Calvary,  
Contrite should my spirit be,  
Rest and holiness there find  
Fashioned like my Saviour's mind.

### **The first saying from the cross, v.34**

As we come to verse 34, we are now at the hill of Calvary, where the Lord and the two criminals have been nailed to their respective crosses. This verse contains two interesting statements. The first is,

“And Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.””

Here the Lord Jesus is making intercession for those who are crucifying Him. Isaiah 53:12 states this in a different way when he writes,

“Makes intercession for the transgressors.”

When we consider the horrendous mistreatment the Lord received from Jews, Herodians and the Roman soldiers we can only marvel at the gracious words coming from the Saviours lips, “Father forgive them”, fulfilling the words of Isaiah.

The second part of verse 34 involves the Lord's clothing,

“And they cast lots to divide his garments.”

This is found in Psalm 22:18 which states,

“They divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.”

Here are the Roman soldiers on execution duty claiming for themselves the garments of the condemned, this was probably what might be called today, ‘The perks of the job.’ Again, we have prophetic words about the Saviour from the psalm, as quoted above, which has much to say about the Lord’s mode of execution and what the soldiers probably claimed to be their rightful spoil from the condemned.

### **The hill of mockery, vv.35-37**

A great multitude of people had followed the execution party coming out of Jerusalem. Let us read the words from Luke’s account,

“And the people stood by, watching, but the rulers scoffed at him, saying, “He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!” The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine and saying, “If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!””

There was a mixture of response from this crowd: those who came to observe what was happening; others came to mock and sneer. And we find the soldiers joining in with the crowd including offering Jesus wine to drink. In the above words of the crowd, we see how totally the people of Jerusalem were rejecting their Messiah. No doubt the words of the soldiers were mocking Him as the ‘King of the Jews.’ For the soldiers this was a pathetic sight, what kind of king was this who had never fought a battle and was condemned as a criminal even though pronounced innocent by their governor, Pilate.

### **Pilate mocks the Jewish rulers, v.38**

All four Gospel’s must be read to see in full the mocking accusation of the Lord’s crime, that Pilate himself wrote. The charge, that it was placed over the head of Jesus for all to see, was written in the three languages relevant to the people of Jerusalem. Greek, the language of culture. Latin, the language of the conquering authority. Finally, Hebrew, the religious language of the Jews. This was done so that all who passed by would be able to read the inscription. Luke gives only one verse to the accusation which simply states,

“There was also an inscription over him, “This is the King of the Jews”” (Luke 23:38).

From other Gospels we know that what Pilate wrote infuriated the Jews, but Pilate would not change what he had written. Combining all Gospel inscriptions, we have “This is Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews.”

The man who came from the despised place of Nazareth, a town of no account in Galilee, combined with the words, ‘King of the Jews’ would infuriate the Jewish rulers, who would understand that it referred to their Messiah. Pilate was saying to them “You are crucifying your long-awaited ‘Deliverer and Saviour.’”

### **The criminals, vv.39-43**

We now come to the last few verses of our section under consideration. It is about the two criminals being crucified either side of the Lord Jesus. We will read these verses,

“One of the criminals who was hanged railed at him, saying, “Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!” But the other rebuked him, saying, “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.” And he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” And he said to him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise”” (Luke 23:39-43).

It is interesting to note that initially both the criminals railed on, spoke reproachfully, or blasphemed, the Lord Jesus, this being recorded in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark. However, Luke in his account of the crucifixion scene misses out the railing and commences where one of the criminals has had a change of mind and so only records the one who continues to speak reproachfully against the Lord Jesus. This criminal was motivated by selfishness, wanting to be released from being crucified. We might think that this was very understandable. It is his fellow partner in crime that rebukes him in a most interesting way. He gives witness to the fact that Jesus is God when he says, “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?” This criminal sees no problem in referring to Jesus as both God and man. At the same time he acknowledges that they were receiving the due reward for their deeds. Then again, he gives testimony to Jesus by saying “but this man has done nothing wrong.”

From what comes next in the verses we can appreciate that this criminal has accepted Jesus as his Lord. In the ESV translation it states Jesus but the King James or Authorised Version states,

“And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom” (Luke 23:42, AV).

“And no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except in the Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:3).

From the verse in Corinthians, we can see that there has been a clear work of the Holy Spirit in this man’s heart to turn him from being a blasphemer to someone who sees beyond the Cross to the Kingdom and who would like his Lord to remember him in that day.

The response from the Lord Jesus is most remarkable and gracious as He says,

“Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43).

Paradise is one of the terms used by the Jews as a place of blessedness for the soul and spirit of a person who has died and who was truly righteous in God’s sight, as opposed to the wicked who go to hell, a place of torments.

[Whether we have good days or bad days, the hymn by Miss A. L. Waring \(1820-1910\) vv.1-3 and E Cronin \(1800-82\) v.4 captures the hope of the believer that there is a sure place beside the Lord Jesus.](#)

In heavenly love abiding,  
No change my heart shall fear;  
And safe is such confiding,  
For nothing changes here;  
The storm may roar without me,  
My heart may low be laid,  
But God is round about me,  
And can I be dismayed?

Wherever He may guide me,  
No want shall turn me back;  
My Shepherd is beside me,  
And nothing can I lack;  
His wisdom ever waketh,  
His sight is never dim;  
He knows the way He taketh,  
And I will walk with Him.

Green pastures are before me,  
Which yet I have not seen;  
Bright skies will soon be o'er me,  
Where the dark clouds have been:  
My hope I cannot measure,  
My path to life is free,  
My Saviour has my treasure,  
And He will walk with me.

We'll see Thee soon, Lord Jesus,  
Amid the ransomed throng,  
Its glory, joy and beauty,  
Its never-ending song:  
Oh, day of wondrous promise,  
The Bridegroom and the Bride  
Are seen in glory ever,  
For ever satisfied!

### **What do these events mean for Christians?**

The way the world in general treated the Lord Jesus, represented by the religious leaders, the Herodians and the Roman authority, emphasises how the world is still capable of treating Christians. In the Lord's prayer in John 17:14 we are reminded how the Lord made known to His Father the character of the world,

"I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world" (John 17:14).

The Scriptures are our resource so that whatever happens should not take us by surprise. Unbelievers at any time and for no apparent reason can turn from being reasonable people to being those who are violently opposed to Christians. We know that such a change is due to Satan, who is the god of this world and can stir up men's hearts at any moment. Most of the time, in many countries, Christians may not see violent opposition. However, there are countries where opposition is always just under the surface and may blow up at any moment. However, like the repentant thief, who turned to the Saviour, our testimony as we live our lives can impact others which may draw them to the Lord.

Earlier I made mention of the first spoken words the Lord made from the cross, verse 34,

"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

There was a lot of ignorance among those that dealt so brutally with the Lord Jesus before He was taken away to be crucified. Some were wilfully ignorant as with the religious leaders of the nation of Israel, but with the Gentiles it was simply ignorance of the Scriptures. Yet the Lord pleads with His Father to forgive them because whether wilful or not they had no idea what they were really doing. This is a lesson for us that we should be marked by forgiveness towards those who would

seek to persecute and harm us. In saying this it might not be an easy thing to do, especially where that persecution involves physical violence and loss of property. It takes a lot of love to respond with forgiveness. But think of the Saviour's love, which was beyond measure, that it took Him to the Cross to redeem rebels and bring them to God.

The other thing that Christians will encounter from unbelievers is the mockery of their Saviour and Lord. This mockery comes in various forms: the misuse of the Lord's name, the misuse of the name God, the denial that there is a God, that Jesus was no more than a historical figure who lived 2000 years ago and has no relevance today, that the Lord is not the Creator, that there is no heaven or hell and therefore no accountability after death. No doubt there are many other forms of mockery but the above will be sufficient to show the attitude of the world in which we live and that it has not changed since our Lord was crucified.

Yet without the crucifixion there would be no salvation and no escape from the bondage that Satan has over the people of the world. The events of the Cross highlight the need to proclaim the message of the Gospel to bring people out of spiritual darkness into the glorious light and liberty of knowing their sins forgiven. Let us be thankful for those words of the Saviour, 'Father forgive them', as we have gained the blessing of Salvation. Let us also reach out to others in whatever way we can, that forgiveness may be gained and enjoyed by many more.

Thank you for listening to this Truth for Today talk in the final series of Luke's Gospel, talk number T1221, 'Events at the Cross.'

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