

Further up, Further in

Resources for Continued Study



LOOKOUT
MOUNTAIN
PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH

"THE CROSS, PART 2"

For individual study or discussion

In Luke 23:39-43, we learn that the Kingdom of God is open to all repentant believers. Encountering Christ can elicit one of two responses. Note the contrast between the two criminals. The one thief demands, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!" (v. 39), while the second thief acknowledges his sin and cries for mercy. As Jesus hangs on the cross between two criminals, one mocks him while the other asks for mercy. One asks to be taken down, and the other to be taken up.

Salvation callously missed and mocked (v. 39)

The first criminal callously misses and mocks the Savior, challenging Jesus (v. 39). His demand, as one commentator notes, reflects a fatal error in judgment: "When he tells Jesus, 'Save yourself and us!' he's talking about salvation from the physical agony of crucifixion. But he doesn't understand that it's precisely by staying on the cross and not saving himself that Jesus is able to save others from God's judgment, a fate far worse than physical death."¹

- In verse 39, the Greek word for *railed* can be translated, *blasphemed*.² Since his arrest, Jesus has been mocked and blasphemed. Read Ezekiel 35:12-15. How does God deal with those who revile his name?

Salvation truly seen and sought (vv. 40-42)

Conversely, the second criminal's response reveals a heart awakened by grace. He rebukes his companion, acknowledging their just condemnation and recognizing Christ's innocence. In humility he pleads "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom" (v. 42). As one pastor reflects, "His confession is an expression of trust, of hope beyond hope, that the Man dying next to him was more than a mere man, even if he didn't fully know what that meant. His closeness to Jesus, to Grace Incarnate, to God in the flesh, brought about his surprising and sudden confession. He knew himself to be a sinner of the worst sort. What's more, he knew that he was dying. Thus, he repents and flings all of his faith onto the shoulders of the One who was dying next to him. Little did he know that his desperate cry for pardon was the very thing for which Jesus was bleeding out."³

- Read Genesis 40:14, 1 Samuel 1:11, Nehemiah 5:19, Job 14:13 and Psalm 106:4. How does the penitent thief's request in verse 42 echo the plaintive cries of Old Testament figures who have gone before him?
- Martin Luther's *theology of the cross* asserts that faith in Christ and his finished work on the cross are the sole means for understanding salvation, whereas *theology of glory* places salvation within man's strength. Dr. Carl Trueman further illustrates Luther's dichotomy using the narrative of the two thieves: "The theology of glory says 'Christ, if you are the king, come down from your cross.' This is the first thief on the cross. The second thief says 'when you enter your kingdom, remember me.' The second is not thinking in human terms or theology of glory terms. He knows that death is no bar to entering the kingdom but Christ's death is the only way in. He is thinking in terms of the cross."⁴ Read Colossians 1:19-23. How does the penitent thief's plea underscore Paul's theology of the cross?

Salvation graciously given and bought (v. 43)

Even as he suffers on the cross, Jesus graciously offers salvation to the penitent thief. Despite his frailty, Jesus demonstrates the power to save. Note the upside-down Kingdom of God in action: Jesus' weakness is our strength, Jesus' suffering is our glory, Jesus' death is our victory, and Jesus' cross is our redemption.

- In 1 Corinthians 1:18-25, Paul states we are "being saved" by the power of God through the cross of Christ. The transformation of our inner lives takes place as we daily crucify our flesh and follow him. Read Galatians 5:24; 6:14 and Romans 6:5-11. How does one die daily to self in order to find new life in Christ?

DATE: April 06, 2025

SPEAKER: Brian/Wil

SERIES: Gospel of Luke

PASSAGE: Luke 23:39-43

RENEW: 31 Days of Prayer

DAY 31: For the release of Kingdom resource

PRAYER: Our Provider and Master, you tell us, "From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked." Gracious God, enable us to be good stewards of all your blessings. Help us to use our time, talents, and resources wisely and to your glory. We hear you warn us, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions." Father, forgive us for thinking that this life is about getting more stuff than our neighbors have. Our homes, cars, appliances, gadgets, and toys do not make life worth living—only you do. Lord, you free us in calling us to remember this: "Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." King Jesus, grant us joy in giving. Light a passion in our hearts for building up your body and providing for the work of your Kingdom. Immanuel, God with us, you remind us, "Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies." Understanding that our lives are not our own, we cannot save ourselves and have been bought with your precious blood; may we live not for ourselves but for you alone. Lord Jesus, you yourself said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." We ask and we beg, for your honor and the advancement of your Kingdom, reorient our life direction from being getters to being givers, so that we might know the joy of your blessed life and spread the joy on the mountain, in the city, and throughout the world. We pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

PRAY FOR HOME MISSIONS

Chattanooga Young Life & Young Life Urban, supported partner ministry

PRAY FOR WORLD MISSIONS

Christ Church, Leeds, supported missions partners

¹ Witmer, Stephen. Jesus Between the Criminals. April 18, 2014. Desiring God.org. <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/jesus-between-the-criminals>

² https://biblehub.com/greek/ebblasphe_mei_987.htm

³ Gray, Bradley. Remembered and Redeemed. January 31, 2023. 1517.org. <https://www.1517.org/articles/remembered-and-redeemed>

⁴ Trueman, Carl. 2011 Academy Conference, Session 5. January 23, 2011. <https://www.ligonier.org/posts/2011-academy-conference-session-5-carl-trueman>