

Rescue – “What did the Cross achieve?”

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[0 : 00] children, you are welcome to go out to the hall and you can enjoy a holiday junior church all together. For the rest of us, we can turn in God's word to the gospel of Luke chapter 23, and we are going to read from verse 26 to 49.

And the words will be up on our screen if you don't have a copy of the Bible on your phone or in paper form.

Luke chapter 23, let's hear the word of God. As the soldiers led him away, they seized Simon from Cyrene, who was on his way in from the country, and put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus. A large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wailed for him. Jesus turned and said to them, Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me. Weep for yourselves and for your children.

For the time will come when you will say, Bless to the childless women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed. Then they will say to the mountains, Fall on us, and to the hills, cover us. For if people do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?

Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there along with the criminals, one on his right, the other on his left. Jesus said, Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.

[1 : 41] And they divided up his clothes by casting lots. The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, He saved others. Let him save himself, if he is God's Messiah, the chosen one. The soldiers also came up and mocked him.

They offered him wine vinegar and said, If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself. There was a written notice above him which read, This is the king of the Jews. One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him, Aren't you the Messiah?

Save yourself on us. But the other criminal rebuked him. Don't you fear God, he said, since you are under the same sentence. We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong. Then he said, Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom. Jesus answered him, Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.

It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, for the sun stopped shining, and the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Jesus called out with a loud voice, Father, into your hands I commit my spirit. When he had said this, he breathed his last.

The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, Surely this was a righteous man. When all the people who had gathered to witness this sight saw what took place, they beat their breasts and went away. But all those who knew him, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance watching these things. Amen. And before we turn back to look at that section of God's Word, we're going to sing two sections of Psalm 22. And again, like Isaiah 53, we're going to hear prophecies of the sufferings of the Lord Jesus as Savior. So let's stand and let's sing from Psalm 22.

[3 : 41] Psalm 22. Psalm 22. Psalm 22. Psalm 22. Psalm 22. Psalm 22.

Psalm 22. Psalm 22. Psalm 22. Psalm 22. Psalm 22. .

. throw the dice to get my coat, among themselves my clothes they share.

Come quickly, rescue me, my strength, to not be far from me, O Lord.

Save me from power of evil docks, my precious life from cruel sword.

[5 : 16] Now to my brothers I'll declare the praises of your glorious name.

Within their gathering I will stand, and your renown I will proclaim.

Praise Him, all you that fear the Lord. Give honor to Him, Jacob's grace.

All Israel's children, worship Him. Bow down with awe before His face.

Amen. So as we continue to think about the journey to Easter, we come to the cross.

[6 : 29] Our theme is rescue. Our question is what did the cross achieve? I mentioned earlier this little booklet, Freed But At A Price.

And it tells us of a story that some of us may remember. A few days before Easter in 2018, in the south of France, there was a hostage situation.

And there was this gendarme, this police officer by the name of Arnold Beltram, who offered to take the place of the person who was held hostage, so that negotiations could continue, so that the women might be spared.

Well, Arnold was shot and killed during that hostage situation. And a number of days later, as the lady, the hostage Julie, was being interviewed, she said simply, he gave his life for me.

He was killed so I could live. And in a very real sense, that takes us to the heart of the very first Easter. It takes us to a world held hostage by the dark side of our nature, by our sin.

[7 : 45] And where we have no hope by ourselves of escape, and into that situation came Jesus. And Jesus' mission, as he described it himself, was to give his life as a ransom for many.

A picture of a slave with no chance of escape, or indeed, of a hostage being held ransom. And the message of this first Easter is that if we believe in Jesus and what he has done on the cross, then we also can say, he died for me, so I can truly live.

So as we continue to think with Luke about this journey to the cross, the journey to Jesus' death, we're going to see together a number of different events, different interactions and conversations that are going to reveal to us both the work of Christ and the heart of Christ.

Helping us to see and to consider his loving rescue. And again, as we do that, let's be asking ourselves the question, what impact will this have on our lives as we think about what Jesus has done?

Let's begin with the theme of substitution and with this man, Simon. So verse 26, we're introduced to him. We're told as the soldiers led Jesus away, they seized Simon and they put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus.

[9 : 20] So behind this event lies the fact that Jesus is now in a severely weakened physical state, subject to multiple beatings, to cruelty and torture at the hands of the soldiers.

And so he is unable any longer to carry his own cross. So this man, Simon, from North Africa, from Libya, is commanded then to carry the cross of Jesus to the place of crucifixion.

And now we don't know very much about this man, Simon, but Mark tells us, Mark 15 verse 21, that he was the father of Alexander and Rufus. And that can seem kind of an incidental detail, but it also points to the fact that Alexander, Rufus, Simon, stand as early eyewitnesses to Jesus and to his death on the cross.

And they are included so that people could go and ask questions of them when Mark's gospel was written some 30 years or so after the death of Jesus.

Well, here is Simon, and he's been commanded to act as a substitute. He is carrying Jesus' cross to the place of crucifixion.

[10 : 38] But if we pan back in the story just a little bit, we recognize that in a far greater sense, Jesus on this journey is functioning as a substitute for Simon. And not just for Simon, but for anyone who will believe in him.

Now, why can we say that? Because here is Jesus, the Son of God, who has become fully human. Here is Jesus, he is sinless, and he is perfect. But where is Jesus going?

He's going to the place of the cross so that he would bear the burden of sin, and he would face the penalty for sin, that punishment, that penalty that you and I should deserve.

And so the cross becomes God's great exchange. As we look to the cross, what are we seeing?

We're seeing Jesus, the God-man, experiencing what we deserve. Separation from God, punishment from God.

[11 : 38] And he experiences that why? So that we might enjoy what he deserves. Eternal life. And so this theme of substitution is central to the good news of the cross, and it's central to the Christian faith.

To think about it another way, let me read for us verse 44 again. It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, for the sun stopped shining.

This darkness at midday isn't natural, it's supernatural, it's an act of God. And what's happening there? On one hand, Jesus is entering the dark clouds of our human wickedness as he takes sin on himself.

But he's also going into that darkness facing the penalty that sin deserves. In the Old Testament, darkness is often an image of the judgment of God. So here is Jesus, because he is bearing our sin, he is also bearing the punishment for sin.

And he's going into the darkness as a substitute for all who will trust in him. It becomes clear in the cost of salvation that there is only one way to be saved.

[12 : 55] There's only one way to forgiveness, otherwise this would never happen to Jesus. And here, as we think about this theme of substitution, we're being invited to recognize the heart of Jesus.

As he says to a world held hostage by sin and unbelief, I will die so that you can live and live eternally.

But the cross speaks to us of more than just substitution. It also speaks to us of mercy. Mercy in the place of judgment.

And to help us to see that, I want us to think about this conversation between Jesus and the women in verses 27 to 31. Many of us perhaps are familiar with the stage play Evita and the famous song, Don't Cry For Me, Argentina.

Well, here is Jesus turning to this crowd, following after him's, Don't weep for me, women of Jerusalem. And we have to ask, why not?

[13 : 56] Why should they not weep for Jesus? Let's read again verse 27. A large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wailed for him.

So we know in that culture, public mourning was a thing. Here is a group of women who are showing sympathy towards Jesus in his suffering. But Jesus responds, Do not weep for me.

Weep for yourselves and for your children. Jesus is walking to his death and he knows it. And yet he says to them, Your weeping is misplaced.

Don't weep for me. Weep for yourselves and for your children. Now why can he say that? Why would he say that? Let me suggest three answers for us.

One, it's Friday. It's Good Friday. But Jesus knows Sunday is coming. Jesus knows in the plan of God, yes, he will die.

[14 : 57] But he will also rise in victory. And so he says, Do not weep. This is not the end of my story. He says, Don't weep for me.

Weep for yourselves. Because he knows another thing is coming. He knows future judgment is coming. That's why there's that language in 29 and 30. The time will come when you will say, Blessed are the childless women.

Then they will say to the mountains, Fall on us and to the hills cover us. It's language that speaks of the coming judgment of God. Last week we thought about the fact that Jesus came to the city of Jerusalem and he wept over it because they didn't recognize in his coming, is God's coming?

Is God's Savior come for them? They rejected him. And so judgment would come. And so here is Jesus giving one last lament for the city, for those who would turn their back on him.

And say, Don't weep for me. Weep for yourselves. Because judgment is coming because of unbelief. But he also says, Don't weep for me. Weep for yourselves. Because what Jesus doesn't want is, He doesn't want their sympathy.

[16 : 10] He wants their faith. He doesn't want tears of sympathy. He wants tears of repentance. He wants them to have a change of heart and a change of mind.

To recognize he's not just another figure suffering in agony and humiliation, but he is the Son of God who has come deliberately to save them.

And so he invites them to cry tears of repentance and to trust in him. And again, here is the mercy of Jesus on display for us.

Experiencing a personal agony that we can only begin to imagine. But he doesn't turn inward to focus on his own suffering.

Rather, he turns outward on the need for mercy for others. It's the point of the proverb in verse 31, I think. For if people do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?

[17 : 10] Jesus is saying, If this, if the cross is going to happen to me, how much worse will be what happens to the city who rejects me? And so he offers a loving warning.

Judgment is coming. Seek mercy. When we think about the story of our booklet, that story of the hostage situation in France, we find ourselves with so much admiration, don't we, for the heroic acts of bravery that we hear about and read about.

Where compassion leads to action. It's what we see with Jesus. It is Jesus, the Son of God, with his heart beating, full of mercy and love, and it leads him to act, willing to come to be one of us, willing to suffer the judgment of God on our behalf, willing to display the mercy of God to the world, so that you and I don't have to face this future judgment that Jesus anticipates and promises, so that we might know mercy.

And so when we think about the cross, doesn't it call us to admire Jesus in his loving sacrifice, to delight in him that he would love me and give himself for me, but not just to admire him from a distance, also to trust him personally.

It makes us ask the question, will I weep over my own sin? Will I have true faith and find mercy from Jesus?

[18 : 58] That's not all that the cross achieves for us. We can move to verses 32 to 34 and think about forgiveness.

And here we find Jesus among his enemies. We discover in verse 32 that two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed.

And when they came to the place called the skull, they crucified him there. And as he is crucified, Jesus said, Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.

The last few days of Jesus' life has seen this conspiracy of evil gather around Jewish leaders and Roman officials looking to execute Jesus.

And now they have achieved their goal. Here is Jesus hanging on the cross in public shame. But what Jesus understands, that's why Jesus came, is that this fulfills Scripture.

[20 : 02] This fulfills the plan of God. That's why we began our service in Isaiah 53. That's why we sang Psalm 22. Isaiah 53, verse 5, he was pierced for our transgressions.

Verse 12, he was numbered among the transgressors. Psalm 22, verse 18, they divided my clothes among them. The Old Testament anticipates the work of God's anointed king, that he would be a suffering servant.

And so here is Jesus, now being nailed to the cross. And even now we see his mission of mercy continues. His blood flows and prayer flows.

As he says, Father, forgive them for they don't know what they are doing. When we think about the ethics of Jesus, we think about the famous sermon on the mount.

Perhaps one of the most challenging statements Jesus made is when he called his followers to love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. Matthew 5, 44.

[21 : 13] What do we see in Jesus? We see in Jesus one who practiced what he preached. He taught with authority and he lived it out. He was concerned for these ignorant Jews.

They thought they were getting rid of a false Messiah. For these ignorant Romans who were executing him, thinking this was just all in a day's work, not recognizing the significance of the one that was hanging on the cross.

And so he prays for forgiveness. You can look in history books and you can find records of crucifixions because Rome used crucifixion a lot as a show of force and to sort of put down uprisings.

And those records are ugly and violent scenes. You will find records of people hung on the cross cursing those who are killing them and mocking them and as they die they're giving as good as they get.

But not Jesus. That's not his way. He prays for forgiveness as he is providing forgiveness. And this beautiful prayer is a prayer that stretches across space and time.

[22 : 35] Perhaps we can think of his half-brothers. Those half-brothers who thought that Jesus was crazy, frankly, for his claims. But when Jesus appeared to them risen from the dead they became followers.

Their sins were forgiven. They didn't know what they were doing. when you think about Saul who we know as Paul the great persecutor of the early church hated of Jesus wanted to destroy the church when the risen Jesus appears to him what happens?

His sin also is forgiven. He didn't know what he was doing in rejecting Jesus. And you know this prayer is a prayer that's answered in the heart and life of everyone who is a Christian who is a follower of Jesus.

Our sin is forgiven. Our ignorant rejection of Jesus in our past is forgiven. And this is a prayer that gives each of us hope if we're not followers of Jesus.

As we see again the heart of mercy that Jesus on the cross would pray for forgiveness. This isn't just for those people back then. this mercy and forgiveness is available for you and for me today.

[23 : 53] If we see our need of sins being forgiven and if we trust Jesus and his work for salvation then this prayer will be answered in your life too.

What else does the cross achieve as we consider this story? Let's think about salvation as we think about the thief on the cross.

So verse 35 to 43. But again if we go back to our hostage situation in the south of France this man Arnold he knew in the way that only people in the line of fire can know I can only save this hostage by not saving myself.

I need to put myself in the place of danger in order to give safety and salvation to another. It's one of those wonderful stories of courage and sacrifice.

Sometimes we hear those stories of parental love or we hear it in the context of war at one sacrificing themselves willingly for the sake of another and this is what we have in Jesus he knows there is no other way but we recognize as we read our text that the enemies of Jesus are blind to this truth.

[25 : 10] Look at verse 35 here are the Jewish rulers who sneer at him they said he saved others let him save himself if he's God's Messiah the chosen one verse 36 the soldiers they mock him if you are the king of the Jews save yourself one of the criminals hanging on a cross hurled insults at Jesus aren't you the Messiah save yourself and us they are blind to this truth that the human sin problem is so desperate that we are so helpless in and of ourselves we cannot save ourselves we cannot escape the darkness that separates us from God and makes us liable to the judgment of God that we can only be saved from the outside we cannot make our way up to God we need God to come down to us as he's done in the Lord Jesus who saves by the way of sacrifice and so we have this powerful reminder whenever we think about the cross that it saves us from sin but we're also reminded in

Luke's gospel of what we are saved for and again Luke records and other gospel writers record something that happens in the temple as Jesus is dying so verse 45 after we discover that the sun stopped shining we hear this and the curtain of the temple was torn in two so within the temple there was this location in the temple called the Holy of Holies the place where God was seen to dwell and it was separated from the rest by this huge curtain as thick as a man's hand it was a great big no entry sign saying that a holy God cannot be with sinful people or there would be destruction for people but as Jesus dies and as sin is removed what happens the barriers is torn into again another work of

God saying to us in the death of Jesus the way is open to know God personally to come into God's presence presence and all because Jesus endured the cross and took the darkness but back to our events here and back to this thief on the cross verse 40 we thought the last time about Zacchaeus a very unlikely candidate for salvation well here is one even less likely but what does he see when others are blind the other criminal rebuked him don't you fear God he said since you are under the same sentence so he's got this sense of fear this awe this reverence I should be here but Jesus he's on the cross and this thief has so much to teach us it can teach us what we might call the gospel

ABCs how to respond to the work of Jesus the first thing that he teaches us is the importance of admitting our guilt so look at verse 41 he says we are punished justly for we are getting what we deserve he's not blame shifting he's not downplaying what he has done rather he acknowledges I deserve to be punished and for us to come to know Jesus as Lord we need to apply this to our own sin and to admit our guilt that we have on a daily basis treated God as insignificant that we have regarded him as having little worth that though he is our creator we have chosen to reject his rule we have sinned against him in thought and word and in deed and we need to admit that but we don't just stop there notice that this criminal he doesn't just admit guilt he also believes who

Jesus is there's wonderful words in verse 41 and 42 he says of Jesus this man has done nothing wrong and then he said Jesus remember me when you come into your kingdom this man has done nothing wrong this man is sinless and we need to recognize as we look at Jesus he's not just one of us he is the sinless son of God and notice too that as Jesus is about to die this criminal recognizes Jesus is at the same time about to enter into his kingdom so this thief on the cross knows Jesus is God's eternal king and his only hope of salvation and so the Christian faith requires us to believe in who Jesus is but again we don't just stop there believing certain truths about Jesus we need to come to him come to him for rescue so we find when the thief says remember me

[30 : 35] Jesus when you come into your kingdom not remember me Jesus act for me Jesus receive me Jesus as the king will you grant me eternal life it's a remarkable scene here is one dying man turning to another and says save me here is a cry of faith and if his words are beautiful then so too are the words of Jesus let's think of the response of Jesus and this response in verse 43 really stands as the basis for Christian hope because we can discover a few things about salvation first of all we can discover that when our faith looks to Jesus salvation is certain Jesus answered him truly I tell you today you will be with me in paradise here is

Jesus speaking with the authority of God come on the mission of God as the son of God as God King and he declares salvation will be accomplished at the cross and if you're trusting me you will be with me salvation is certain when we're trusting in Jesus we also discover that salvation is personal notice that Jesus said truly I tell you today you'll be with me now there's the goal of salvation to be with Jesus Jesus in this sense goes ahead of this criminal Jesus is the first of the three to die and he goes ahead to prepare the way to receive this man into the kingdom just as Jesus had said to his disciples he spoke about heaven as his father's house said in my father's house there are many rooms and I'm going there to prepare a place for you and if

I go I'll also come back and take you to be with me that you may be where I am that salvation to be in the presence of Jesus and his people in a world made perfect with sin removed for all eternity we also get an understanding that salvation is eternal when we think about this word paradise a very rich word paradise it's actually a Persian word meaning a garden or a park and perhaps as we think about that we go back to the very first garden the garden of God the garden of Eden in Genesis 1 and 2 and what do we find was the reality of the garden of Eden there's God's people Adam and Eve they're living in God's place and they're enjoying God's presence and that is salvation God's people in God's perfect place enjoying his perfect presence forever and the last thing to recognize about this salvation and it's so important for us to see that salvation comes by grace could this thief on the cross earn his salvation did he have a chance to turn over a new leaf and do some good deeds did he have a chance to do some great religious activity no he only had a few short hours left to live and that reminds us that he is saved by grace through faith it's free grace the father bearing the cost of salvation and sending his son his free grace and the son being willing to go to the cross to die in our place for our sins it's a gift to receive by faith just as this man couldn't do anything to earn it neither can neither do we it's free grace what does the cross achieve it achieves our freedom at a price as

I was reminding myself of the story of Arnold Beltram I found myself wondering I wonder how this lady Julie I wonder how it impacts her life four years on I wonder if that's a daily reminder that she's here because of the sacrifice of another or is that something that falls to the back of one's mind as you need to get on with the reality of life don't know the answer to that one and in a sense it's not really that important for us but when it comes to the loving rescue of Jesus it's hugely important when it comes to his willingness to trade places with us to die so that we might live how we respond to that has eternal and lasting significance one final observation to make in verse 46 as Jesus dies he dies as an innocent sufferer entrusting himself to God as he prays father into your hands

I commit my spirit and they notice the centurion so the Roman soldier seeing what had happened praised God and said surely this was a righteous man while others were blind to the reality this Roman executioner he sees he praises he believes here is Jesus a man full of mercy here is Jesus a man who gives forgiveness here is a man who has died to secure salvation and so he praises God as he considered the cross what about you and me today as we have considered the cross as we considered the loving sacrifice of Jesus the son of man who came to give his life as a ransom for many does it cause us to worship to give us a profound sense of gratitude does it transform our hearts and our lives is this a gift that we have received have we come to that place where we've admitted our guilt where we believe that

[37:15] Jesus is the son of God and he's the saviour have we come to him because if we do we have this promise that we'll enjoy life with him now and for all eternity in the paradise of heaven let's pray together lord our god as we have considered the cross of the lord jesus and the price he paid to secure salvation we pray that you would give us the eyes of faith to see like that thief on the cross to recognize jesus as the sinless one to recognize him as one with an eternal kingdom to recognize him as the one who came to save help us to admit our sin and our guilt help us to believe in him so that we would come to him in faith lord we pray that you'd help us to see just like that

Roman centurion so that our response to the cross us and we'd be one of heartfelt praise that we would recognize jesus as the truly righteous one suffering and dying in our place so that his righteousness might be given to us so that we might have access to know and enjoy life with you our god lord we thank you for this time of year we thank you for easter and for the opportunity it gives to us to share with family and friends and with our wider community the good news of what we believe and so lord we pray that you would be at work up and down this country and indeed through the world as your people take different opportunities to introduce and to invite we pray for a real openness we pray for a work of god in the hearts of men and women and boys and girls causing many to see and to believe and to have deep and lasting joy and lord we pray especially once again for our children and for our young people lord as we have been asked to pray for our youth camps we thank you for them for the friendship for the bible teaching for the fellowship that they provide lord we ask that where there are still important vacancies to be filled on teams that you would bring just the right people to come along and we pray that every camp would be filled and that there be great times of fun and learning from your word together lord we also give you thanks for the edinburgh youth group and its work over the last few months thank you for every opportunity that there is for discipleship to take place in our junior church and in our bible class lord we do pray that you would give the gift of faith and endurance and hope and love to our young people and indeed as we think across our nation lord we recognize that there are so many competing influences so many challenges and temptations but lord we pray that you would preserve and we pray that you would draw many to yourself lord we also continue to pray for the situation in ukraine as we hear of fresh horrors unfolding as we see a lack of mercy lord we pray against wicked oppression lord we pray that you would humble and we pray that you would stay the hands of wicked men lord we ask that you would show mercy and we pray today for those who are living with great fear for those who are under attack and lord we thank you for those who are survivors and we pray that there would be many more lord we pray for the refugee crisis emerging from there and we ask that there would be the ability from nations and from churches to meet the multiple needs that there are lord open our hearts to make us generous and open our hearts to make us generous in praying for ukraine for russia for the nations round about lord that your peace would break out that the good news of the lord jesus would have transforming

power from government level all the way down to those who are most weak and vulnerable in society lord we pray this so that you would be glorified and in jesus name amen