

A Parody, A Regicide, and A Promise

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[0:00] Amen. Yes, he is. Amen. And we're going to be in Luke 23. We've been going through the Gospel of Luke, and this is our last journey through the Gospel this morning. We're going to be in chapter 23, beginning in verse 35.

Actually, I'm going to read for you verse 32 to 34, because I think it sets our Gospel passage in order. And that's going to be found on page 1051. So I invite you to open your Bible and follow along to make sure that I'm not making anything up.

So page 1051 in your pew Bible. And I'm going to read verse 32 to 34. And when they came to the place that is called the skull, there they crucified him and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left.

And Jesus said, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do, and they cast lots to divide his garments.

So Christ the King Sunday, as I said, marks the end of our liturgical year and the beginning of the season of Advent and a new church year. It also marks the end of our time in the Gospel of Luke.

[1:35] But you have to probably admit that it seems anticlimactic to have, as a Gospel reading, this account of the event of Jesus' crucifixion on Christ the King Sunday.

On the day the church remembers that Jesus is indeed the King of the universe, because we have, as our Gospel reading, the account of his death. Really, what we have before us is a regicide.

You know what a regicide is? It's the act of killing a king. And this is an account of a regicide. Now, this story that we have before us was meant to be a cruel joke.

These people, we're told, stood by, watching. But the rulers, these people stood by, watching. But the rulers, scoffed. To scoff is to lie in derision.

To mock. They scoffed at him. Up there on the cross. The very picture and reality of a crucified king, to these people, is an oxymoron.

[2:46] You know what an oxymoron is? This is something that doesn't, that doesn't, it's a contradiction. It's the contradiction of the highest order. Here you say you're a king.

But here you still are on a cross. What a gross contradiction. And it is, and they recognize the contradiction in Jesus' day. It's not, it's not for, to those people in Jesus' day, it's not that kings don't die.

They would have known, in Jesus' day, that to be a king is to ever be in danger of being killed.

Someone else wants to usurp your position and your authority.

But kings were not killed in this manner. Kings might die in coups, in rebellions, in battle, by assassination, by a family member who wants to become king, by a rival family.

All of these ways are ways that people who are kings and queens die. Even they might die by execution sometimes. We have a few cases of kings who have died by execution.

[3:51] But they are afforded, even if it is an execution, they are afforded a dignified death. A death on the cross is as far away from dignified and dignity as you can find.

Nothing about the crucifixion is dignified. It was a manner of death that was reserved for the worst, and I mean the worst, criminals in the Roman Empire.

It was so sinful a means of death that no matter the offense that you may commit as a Roman citizen, you cannot be crucified. A Roman citizen must not and cannot be crucified.

It's too shameful. Any death but the death of a crucifixion. But here we have Jesus of Nazareth, Son of God, Ancient of Days, cursed and hanged on a crucifix tree.

So you can see to these people the derision, the laughing from all sides. They look at Jesus and they say to themselves, What kind of king dies on a cross?

[5:08] The Jewish rulers of the temple, the Roman soldiers, the crowd looking on, even one of the two criminals. In fact, actually, Matthew tells us that in the beginning, it was both criminals that were laughing and mocking him.

And these two criminals were especially hung with Jesus, hung with Jesus to intensify the joke, Here is the king hanging with common criminals.

They mocked him. It's partly because they were scandalized by the cross itself. To the crowd, to the rulers, they thought they've won.

Well, this is the guy who claims to be the Messiah of God. He cannot be. Everybody must see now that he's not who he says he is because he's hanging on the cross. And to probably the crowd, any claim of kingship or messiahship made by Jesus, to the crowd now is nullified by the manner of his death.

The rulers said to him, If you are the Christ of God, look at the words they're using. If you are the Christ of God, if you are the chosen one, save yourself.

[6:26] They said, If he is the Christ of God, if he is the chosen one, let him save himself, they say to themselves. And in fact, what they're saying in those words were, See?

We were right all along. See for yourself. How can he be God's anointed if he's hanging on the cross? Luke tells us that in scoffing at Jesus, it's an allusion to the messianic psalm of Psalm 22, which says, Everyone who sees me, mocks me, they sneer, and shake their heads.

This is what's happening to Jesus. Jesus here is stripped of his humanity. He is nothing more than a worm to be derided and scorned at by evil doers.

And it's not only the rulers of the temple, the Jewish rulers, it's also the Roman soldiers who joined in in mocking Jesus. They say, If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.

That's also in the fulfillment of Psalm 69, verse 21, which says, They gave me gall for my food, and for my thirst, they gave me vinegar to drink.

[7:46] And that's exactly what the soldiers did. In their parody, in their derision, they offered Jesus sour wine. It was all to them a joke.

It's not offered to him to quench his thirst. It was to say, Well, kings are meant to feast on the best food and drink the choicest wine. So, to them, in an absurd parody, they offered Jesus sour wine. They supposed fake wine for a fake king. What the Roman authority is communicating through the very act of crucifixion is that they are the true power that all must submit to.

That's why crucifixion is not always, always a public act. No one gets crucified in a dungeon. It's always in public, so everyone can see it.

So, it can be an example to the might of Rome, the fact that Rome cannot be questioned. No one can stand up against Rome.

[8:55] And so, this was meant to send a message. And it's also often the practice of the Roman power to place a placard or like a sign above the condemned, the person who was crucified, to signify his crime.

And the particular crime of Jesus, in their eyes, in the eyes of the Romans, at least that's what they accused him of, is that he claimed to be king. So, they wrote the inscription, this is the king of the Jews.

It was meant to be another joke by Pilate in doing that. It was meant to be a joke on Jesus and also a joke on the Jews themselves. And it's also a declaration by the Romans, we are unrivaled and we are unquestioned.

We cannot be questioned in our power and our authority. And they're saying, they're saying to the people, they're saying to the Jews, here is your king. Here is what happens to all who refuse to bend the knee to the empire.

The Jewish rulers, seeing this, were shamed by the inscription. They protested it, but they could do nothing about it. After all, they were looking, they themselves, the Jewish rulers, were looking and they were hoping for a king.

[10:18] They were looking and hoping for a king who would deliver them from Roman oppression. But they rejected Jesus as that king. No thank you, they say to Jesus.

A king on a cross? Not my king, they say. And the last marker, the last copper in this story, is one of the criminals that was hanged with Jesus.

Now, you can imagine that this criminal has heard the views of the religious leaders. They've marked him. He's heard the views of the state authority represented by the Roman soldiers.

And he says to Jesus also, well, are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us. Now, you must note that this is not a request for salvation by this criminal.

It was a mockery. It's him mocking Jesus along with the rest of them. And it's the same lie in those three words that runs through all of them, all the three versions of mockery.

[11:30] Do you see it? All three mockery were calls for Jesus to save himself. The rulers in their hypocrisy admitted that Jesus had saved others in the past.

And so they call on him to save himself. The soldiers said to him, if you are indeed king, exercise your royal power and save yourself. The thief next to him said, if you are the Christ, save yourself, then save us.

The cry all along by all three mockers, groups of mockers, were for Jesus to save himself, to exercise his authority and his power to deliver himself from shame and humiliation of the cross. And where else have we heard that before in Luke? Where else in Jesus' earthly life and messianic mission has he been asked, even tempted, to save himself?

Anyone? In the wilderness. In the desert. Isn't that the very words of Satan to Jesus in the wilderness? After his 40 days of fasting and prayer?

[12:47] Yes. The Jewish rulers here and the soldiers and one of the criminals, all they've done is join their voices with the serpent's voice.

In their mockery of Jesus, they've denied Jesus as the chosen one of God. They've denied him as the king of the universe and they've sided with their very words with the son of perdition.

They've condemned themselves. They condemned themselves to hell and they share by their very words of mockery in the condemnation and the eternal damnation reserved for the devil and his angels.

Here is the call of Satan. Save yourself, Jesus. And that's the tragedy of this whole scene, isn't it? The same tragedy, it's the same tragedy of the world around us. It's, this scene is rich in irony in that all these three groups of mockers kept repeating the words, save yourself to Jesus.

[13:56] It's because to them, his suffering and death says, he cannot be the divinely chosen one of God. They looked at Jesus' suffering, they looked at the manner of his shame, the manner of his humiliation and they said, he cannot be the Messiah, he cannot be a king.

Yet Luke wants us, wants us to see that by the very nature of his suffering, by the very fact of his death on the cross, he is the chosen one of God.

He is the savior of mankind. He is the king. Precisely because he chose not to save himself, in order to save us.

That's the tragedy and the irony of the Christ, save yourself, save yourself. If Jesus were to save himself on that cross, then there is no salvation for the rest of us, for all of mankind.

That's why Luke makes the allusions to the Messianic Psalms and the fulfillment of the prophecy about the suffering servant of God. This chosen one of God who becomes a substitute.

[15:14] He's the one on the cross. He does have power, mind you. He does have power to save himself. But he willingly, he willingly went as a lamb to the slaughter so that all our sins may be laid on him.

He refused to save himself so that you and I can be saved. But the tragedy is that the crowd couldn't and didn't see that.

And the tragedy is that the world God doesn't see that. All they saw was the shame, the weakness, and the humiliation of the cross.

But there is one person in this story, there is one person in this story who was given, I think, by God himself, hides to see and hears to hear.

And this person, upon seeing and upon hearing, he asked the only question worth asking. Let's look with me in verse 40.

[16:28] after the one criminal had mocked Jesus, the other criminal 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. it's as if this other criminal, seeing the mockery of Jesus from all sides, seeing Jesus ask his father to forgive his enemies, for they do not know what they do, seeing the apparent and obvious innocence of this man on the middle cross, recognizing his vicarious death, that his death was on behalf of others, this one criminal rightly interprets what is going on.

And that's why Luke focuses our attention on him. He says, do you not fear God? That's precisely the problem, isn't it? The Bible says the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom. and that's the problem. There is no fear of God before the highs of all these people. And perhaps we might ask the same question of ourselves and of those who would not look to Jesus as their Lord and King.

Do you not fear God? You are under the same sentence of condemnation and you are under that sentence of condemnation justly because of your sins, because of your guilt.

[18:27] You are receiving the duly word of your deed. But this Jesus, this chosen one of God has done nothing wrong.

Do you see that? That we are under the condemnation of death. And that condemnation is both physically and spiritually. The Roman crucifixion, as awful as it is, as awful as it is, pales in comparison to the Lord of life, who you must answer to at the end of your days.

He has the power to kill the body and the soul. And you are under his condemnation. the one thief that is mocking Jesus, the one criminal that is mocking Jesus, has forgotten that he is under the same gallows of death that Jesus is in.

He mocks God's anointed one. He, along with the rulers and along with the soldiers shake their fist at God's majesty.

Even at the point of death, he shakes his fist at the only means of salvation for him. What a tragedy. But how many times I ask you, is this same tragedy played out again and again and again in our world?

[20:05] How many men and women, thousands and thousands, go to their death every day rejecting the word of life, the gospel of salvation?

Now, the difference between Jesus and the criminals is that, as one of the criminals attested to, they are guilty. They're guilty on both counts, both before the earthly judge and before the heavenly judge.

They are guilty. But Jesus is innocent on both counts. He had no sin for which to be crucified for. It was a sham, it's a miscarriage of justice, the worst, worst miscarriage of justice in the history of humanity.

And he had no guilt before the God of the universe either. He was perfect, righteous, without blemish and without sin. But yet here he is lifted up for the sin of the world.

There are two things I want us to see in what this criminal, the one who confesses Jesus' true identity, I want to see two things that he does that reveals that he is truly repentant.

[21:27] the first thing is that he feared God and he recognized his sin and guilt before this holy God. And you might say, well, he does recognize his sin and guilt, he does have the fear of God, but what can be done in this predicament that he's in?

It's not enough to recognize that you are a sinner and deserving of death. That's part of it, but it's not enough, is it? You might recognize you're a sinner, you might recognize you're under God's judgment, but how do you rectify the problem now that you know it?

Look in verse 42. This man said to Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, the very word is important, the very name is important, Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.

He cried out the name of the one who can deliver him. Jesus, the very name which means God rescues, God saves. As this man lay dying in his sin, he spoke out the only name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.

He knows there is salvation nowhere else, but in this Jesus who is nailed to the middle cross. He cries out, remember me when you come into your kingdom.

[23:06] Now what is the significance of that request? Christ? I think it's because this man anticipates. He sees what no one else in this story sees. He anticipates something that everyone else has failed to grasp.

It's as one commentator puts it. This man sees that Jesus' death on the cross is not a contradiction of his role as Savior. Rather, it confirms his role as Savior.

This man sees that the suffering of this Christ and his cross is not a scandal like everyone else sees it, but this very sign to his kingship, to his enthronement at the right hand of God as ruler and king of the universe.

the cross which was a scandal to all, this man sees as the means by which this man is indeed God's chosen king.

And what does Jesus say upon this man's confession? What does Jesus say to him? Verse 43, Jesus says to him, Truly, truly, I say to you, today, you will be with me in paradise.

[24:34] Here is the king's royal decree. Truly, the Hebrew word truly here is Amen. Amen.

And what does that actually mean? It means that what comes next after what I'm about to say, anything that comes after the Amen is fixed and firm, cannot be questioned.

It can be trusted. Amen. What I'm about to say, it's fixed and firm and can be trusted.

What does Jesus say to him? You will be with me today. You will be with me conveys a direct and personal access to God's paradise.

Look at it. The promise was immediate. Notice that there is no mention of purgatory. There's no mention of a soul sleep to be awakened later.

[25:39] There's none of that. The biblical witness is that this man's condition was advanced immediately upon death. His estate was advanced immediately upon death.

Today, Jesus says, immediately upon your last breath, you will be with me in paradise. Paradise here refers to God's garden.

It's the final destiny of those who are in Christ. Paradise. Remember, since the fall, Adam and Eve's disobedience, mankind has been expelled from God's garden.

But here, offered to this criminal, is the promise of a return back to that place of peace and tranquility and fellowship with his creator.

Here is the promise that all of mankind has been holding on to since the first gospel proclamation.

Do you know the first gospel proclamation in the Bible?

[26:51] It is the promise that the seed of the woman, the chosen one of God, will come to crush the head of the serpent. And that head crushing took place at the cross.

The cross was at the center of God's plan. It has always been at the center of God's plan to restore humanity back into paradise. Here, brothers and sisters, is the gospel.

Here is the gospel news, the good news of the Savior. Here is your king. He bore your sin, carried your shame, paid the penalty in fall.

the cross that is a scandal to the world around us is the only means of your salvation and your deliverance.

It is in the words of the Westminster Confession of Faith. It says this, the Lord Jesus, by his perfect obedience and sacrifice of himself, which he through the eternal spirit once offered up unto God, has fully, fully satisfied the justice of his father.

[28:21] Hear these comforting words, brothers and sisters. By his death, he has fully satisfied the justice of his father and he has purchased not only reconciliation but an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven for all those whom the father has given unto him.

Is that you this morning? Do you know that the thief could do nothing to earn this gift that has been given? He was a death's door. All he could do at this moment is place his trust, his faith in Jesus, in whom Jesus claims to be, in who he is and what he has done.

And that's the same and only requirement for you and me as well. There is no earning our way. We do not enter by our merit, but by the merit of Jesus Christ alone.

So, on what basis do we come into God's paradise? There's a wonderful, wonderful exposition of this question by a pastor named Alistair Begg.

And I wouldn't often do this, but I'm going to encourage you when you get home, not now, when you get home, go on YouTube or Google and type in the words, the man in the middle cross said I could come.

[29:55] The man in the middle cross said I could come. It's a wonderful exposition of what it will have looked like. He just paints a picture of what this man, this criminal, when he got to heaven, when he did get to paradise.

Can you imagine? He has never been to a Bible study. He's never docked the footsteps of a church probably. This was a degenerate by every word, by every explanation of the word.

He was a criminal justly and rightly judged. And he got to heaven and the angels are asking, on what basis are you here? And he's looking around and I don't know.

And they're probably asking him, you should do it. Alistair does perfect justice. I'm just paraphrasing the way he characterized this. But the angels probably asked him, well, do you believe in justification by faith?

And he says, I don't know what that is. what are the good works you've done? I know, I haven't done any.

[31:05] And they said to him, why then are you here? And what is his answer? The man in the middle cross said I could come.

brothers and sisters, that is our answer as well. That can only be our answer if we are to be in God's paradise.

The man in the middle cross said I could come. On what basis? The man in the middle cross said I could come. Here's the comforting word.

I hear this this morning. If you've come to faith in Jesus Christ, I know that some of you are sometimes wracked by guilt. You think, how could God love someone like me?

Do you not know what I've done in the past? Do you not know my history? How could God really truly save me? It is not on the basis of what you have done or you can do.

[32:07] It is on the basis of what the man in the middle cross has done. And here is his word of assurance. Amen. Truly, I say to you, today, you will be with me in paradise.

That is your assurance as well, brothers and sisters in Christ. Will you then join your voice with the voice of this criminal? Will you join your voice with his voice?

Will you say, Jesus, remember me? All who do, all who join their voice with his, are assured of the same promise of paradise in Christ Jesus, our King.

Here, brothers and sisters, is Christ the King. Amen. be the f**k. f**k.

f**k. f**k. f**k. f**k. f**k. Thank you.