

Symbol Amongst the Crosses

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning everyone.

Welcome here today. And yes, Christ is risen. It's Easter Sunday. And this day, so Mary came to the tomb in the morning.

And the stone was rolled away. The grave was empty. We can always praise God for that. My message, I'll be backing up and looking at events that took place on Friday.

Specifically looking through the account here in Luke. And so just some details here. Luke was a Gentile.

He was not a Jew. He was a Gentile. He accompanied Paul during a part of Paul's second missionary journey.

[1 : 10] So he's been around as well and instrumental in establishing some churches. In Colossians 4.14, Paul mentions him as a beloved physician.

So he was actually a doctor in those days as well. And so being a doctor, what comes to mind then is the attention to detail.

He's dealing with humans, with fixing us. And so that means paying attention. And that's something we notice when we read the accounts in Luke versus some of the other Gospels.

There's some of these extra details in there. And that I believe it would just come from him having been a doctor and needing to pay attention to small details.

And there's also some that believe that he was a painter. So maybe he had a hobby of painting on the side. Painting pictures. And if that is the case, that would also just add to the thought about his attention to detail.

[2 : 28] So in our text here, we're looking at Friday. It's Friday morning. And just before 9 a.m.

And they're just outside of Jerusalem. So during the past week, we know last Sunday, Palm Sunday, Jesus rode into Jerusalem. And he spent days teaching in the temple.

And having a couple of times already tried to lay hold of him to arrest him, the chief priests. And they finally do that now.

They arrest him in the Garden of Gethsemane. And so he's been arrested. He's been brought to trial before the Jewish leaders. They condemned him of blasphemy.

But they did not have the power to put him to death. So they needed to find a way to put an end to Jesus.

[3 : 35] And so they sent him to Pilate, the Roman governor. And he examined him as well and found no fault. And so he went back to the Jewish leaders and told them, there's no fault in this man.

And them wanting him put away, they come up with a complaint. Well, he's been causing problems from here right through Galilee.

And so Pilate picks up on that. Oh, he's from Galilee. Okay, well, Herod is the leader there in that area there.

And Herod conveniently is in Jerusalem to Herod. It's like, you could wipe his hands clean of this. Let Herod deal with him, right? And he doesn't answer Herod a word to any of his questions.

So Herod, he can't get anywhere with him. So he just sends him back to Pilate the second time. And again, he just finds no fault.

[4 : 37] But the multitudes, we know, they cry out, crucify him, crucify him. They want him done away with. And so Pilate, instead of being a good, strong governor and having control of his people, he's fearing them and fearing what could happen to him and to his position and power there.

And so he gives in to the multitude and he sentences Jesus to death and releases Barabbas in his place. So that's where we get into our text here.

So in today's message here, I want to look at some of the symbols we can pick up. The Bible, there's a lot of symbolism in there.

And so I want to just pick up some of the symbols here in this account. So I've titled today's message, Symbols Amongst the Crosses.

So I want to look specifically at the three crosses and, I guess, more specifically, the three different men hanging on these crosses.

[5 : 47] So we'll be going back and forth through our text here a little bit this morning. It won't just be from 32 working our way down. We'll be going back and forth a bit as we look at each of these men.

So the first criminal we'll be looking at, I've called him the mocking criminal. And we only have one verse speaking of him.

That's in verse 39. Then one of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed him, saying, If you are the Christ, save yourself and us.

So it was only this one verse, and it says that he blasphemed Christ. And another word for that, I guess, he was talking evil of Jesus.

So in Luke's account here, he calls them criminals. Matthew and Mark, in that text there, they call them thieves. And if we look at the old King James Version, it calls them male factors.

[7 : 02] And I guess a description or a definition of male factors is rebels. These men had been accused of being rebels.

They were rebelling against the harsh Roman rule at the time. They didn't like the heavy taxes and the overpowering control that the Romans had on them.

And so they were rebelling. And an interesting thing here then, there was another man accused of being a rebel. Let's turn to Mark chapter 15.

Mark chapter 15, verse 7. And there was one named Barabbas, who was chained with his fellow rebels. They had committed murder in the rebellion.

It's an interesting thought there. The man who was, he was freed. Barabbas, he was a rebel. And an interesting note on that, I was reading in the expositors' commentary.

[8 : 26] They make the suggestion there that these two thieves hanging on the crosses, accused of being rebels, they're actually thinking that these two men were most likely partners in crime with Barabbas.

So, it's just an interesting fact there that possibly these two men were part of Barabbas' gang. And so it's just interesting to note that Jesus taking Barabbas' spot, Barabbas would otherwise most likely have been the man hanging on that third cross.

He was set free. Barabbas' spot. So, if we take a look at this criminal, we only have this one verse. If we look at it symbolically here, what do we see here?

Doesn't he, him rebuking, or yes, rebuking Christ, blaspheming him. What does that remind us of?

It's not a picture of mankind in his sinful state. He's not being repentant at all.

[9 : 48] He's hanging on a cross. He's dying. And still he blasphemes Christ. I see a picture here of mankind in all his sin.

Then we'll look at the second criminal on the second cross. I've called him the rebuking criminal. That's in verses 40 and 41.

But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds.

But this man has done nothing wrong. So, he's talking in response to the first criminal, blaspheming Christ.

He's, he asks him a question. He's like, don't you even fear God? He's telling him, just look at yourself.

[10 : 54] Look at us. We're hanging on these crosses. We're being killed. It's a slow, torturous death. It's not, not quick. So, just look, look at yourself.

You're on the doorstep of eternity. And still, you would blaspheme God. So, it gives us a picture here that he has, he has a sense of eternity.

He, he knows of life after death. And then, as his answer continues on in verse 41, he's saying, we're reaping what we've sown.

The trouble we've caused, we're paying for it. We deserve to die. And then, he brings in Jesus here.

He says, but this man has done nothing wrong. So, obviously, these criminals, they must have known about Christ's situation.

[11 : 59] There's nothing about him being falsely accused. So, it says that this man, he knows his sinful deeds.

He knows, he knows right from wrong. He's, that they're paying for what they've done. So, it makes you wonder, with his answer that he has, this man, has he heard the gospel before?

Let's read on in verse 42, our text. Then he said to Jesus, Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom.

This, to me, it's, Lord, remember me. It's a statement from a sinner. A man who's aware of his sin.

And finally, his eyes are opened. As he's on death's doorstep, his eyes are opened. He recognizes his lost condition.

[13 : 08] Lord, remember me. So, he's saying, calling Jesus Lord. He's recognizing. He's recognizing Jesus and acknowledging him as Lord and Savior.

And then in remember me, those two words. He's repenting of his sins before it's too late.

Can we relate to this? We've been to this point ourselves, have we not? Amen. Those are the first two men hanging on the cross.

Let's turn our attention now to the third cross on which hung Jesus. The man Jesus was falsely accused.

He's been beaten, spit upon, and mocked. He's been led out of Jerusalem to Calvary. And he's been crucified between these two criminals.

[14 : 18] In verses 32 and 33, there were also two others, criminals led with him, that's with Jesus, to be put to death. And when they had come to the place called Calvary, there they crucified him and the criminals, one on the right hand and the other on the left.

Let's turn to Isaiah 53. Be reading verse 12 in Isaiah 53.

Isaiah 53, 12. Therefore I will divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured his soul unto death, and he was numbered with the transgressors, and he bore the sin of many and made intercession for the transgressors.

So here, close to 600 years before the events at Calvary took place, Isaiah is writing that he would be numbered with the transgressors.

He would bear the sins of many and intercession made for the transgressors. Going back to our text in Luke 23, why crucifixion?

[15 : 50] Why hang him on that middle cross? Why not on the cross on the left or on the right? Why the middle cross? Let's answer these two questions here. Why crucifixion?

This was a common form. The common death penalty during the Roman rule. This was common with the Romans. They would execute criminals in this manner.

In a humiliating way, they would be hung on crosses outside the city, usually beside a road, so that passers-by could see them, and they would have their crime hanging on a tablet above their head.

So just a warning to anyone going by that this is what happens to these kind of people. So the symbolism of crucifixion, let's flip back to the Old Testament, I guess, in Numbers.

We'll be reading a bit out of Numbers as well as Deuteronomy. Let's turn to Numbers first. Numbers chapter 21. It's just some of the symbolism surrounding crucifixion.

[17 : 12] Numbers 21. I'll be reading verses 4 through 9. We've got the Israelites in the wilderness.

Then they journeyed from Mount Hor by the way of the Red Sea to go around the land of Edom. And the soul of the people became very discouraged on the way. And the people spoke against God and against Moses.

Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and our soul loathes this worthless bread. So the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, and many of the people of Israel died.

Therefore the people came to Moses and said, We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord and against you. Pray to the Lord that he take away the serpents from us. So Moses prayed for the people.

Then the Lord said to Moses, Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and it shall be that everyone who is bitten when he looks shall live. So Moses made a bronze serpent and put it on a pole.

[18 : 22] And so it was if a serpent had bitten anyone. When he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived. That speaks as well to John 3, verse 14, where it says, As the serpent was lifted up in the wilderness, so too must the Son of Man be lifted up.

So this is the account of the Israelites complaining yet again in the wilderness about their situation. God sent these serpents among them to bite them, and many died.

They recognized their sin, this complaining. And the Lord instructs Moses to make this serpent, a bronze serpent, and to put it up on a pole, and it would be set up in camp.

And anyone who looked at that bronze serpent after he had been bitten, he would live. That is very much a picture of Christ is that same picture.

He was put up in one. Coming to Christ will live. Then let's look as well at Deuteronomy chapter 21.

[19 : 40] Just another thought here. This is one of the many laws of the Israelites in the Old Testament.

Deuteronomy 21, verses 22 and 23. If a man has committed a sin deserving of death, and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his body shall not remain overnight on the tree, but you shall surely bury him that day, so that you do not defile the land which the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance.

For he who is hanged is accursed of God. See the picture there? They had their laws if anyone is hung on a tree or a cross.

He's not supposed to remain there overnight, but they should bury him. Same happened with Jesus. They did not want him hanging on the cross over the weekend.

They wanted him buried. The end of verse 23, for he who is hanged is accursed of God.

[20 : 54] What was the accusation against Jesus? The chief priests found him guilty of blasphemy because he had said he was the son of God. And in their law, their laws here, he who is hanged is accursed of God.

And so as the crowds were shouting, crucify him, crucify him, this thought must have been in their head, he will be accursed of God. Let's go back to our text in Luke.

So the next question, why hang him on the middle cross? There's symbolism here as well.

And in order to bring out this symbolism, you need to kind of just look back at the other two crosses as we've talked about these two, the one hanging on the left of Christ and the other on the right side.

On the one side, the mocking thief, unrepentant, not concerned about his soul at all as he is hanging there dying.

[22 : 06] And on the other hand, the thief that rebuked the first one, and he was repentant, he asked Jesus, Jesus, Lord, remember me.

So the picture here, we have the mocking thief, one side, the repentant thief, on the other. How do you get from where the mocking thief is to the thief who was repentant?

You need to go past that middle cross. And on that cross, hung Christ. That is the way to having salvation to going from being a sinner.

You need that man on the middle cross. You need Jesus. You need to acknowledge him. Amen. John 14, 6.

We have Jesus speaking. He says, I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. See the picture there?

[23 : 23] Verse 34 of our text. Then Jesus said, Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do. Only Luke records this.

It is a prayer of Christ, of Jesus here. He's praying the Father to forgive those who are crucifying him, hanging him on his cross.

He's praying for the soldiers. The Romans would send out a centurion along with four soldiers for these crucifixions.

These four soldiers would have the responsibility of hanging the man on the cross while the centurion stands by. And here in Luke, he records it.

Again, we just get that a till that Luke puts in here. He takes note of this prayer. Father, forgive them for they do not know what they do. Jesus is a blameless lamb being hung on a cross and he has compassion even on those who are nailing him to that cross.

[24 : 36] That ties in as well with Isaiah 53, 12 that we read earlier that he made intercession for the transgressors.

verses 35 through 39 of our text. And the people stood looking on but even the rulers with them sneered saying he saved others.

Let him save himself if he is the Christ, the chosen of God. The soldiers also mocked him coming and offering him sour wine and saying if you are the king of the Jews save yourself.

And the inscription also was written over him in letters of Greek, Latin and Hebrew. This is the king of the Jews. Then one of the criminals who were hanged blasted him.

If you are the Christ save yourself and us. In these verses we read of the mocking that Jesus endured.

[25 : 39] First of all it talks of the mocking of the rulers. the wording in Matthew and Mark on this account is he saved others himself he cannot save.

I don't think they realize it but the absolute truth in these words he saved others himself he cannot save. these rulers it's the chief priests the religious leaders they're mocking him they're talking about him saving or about healing many illnesses when in the years previous he healed people he healed them from incurable diseases and he even raised people from the dead so he's saying they're saying he saved others yet he can't save himself look he's hanging on the cross he's got no power he can't do anything but they're absolutely speaking the truth in order to save us he had to die he could not save himself he needed to die he's mocked by the soldiers in verses 36 and 37 they mock him as well they offer him sour wine and say if you're the king of the Jews save yourself and even in the inscription that hung over his head the other two criminals probably had tablets hanging over their head accusing them of murder being rebels and here in mockery as well the inscription is written this is the king of the Jews because they could find no fault in him and even that is so truthful he is the king of the Jews they do not see that here and he's mocked by the criminals as well verse 39 it says that one of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed him but we do read in the accounts of

Matthew and Mark as well that both of the criminals mocked Jesus and it's only where this one criminal begins to blaspheme Christ the second criminal stops mocking Jesus how much pain Jesus must have endured it must have broken his heart hearing this mocking that great sorrow that he felt in the garden where it talks of his sorrow and great sweat drops of blood it can only have deepened here as he hung on the cross hearing the mocking words of the people around and yet in verse 42 the second criminal Lord remember me when you come into your kingdom that pain and sorrow gave way gave way to mercy and compassion this is the

Jesus we know right merciful and compassionate comes in his response in verse 33 and Jesus in verse 43 sorry and Jesus said to him assuredly I say to you today you will be with me in paradise that criminal's repentance the acknowledgement of Jesus as Lord and Savior translated to salvation then and there as he hung on that cross what a compassionate Savior we serve in closing I just want to look back at the mocking words of the rulers and specifically the way they were written in the accounts in Matthew and Mark he saved others himself he cannot save and then I want to I want to read what the expositor's commentary has written concerning these mocking words he saved others himself he cannot save in this commentary they've written it is because he saved others that he could not save himself were he willing to let others perish were he willing to let you perish he would this very moment have saved himself but he will bear not only the cruel nails and the spear but your more cruel mockeries rather than give up his self-imposed task of saving others by his perfect sacrifice that is the reason that

Jesus died on that cross that he did not save himself do we need any further reason to follow him today if by chance if there's anyone here who's not born again just remember this he could have come down from that cross but he stayed there for you let's pray heavenly father we come before you this day lord we remember you hanging on that cross dying how you were mocked and scorned the pain you must have felt and yet how your true self shone through when you extended mercy and compassion to that criminal who recognized his lost condition and asked you to remember him lord may you remember us as well may you be preparing a mansion for us in heaven lord we thank you for coming out of that grave on this day many years ago the plan of salvation is complete you are in heaven interceding for us we thank you for that lord may we bring you honor and glory every day we walk this earth may we store up treasures in heaven be there waiting for us when we come home pray this in jesus name amen song leaders to continue through and how we can come to the