

Three Crosses on Calvary's Hill

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Preacher: Pastor Bart Leger

[0 : 00] So as we get started this morning, we're going to be beginning our series on the cross as we're coming up to Easter in just a few weeks as we celebrate the resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

But it all began at Calvary, and what we're going to be looking at this morning is our incentives to live a life for Christ.

And we think of the holiness of our God, and when we do that, we think of Isaiah 6 and the experience of the prophet Isaiah as he is in the throne room of God.

And the holiness of God, the majesty, the splendor, and the awesomeness of God forces him to his knees and forces him to worship and repent of his sin and to see himself as being unworthy to be in the presence of God.

In 1 John 2, we think of the return of Jesus Christ, and we ought to be living a life of holiness as we are expecting him to come back at any moment.

[1 : 07] And so we look at this morning the cross, the greatest demonstration of God's love for us. It's one thing for him to say that he loves us.

It's another thing to say that Jesus was willing to die on the cross for our sin in our place. So this morning we're going to begin by looking to Calvary.

As we look to Calvary, we see Jesus with two criminals dying on either side of him. One dying for sin, one dying in sin, and one dying to sin.

Two were completely guilty. One was completely innocent. Two were paying their debt to society. One was paying our debt for sin on the cross.

So as we begin this morning, we will look to Calvary, and we will see two men in the same condemnation. Two men on either side of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, who were hanging there as a result in condemnation for their own sinful, their own criminal actions.

[2 : 29] We're going to be in the book of Luke, in the Gospel of Luke, chapter 23. We're going to read verses 33 to 43, but we're going to be staying primarily in the last few verses as we look at these two men on either side of Jesus.

As we begin with verse 33, Luke doesn't record all of the events that Matthew and Mark record, but what Luke does is he spends time talking about the final moments of Jesus Christ on the cross as he forgives.

He forgives the world. He forgives those who were crucifying him. And then in his final act, before he breathes his last breath, he forgives a sinner on his side.

Verse, the next verse, Verse 35, And the people stood looking on, but even the rulers with them sneered, saying, He saved others, let him save himself, for if he is the Christ, the chosen of God.

The soldiers also mocked him, saying, or coming and offering him sour wine and saying, If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself. And an inscription also was written over him in letters of Greek, Latin, and Hebrew.

[4 : 18] This is king of the Jews. We're also told that the soldiers, the ones who wrote the inscription, were chastised because they said, I told you to write.

He says he's the king of the Jews. But to fulfill prophecy and because Jesus was, the inscription ended up being written. This is the king of the Jews. How appropriate.

Verse 39, Then one of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed him, saying, If you are the Christ, save yourself and us.

But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, Do you not even fear God, seeing that you are under the same condemnation?

And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward for our deeds. But this man has done nothing.

[5 : 15] Then he said to Jesus, Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom. And Jesus said to him, Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.

And what we see is the mockery of the first thief. Well, we saw the mockery of the religious leaders. We saw the mockery of the soldiers. We hear the mockery of this criminal that was on the side of Jesus.

And the other thief, we see his remarkable observation. How astute his observation was that he realized and understood who this man was, who was hanging beside him.

And what he does is he states a spiritual truth. What he says is, Hey, dude, don't you know we're dying for our own sin? But this man, he's done nothing wrong.

He realized that. And so what he does to the other criminal, he says, Hey, watch your mouth. We're dying here because we deserve to die for our actions.

[6 : 27] This guy, he doesn't deserve to die because I've not seen him and I haven't heard anything that he's done that's worthy of death. He has done nothing wrong.

So what he does in verse 41 is he recognizes his guilt. And we indeed justly, he realizes. Now, he's not like your common criminal because most of them are innocent, right?

But he says, I admit it. We're guilty. He puts the other thief in the same boat as he is. He says, we're both guilty. And they're justified in putting us to death.

We receive the due reward of our deeds. But this man has done nothing wrong. This possibly may be the most difficult truth on earth to accept, that all people are guilty before God.

That's what a lot of people have a difficult time realizing is, no matter how good they are, no matter how well they live their lives or how well they think they live their lives, we're all guilty before God.

[7 : 38] Now, we sometimes divide humanity by race, by face, or by place.

But with God, it's just grace. That's how God divides people. Actually, he doesn't. We're all in the same boat. We're all guilty. And he looks upon everyone with grace.

And all we have to do is accept that free gift of eternal life because Jesus paid for it. He redeemed us on the cross of Calvary. He bought us back out of the slave market of sin.

And anyone who is willing to receive that redemption can receive it simply by accepting what Jesus Christ did on the cross in our place. And that's all there is to it.

So with God, there is no difference between the mare and the meter maid, between the star and the streetwalker, between the doctor and the patient, between the warden and the criminal.

[8 : 32] There's no difference because we all stand condemned apart from Jesus Christ. It's hard for many to realize that they're lost in their sin apart from Jesus Christ because many people consider themselves to be what?

Good people. They consider themselves at their core to be a good person. They will say, I try hard. I try to live by the Ten Commandments.

Or I go to church. I do my thing. I pray to God. And they look at their life as being inherently good. That they are, they judge themselves by their intentions rather than by their actions. And so they believe that they're okay and they're not in need of salvation. But we know the Bible says, all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.

We all need salvation. What was Jesus called? Jesus was called the friend of sinners. And that's exactly what he is. That's why he was hanging on the cross.

[9 : 40] He was hanging, dying on the cross for our sins, including the sins of the two criminals that were on either side.

Then, second, first of all, we see the two criminals. And we see their response. Then, what we see next is, as we look to Calvary, we see two men who both ask Jesus for salvation.

Now, you may be thinking to yourself, Pastor, I thought just one asked for salvation. Well, no, if you really look at Scripture, they both asked for salvation. Let's look together. Then, one of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed him.

But what did he say? He says, if you're the Christ, do what? Save us. So he says, if you're the Christ, I want you to save me. I want you to get me off this cross and I want to go back to my criminal lifestyle.

I want you to save me from this situation. And so two men hanging on the cross asked Jesus for salvation. He wanted physical salvation.

[10 : 56] Probably, I mean, he wanted to live the rest of his life on planet Earth and probably go back to his sinful lifestyle. No repentance there. Just, if you're, if you are, if you are who you say you

are, get us down from here because I'm not ready to die.

And so, he's hanging there on the cross, blasphemes Jesus. If you're the Christ, save yourself and us. But then, we see the other said to Jesus, Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom.

One asked in mockery, the other asked in repentance. Both thieves asked Jesus to save them. one saying, if you are who you say you are, then save yourself and us.

But the other, recognizing Jesus as Lord, said, Lord, remember me. See, many people pray when they're in trouble.

Many people pray when, and reach out to God when it seems like things are difficult and they need help. They need a lifeline. And so, they'll pray to God.

[12:12] They don't have a, they don't give God a second thought the rest of the time. But when they're in trouble, they'll pray to God, just like this thief on the cross. If you're, if you're God, if you're, if you did all those miracles that they say you did, and if you're God, go ahead, save yourself and us.

I'm not ready to die. I want to live the rest of my life on planet Earth. The other, I deserve to die. And I don't want to go to the place of eternal punishment.

Lord, remember me. Remember me. So the first, ask to be saved from the situation. The second, ask in repentance to go to heaven with Jesus Christ.

The difference, the other, ask to be saved from his sin. The other realized he was a sinner, realized that Jesus was Lord, and very possibly these thieves had, these criminals had heard Jesus as he was, he was teaching.

They may have heard the buzz around town about who Jesus claimed to be and the message that he was, he was proclaiming. So this thief faces the real issues of life.

[13:31] The one who says, Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom, faces the real issues of life, and number one, admits his sin, and accepts that Jesus was Lord.

So he accepts Jesus as Lord. He also anticipates the resurrection of Christ, because he knew that they were dying. This thief knew the result of a crucifixion.

He had never seen anyone come out of it alive. And so he knew that all three of them were going to die. And so what he admits is he anticipates Jesus to be resurrected and to go into glory and to be ruling in his kingdom eventually.

He didn't know how long. I don't know that he knew the Old Testament and talking or had heard that Jesus said, you know, you tear down this temple in three days, I will build it up again. I don't know if he had heard that or not, but he did anticipate the resurrection of Christ.

And what else did he anticipate? His own resurrection. resurrection. Because he says, after I die, I want to be with you in your kingdom. I want to live with you forever wherever you go, Jesus.

[14:43] I'm a sinner. I deserve to be here. But I know that you are God. I know that you are Lord. Save me from my sin. And when I live again, I want to be with you.

So he looks at Jesus in his humiliation and what does he see? He sees a king. The other thief saw a religious zealot, possibly a lunatic, for being willing to die for a message that they didn't think it was worth dying for.

But the other criminal looked at Jesus in his humiliation and he saw a king. So we see three crosses.

We see two men, one dying in sin, one dying to sin because he was going to be raised again never to sin anymore and one was dying for the sin of the entire world.

And then, lastly, as we look to Calvary, we see Jesus. What was his purpose? What was the last thing Jesus did in his life on earth?

[15:58] He saved a soul. The last thing Jesus did was he forgave someone's sin.

Amen? The thief prayed and Jesus said amen to his prayer. Jesus had to win one more soul before he died. Jesus had to bring one more person with him into glory before he died.

So Jesus, as he began his ministry, talked about the way because Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. And he was winning souls even to his last breath.

So, questions answered on that day. And there are a lot of people who have asked these questions. Now, most of the time they're asked as a smokescreen.

They're asked to rationalize why they shouldn't believe. And the first question is, can one be saved in his dying hour? Can one be saved on his deathbed?

[17 : 01] Have you heard that before? I have. Well, you know, how genuine is that? You know, they would say anything. Can one be saved in his dying hour?

Can one be saved after a life of wickedness? I've heard that one before too. Well, could Hitler be saved if Hitler had repented? Can one live a life of wickedness and be saved after all of this? Well, what do we see at the cross? Can one be saved without baptism? Can one be saved without going in front of a church and become a church member?

Can one be saved without having communion? Can one be saved sure of life after death? Or one can be sure of heaven rather, after death?

Well, what do we hear? What do we see in 1 John? I've written these things to you that you may know that you may what? I gave it away. That you may know that you have eternal life.

[18 : 07] And so John says, I've written these things so you can have assurance of your salvation. there's no, well, you know, I hope and maybe one day and, you know, it's presumption if you think you're going, if you're sure you're going to heaven, because nobody knows they're going to heaven.

You know, can we be sure? What did Jesus tell the guy on his side? Assuredly, today you will be with me in paradise.

Why? Because he repented. Not because he lived a good life. Not because he proved, well, you know, he came forward and, you know, he prayed the sinner's prayer, but, you know, we waited a month or so before we baptized him because we wanted to make sure it stuck.

You know, that kind of reasoning. No. He repented. Jesus said, there you go. Today you'll be with me in paradise. And so we answer these life's questions at the three crosses on Calvary's hill.

Can one be saved in his dying hour? Can one be saved after a life of wickedness? Can one be saved without baptism? Can one be saved without repentance?

[19 : 22] Can one even be saved without saying the sinner's prayer? Well, he was. All he did was he reached out and said, Lord, remember me. And I think Jesus saw his heart.

Jesus heard his heart. Because it's not the words, it's the heart response. It's do we truly accept? Do we truly believe in our heart?

We don't even have to say the words. Heard the story of a pastor one day was he had for weeks been going through scripture with someone from another country, someone from another faith. not even remotely a Christian faith. And it didn't seem like it was sinking in. Didn't seem to understand.

He came from no frame of reference. Had never even heard of Jesus prior to their getting together for weeks of discipling.

[20 : 26] Now, discipling doesn't just happen after we're saved. Jesus' disciples didn't really believe, I think, completely until after they had heard the full message. And so, one day he said he was going through the gospel again.

And he said before he had finished going through the Romans road again, he said the guy was sitting across from him, he said he stood up and he reached out his hand and he said you are my brother.

And the pastor said, had the same reaction, excuse me, and he said you are my brother.

And the pastor said, well, what do you mean? Because, you know, because we're going through this plan, we're going through the gospel and what was the pastor thinking?

You have to pray a prayer and you have to go through this formula before you're saved. In this guy's mind, he had worked it all out and what he told the pastor was, he said, when I understood, I believed.

[21 : 45] That was it. when I understood, I believed. And in his mind, and I believe rightly so, in his mind, the moment the light came on and he accepted that Jesus was God, he accepted that Jesus had died on the cross for his sin, and that he wanted to live a life for Christ, and he accepted salvation, it all happened in about two seconds in his mind.

Okay, I'm in. And he stood up and said, I'm your brother. Pastor said, well, we're done here. And he said, yes, you are my brother.

And it's amazing how in a moment all it takes is for us to realize and receive, understand, and accept.

And so this criminal on the cross said, Lord, remember me. when you come into your kingdom. So in conclusion, there are really only a couple of choices you can either accept or reject.

All of humanity is seen at the cross. We see the full gamut. We see the religious leaders. We see the soldiers. We see all of those around who had rejected Jesus Christ from ruler down to pauper. [23 : 20] All were in the same condition. All were lost. We see a criminal on one side who mocked and jeered and rejected.

And we see one sinner on the side of Jesus that repented and received eternal life simply for recognizing Jesus for who he said he was.

So, two ways. If you're listening to this message on our website, if you're listening to this message on our podcast, then which way will you take?

Reject, and we simply reject by doing nothing, or accept what Jesus is offering. the Bible says, all who call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

Simply receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and accept him and accept that free gift of eternal life and salvation.

[24 : 25] Forgiveness of sin, being baptized into the body of Christ, being adopted as a child of God, all of these things take place the moment we accept Jesus Christ as our Savior.

This morning, the question, which will we take? Let us pray. Father, this morning, as we have looked into your word, and we've looked into the account of these two thieves, one who mocked and rejected, one who repented and received, Father, this morning, we ask, that you would help us as we are preparing in a few weeks to celebrate the resurrection of our Lord and our Savior, Jesus Christ, the empty tomb.

Father, we ask that you would help us to be like Jesus, ready to share the gospel with one more and one more and one more, up until it's the last thing that we will, and the last thing that we do, winning others to Jesus Christ.

Father, we thank you for this, and we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.