

Calvary

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[0 : 00] the chapter we read in Luke's Gospel, Luke chapter 23, and if we could turn to verse 33.

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 so on, I want us just to consider this section really that we read here. Jesus is now on the cross, and this is a moment that the enemies of Jesus had longed for for such a long, long time, because they wanted to crush this movement that they were seeing beginning, and they hated Jesus. As it tells us in the Bible, they hated him without a cause. But we know that one of the causes, there was a cause in the hearts of many of them, and that was envy. Because again, the Scripture tells us that they delivered him up because of envy. They were jealous of him. But here they're seeing the Christ upon the cross, and there's this, I'm sure, in many of these hearts, the enemies of Christ, they would be saying to themselves, well, that's it. That's the end of him, and that's the end of this movement that has begun following on from him. But of course, how wrong they were.

Because rather than crush the movement of Christianity, it really simply just mushroomed and grew and has become the great global power that it is today. Now, Jesus is on this cross out of love to his father and love to us for no other reason. Jesus is on that cross, and it's not the nails that are holding him there. Yes, they drove nails into his hands. But we know that everything that Jesus did, he did willingly, and he submitted himself. That's what we were remembering this morning, that unless he had given himself up, his enemies couldn't take him. We highlighted that when they, first of all, they came to arrest him in the garden. He said, who are you looking for? They said, Jesus of Nazareth. He said, I'm he. I am he. And when he said that, they all fell to the ground. They fell backward to the ground. And in that moment, Jesus was displaying his authority and his power. And he was showing really that they couldn't do anything unless he was willing to submit. They got up, regrouped themselves, and as I was saying, I often wonder what went on in their heads. And I'm sure afterwards, of course, when people are fired up with something, and when they have a cause, they don't think logically. They don't think straight. And all these people had come, they had one aim in mind was to arrest Jesus. But I'm sure some of them afterwards must have thought, what on earth happened to us there? That was quite extraordinary. But the next time Jesus said to them, whom do you seek? And they said, Jesus of Nazareth. He said, I am he. And this time he went willingly with them.

And he is on the cross now because he gave himself. He willingly gave of himself. And as we said, it's out of that love to you and to me, out of that love to his father, to do the father's will, and out of his love to save his people. And then we find that they've come. They've come with another two criminals to crucify Jesus. And we find that extraordinary prayer of Jesus in verse 34, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. And we find that it's quite extraordinary. Again, we mentioned this morning about the word suppressed and afflicted and about how one of these words, it's talking about belittling people, of mocking people, of pouring scorn on people.

And that's exactly what they were doing to Jesus. Because below the cross, the people stood by watching, but the rulers scoffed at him, saying, he saved others, let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his chosen one. And the soldiers also mocked him. So we see here that there's this, it's an incredible scene. And it's one that, you know, we're familiar with reading the gospel story, and we're familiar with all this, but here is the creator. Here is the one who made all things.

[4 : 48] Here is the one who is a ruler, as it were, of the universe. And yet here he is, in our nature, submitting himself in this way to all the taunts, and all the hatred, and all the abuse, and all the vile chants and mocking from his enemies below the cross. And of course, one of the things they said, if he is the Christ, come down, save yourself. And then they're saying, he saved others, but he can't save himself. And of course, they were mocking with that, but they were speaking the truth.

Because Jesus couldn't save himself and save others at the same time. If Jesus had said, right, right, that's it. I'm going to come down from the cross. I have the power to come down from the cross.

I can exercise. I can come down from the cross and save himself. But he wouldn't have saved us. Not one of us. Not one of us would be here tonight.

There would be no salvation for this world. But we know, of course, that wasn't what was going to happen. He was willingly there. He was submissive in every single moment of his existence to his Father.

And he was dependent upon the ministry of the Spirit and dependent upon his Father. And so, he, of course, is not going to save himself. Now, we find that there are these two criminals, one on either side. And one of them, we'll just look at both of them in a moment, but one of them in verse 41, he says, we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due rewards of our deeds.

[6 : 36] Very interesting observation this man makes. He's on this cross, and he's dying. And he's saying, you know, we knew that if we did certain things, or if we lived in a certain way, or if we disobeyed the law in a particular way, this is what would likely happen. And it's happened.

And he's saying, you know, really, we can't complain. Of course, they could complain. But they're saying, we can't complain because we knew that this carried the sentence of death if we did what we did.

And, you know, I think we should take heed of that before we move on. Because in life, God has pronounced the sentence of death upon us because of sin.

And God says to us over and over and over in the Word of God that unless you repent, you will die. And it's one of these things that it doesn't matter how we may try and forget it, or ignore it, or pretend it's not there, or close out Bibles, or say, I'm not going to listen to any more of that.

That doesn't alter what God says. God has made a pronouncement. A pronouncement upon us and upon sin. And as the holy, just, righteous God, He cannot ignore sin.

[7 : 59] See, God is totally different to you and to me. He doesn't operate in the same way. He is absolutely and altogether righteous and pure and just and holy in His being.

And He cannot, you and I can ignore things. And we can pretend it didn't happen and so on. God can't. His very nature will not allow Him to do that. And so God says to the soul that sinneth, it shall die.

And the Bible is very, very clear on that. And it doesn't matter what we may say or argue or what we might try and believe other than that.

It doesn't alter God's pronouncement one whit. And the fact is that there are only two options left open to us. We either carry on regardless or else we accept God's provision.

And God's provision is Jesus Christ. And we have to say to the Lord Jesus, Lord, please forgive me all my sin.

[9 : 03] We have to go to the Lord and say, I've messed up in so many different ways. And I can't sort myself out. Do you know the worst thing you can do is to run away and to hide and to ignore it and kind of hope that on the night it will be all right.

It won't. It can't. Because here is God's pronouncement. The soul that sinneth it shall die. And we've all sinned. We're all in that category. And so the Lord is saying to us tonight, Look, turn, turn.

Why will you die? It tells us in the Bible that the Lord takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked. This is why God sent His Son into this world.

To save those who are lost. And we're all in the category of being lost. And that's what the Lord has done. He saved and He saved. And so I'm just highlighting that.

Because this man knew that a particular course of action would bring death. And we also know before God that if we carry on regardless without Him, it will bring death, bring eternal death.

[10 : 11] And that is why we must seek the Lord. Well, we find that both the criminals speak to Jesus. Verse 39.

One of the criminals who were hanged railed at Him. He's mocking. Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us. Now some people say, well, this man's prayed.

Yes, he has to a certain extent. But it's not a real prayer. What this man is asking for is not salvation. He's not asking that he will be forgiven his sin. He's not asking that the Lord will be merciful to him.

He's simply saying, Lord, get me out of this mess. Get me down off this cross. Because all this man wanted to do was to continue in life as he had always continued before.

He wasn't interested in finding salvation. He wasn't interested in being right with God. He just wanted off the cross. And you know, there's a lot of people.

[11 : 11] There's a man in the Bible called Balaam. And he was kind of like that. He was the kind of man who wanted to live the life of the unrighteous, but to die the death of the righteous.

He was a man who really was saying, Lord, I'm not interested in you in the slightest. I want to live my own life. But see, when I come to die, I want you to take me to heaven.

That's kind of basically what he's saying. And you know, there's a lot of people like that. That they live life as if the Lord does not exist. They're aware deep down that he does.

And particularly if you have an upbringing in the gospel, there is annoying conscience there that sometimes just won't go away. But you know that there is, that there is, that God is there, and that God is going to require of you one day.

But we push it away. Push it to the side and just carry on. And we live life. And what we're basically saying to God, we're not actually saying this, but this is what the heart is saying.

[12 : 16] Because every single thing that we have in life has ultimately been given to us by God. That's what the Bible says. What do you have that you have not received?

Every ability, every gift, every good thing in life that is part of your life has been given to you by God. Even the ability to deal with difficult situations, the grace that you receive when there's tough times in your life, everything is given to you by God.

So it's one of the worst things to go through life and saying, well, I'm going to take everything I can get. And more than that, I'm going to take the glory to myself. But when I come to die, Lord, will you take me to heaven?

Well, it doesn't work like that. That is not the way. That's not saying, of course, that the Lord, we see here that the Lord does save people at the very last moment.

But the normal way of life is that we have to seek the Lord. So we find that this man, he has a mocking attitude before Jesus.

[13 : 24] In Matthew's gospel, in fact, it tells us that both of the criminals, they mocked Jesus. Not just the one on the one side, but both of them. But in this account we have in Luke, we see that there is a change.

An awareness comes over one of the criminals because he is brought to see something extraordinary. That he saw, as we highlighted before, he saw, first and foremost, that he deserved to be dying.

And I think that's one of the, I'm not saying that that is one of the things that we have to face up to, but one of the things we have to face up to is our own accountability and our own responsibility before God.

Because far too easily we blame other things. Ah, it was my home. It was a particular upbringing I had. It was the friends I had.

It was the environment that I grew up in. It was some of the, I made one or two wrong choices and all these things. It's so easy to blame others.

[14 : 35] And we're very, very good at doing that rather than facing up and saying, look, I'm wrong. Holding up our hands and saying, Lord, forgive me. I have done wrong.

We find that with David. Remember how David, he, in that moment when, after he had committed adultery with Bathsheba, and in order to try and cover his tracks, he had Bathsheba's husband killed.

And he thought everything had gone all right until one day Nathan the prophet came to challenge him. And after he told the story, and David was incensed about the story about the man with the sheep and the leg, you all know that story.

And he said, that man will die. That man, oh, he was just so angry. And Nathan said to him, you are that man. And at that moment, David, just it was like a knife went into his heart.

And no more, he didn't try and make any excuses anymore. He held up his hands. And that's where we have Psalm 51, one of the most amazing Psalms, where David is pouring out his heart before God.

[15 : 45] And he's really basically saying, Lord, I am so, so sorry for what I have done. It's against you. You only have I sinned. And I, and your side done this ill.

It's an amazing Psalm. And that's where we have to come to, this realization that we're sinners. And it can be painful. It's always painful owning up.

From the time we were young, it was always, you always had a choice. Do I own up or do I not? Do I try and get out of this? It's part and, it goes back to the Garden of Eden.

The moment that Adam sinned and God called him to account. And he said, what is it that you've done? Oh, straight away, he pointed to Eve. Oh, it's the woman, you gave me.

She's straight away trying to put the blame on someone else. And that, that sin is as old as Eden. We're always trying to look to, for some other reason or excuse ourselves because of somebody.

[16:47] Well, this man is teaching us we've got to own up. And while it might be difficult to own up before God, do you know what's really important? And just to come to the Lord and say, Lord, I've messed up.

I'm really, really sorry. And I can't sort this out myself. And that's what the Lord wants us to do is to, is to come like that and to be open and to be honest.

You know, the most important thing is to be honest before the Lord. Even, I would say to you tonight, even if you're here and you don't even feel like becoming a Christian, do you know what's more important?

That you go to the Lord and you tell the Lord that rather than say nothing. The worst thing that you can do is just blank out. Blank yourself before God and ignore God and say, I'm just, it'd be far better to go to the Lord and say, Lord, I don't know where I am, but I'm going to be honest with you. And right now, I don't even, I don't even want to be a Christian. But then you should add, Lord, make me want to be. Because you're now in a dialogue with God.

[17:54] It is so important. And here's this man and he comes and he realizes that the person beside him is the Son of God.

And we see tremendous faith in this man because he is recognizing Jesus here as a Savior. And at that moment, the Lord Jesus Christ looked anything but the King of Glory.

It tells us, we saw this morning in Isaiah 52 that his face was marred more than any. He was, his facial features were unrecognizable.

If you didn't know what was happening and you had heard Jesus quite often in this world, supposing you had lived 2,000 years ago and you had been around and about and you had seen Jesus and then you'd just come up below the cross and you would see this figure, this person hanging there in the middle.

You would say, who is that? And they would say, it's Jesus of Nazareth. What? I can't recognize him. Because that's what the prophecy says.

[19:01] His face was disfigured more than any because of the severe battering and the fear for flogging and everything that he had received. And yet, although there is this dying figure who appears so helpless, the criminal turns to Jesus and recognizes that this is the Savior, that this is the Son of God.

And it's a, it's a wonderful moment of faith where he sees who Jesus is and he prays the most simple prayer. And he said, Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.

You know, some of the greatest prayers in the Bible are incredibly brief. Just a few words. Some of you here tonight may be saying, I don't know how to pray. I come to funerals and I come to things and church and weddings and such like and I hear prayers and I say, I can't pray.

Prayer is not in the multitude of words. It's in the heart. And it might only be two or three words. And we find that quite often. The publican in the temple, Lord, be merciful to me, thee sinner.

Lord, that I might receive my sight. And here it says, Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom. There's no great theology, no great understanding, but there's sufficient understanding and sufficient faith.

[20:31] And that's all we need. just to say, Lord, be merciful to me. That's all you need to cry. With all your heart, go to the Lord and say, Lord, please be merciful to me, a sinner.

And that's what this man is really crying. And we must never, ever, ever underestimate the power of Christ to save. Because it tells us he's able to save to the uttermost.

And he can save just like that in a moment. I remember the fellow on the horse back and he always put it into rhyme. And he was galloping along and the horse flung him off.

And in that second he thought he was going to die and he cried out for Meshie. And before he hit the ground he had God's Meshie. From the stirrup to the ground Meshie sought, Meshie found.

That's what he wrote afterwards. Just the, and that the Lord can, that's what he can, just in the twinkling of an eye that he can have Meshie upon a person. And so we find here's this man and as he's approaching death the Lord has Meshie upon him.

[21 : 40] But we find that as all that's taking place here we find in verse 44 that there's various phenomena occur. And one of the things is that the the very scene of the crucifixion is plunged into darkness.

darkness. It's like as if the sun in the universe, the midday sun, it's almost as if heaven is saying we can't bear to look on this.

It's as if the sun in the sky is hiding its face. But of course we know that this darkness was symbolic because that darkness was speaking to us of the darkness that Jesus plunged into where he became the ultimate sin bearer.

This is where he was bearing our sin. This is where he was doing big business with the Father. This is where he was being crushed. This is where God's wrath was being poured upon him for our sin. And then we have that amazing moment when the curtain of the temple was torn in two and we read elsewhere it was from top to bottom. The Lord tore that curtain. And we find another amazing thing.

[22 : 58] Because at the end we find at verse 46 then Jesus calling out with a loud voice said Father into your hands I commit my spirit. Elsewhere we're told the different gospel writers highlight different things.

And one of them says that of course with this cry he cried out it is finished. And then of course he then cries Father into your hand I commit my spirit. But what is important to underline is with a loud voice.

Calling out with a loud voice. And here we're seeing something quite extraordinary. Because crucifixion as we know was probably as bad a death as you could possibly have to undergo. It was devised to make death as long and as painful as lingering and as cruel as possible. It is said that those who were crucified died a thousand deaths.

And the one thing that a crucified person at the end as they were approaching death could not do was cry out loud. Because you were being suffocated.

[24 : 03] That was part of the awfulness of it. That you were gasping gasping for breath. You were being strangled. You couldn't get a proper gasp of breath.

death. And a person who was approaching death could not cry out with a loud voice. But Jesus did. And what Jesus was demonstrating here was that he was in control even into death.

Because he dismissed his spirit. He was in control even there. He died absolutely and completely same as you and I unless the Lord comes first will die.

And we will breathe take our last breath. But his dying was physically it was the same. But there was a difference in that he was even in control even at that very moment.

And we find that when Jesus does this verse 47 it tells us now when the centurion saw what had taken place notice what he does.

[25 : 16] He praised God saying certainly this man was innocent. And in fact if we turn to Mark's gospel we find the same thing there about the centurion that it tells us in verse 39 of chapter 15 and when the centurion who stood facing him.

So you've got to remember if we can see the scene you have all these people involved but the centurion is a person who is overseeing everything. And he is standing we're told that he's standing facing the cross.

And when the centurion who stood facing him so that throughout the whole operation and all that was taking place and remember this centurion because it's his job and all the other soldiers are under him he is standing like I suppose like a clerk of works director of operations he's in control and he's standing facing Jesus and he's watching everything and he's listening to everything throughout these hours.

And we've got to remember that he heard as the soldiers were hammering driving the nails into Jesus that Jesus is praying father forgive them for they know not what they're doing.

And this centurion he then says in verse 39 of Mark 15 and when the centurion who stood facing him saw that in this way he breathed his last because this centurion would have been overlooking overseeing probably many deaths many executions many crucifixions he had never seen anyone anyone ever like this.

[27 : 02] He said truly this man was the son of God. God. And in this chapter here we find that the centurion that he is saying truly certainly this man was innocent.

Because we've got to remember the centurion is standing there all the time and he's listening to Jesus and he's watching Jesus. He's listening to the conversation between the criminal and Jesus. Lord remember me when you come into your kingdom. That day this centurion heard things and saw things that he had never ever seen in his life before.

And I would like to think that in that confession that declaration that this centurion makes particularly what we have in Mark that truly this man was the son of God.

That this man has come to a realization and maybe more than that that a belief that this is that here we are seeing fruit to Jesus' prayer.

[28 : 04] Father forgive them. Already the father has forgiven one of the criminals and I would like to think that he has forgiven the centurion who is over all the operations that are taking place.

And then we find at the last part here where Jesus is buried that another confession takes place because we find here that this man Joseph from the town of Arimathea and he was part of the Jewish council but it tells us he was a good and righteous man and he hadn't consented to their decision and he was looking for the kingdom of God.

He went to Pilate and he asked for the body of Jesus. And again if we go back to Mark's gospel we find that it's very interesting.

It tells us in verse 43 Joseph of Arimathea a respected member of the council who was also himself looking for the kingdom of God took courage and went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Pilate was surprised to hear that he should have already died. And summoning the centurion he asked him whether he was already dead.

[29 : 19] And when he learned from the centurion that he was dead he consented. I would love to have heard that conversation. I wonder what Pilate actually thought.

Pilate was the man who knew all along what was the right thing to do. Everything within him was saying I should release Jesus. And yet he didn't.

His wife said to him release Jesus. The voice in his own head was saying if ever I have seen a righteous man if ever I have seen a man who is not worthy of death it's this man.

And he was determined to release Jesus but he didn't. Pilate is a real warning to us of somebody who knows what is right but never gets around to doing it.

And you know we can be like that with the gospel. We know what's right and we have every intention of sorting it out. We have every intention of getting right with God but you know it's possible that we might never do it.

[30 : 21] Please, please, please don't be one of these. But what I love about Joseph of Arimathea when he comes forward to ask. He takes courage because up until this point there were some of the leading lights within the Jewish council who believed in Jesus but because they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.

They didn't confess him. They were afraid they'd be thrown out. Whether Joseph of Arimathea was in that actual category I don't know. But up until this moment he has never displayed this courage that on this particular evening he does.

And he comes to Pilate. This was the most dangerous time. And I would like to think that even today, tonight, that some of you who maybe witnessed the Lord's Supper today, that maybe it's lack of courage that's holding you back.

And that lack of courage can come in so many different ways. And one of the most profound and powerful ways is what will people think?

You see, we live in small communities and we know one another. We know our faults and our failings and we say, oh, I can't. I can't go forward because people know what I'm like.

[31 : 43] Do you know what's important? Is that Jesus knows what you're like. And it's important that you get right with Jesus and leave everything else. You ask for the courage.

If you love the Lord Jesus Christ, you ask the Lord, Lord, give me the courage to come out on your side, to come out and confess because we're told in the scripture that we are to believe in our heart and we are to confess with our mouth, with both, with both things we're to do.

So here was this man, Joseph, and here was this centurion, and there are so many who are making representation and testifying, this is Jesus.

What about you tonight? As you look on these different type of characters, we haven't really looked at Pilate, just mentioned him. The man who knew what was right, but didn't do it. look at the man, the criminal, he was only interested in living for this world, he wanted out of the cross simply to live for the world, he had no interest in Jesus.

Or there was the man who was dying and he saw Jesus as the savior. There was the centurion who said truly, this was the son of God. Where are you tonight? Who do you side with?

[33 : 09] Because it's a very, very important question. It's the most important question you can ask yourself. Where am I in relation to Jesus?

You're either with him or you're without him. And if you're without him, I would ask you tonight, particularly on the Sunday night of a communion, that you would seek him.

And as we said, we don't need big prayers, but we need a prayer, however small that means what it says. Lord, save me.

Let us pray. O Lord, we give you thanks for the word of God, and we give thanks for everything that we receive in it.

We give thanks, O Lord, for the wonderful way of salvation, which no human mind could ever have devised. Christ. And even the greatest human mind is still incapable of understanding it all, because great is the mystery of godliness, Christ manifest in the flesh.

[34 : 18] But we give thanks, O Lord, that faith brings to us what sometimes we don't understand, and faith makes real the things that we cannot properly see.

And O Lord, our God, then we pray to bless us. Bless everybody here tonight. Bless every home represented. Bless all our families and all our loved ones.

Take us to our homes in safety, we pray. And may you be a blessing to this community and to this congregation. And we remember the neighboring congregation in its vacancy at this time.

And we pray, Lord, that you will bless them. Lord, do us good and take away sin. In Jesus' name. Amen. Our conclusion