

Luke 23:26-43 "The Forgiving Savior"

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[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

We're going to keep meditating on the cross for the rest of this service, and in particular on the man of sorrows who was crucified on it.

See, that's what Luke has been focusing on in his gospel since chapter 1, isn't it? Who is this Jesus? What did he do?

What did he say? What is his identity? And we've been learning about him as a king who has an upside-down kind of kingdom that nobody's ever expected.

We've seen him as a prophet who is mighty in word and is teaching and mighty in deed and is healing and is other acts. And all along the way, as we've learned all of those things about Jesus, Jesus has been telling us that the most important thing about him, the most important thing about who he is and about why he has come, is coming in Jerusalem where he's going to suffer and die and rise again.

[1 : 15] He's promised forgiveness of sins. He's pointed us to eternal hope. He's told us of a kingdom that's not of this world but that changes everything about this world.

And now this is it. We're there. The greatest events in human history. The defining moments for Jesus and his followers. Now, as we've seen recently, he's been betrayed.

Arrested. Denied. Beaten. Found innocent. And nonetheless condemned to be crucified.

Turn with me to Luke chapter 23. And we'll read together of his actual crucifixion. In the middle of the night, Roman governor Pilate has granted the demand of the Jewish leaders and the crowds to have Jesus killed.

And in the early morning hours of Friday, he hands him over to be crucified. Follow as I read and listen for the heart of Jesus that tells you more of why he came, why he died, and of who he is.

[2 : 32] Luke 23 at verse 26. And as they led Jesus away, they seized one Simon of Cyrene who was coming in from the country and laid on him the cross to carry it behind Jesus.

And there followed him a great multitude of the people and of women who were mourning and lamenting for him. But turning to them, Jesus said, Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.

For behold, the days are coming when they will say, Blessed are the barren and the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed. Then they will begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us and to the hills, cover us.

For if they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry? Two others who were criminals were led away to be put to death with him.

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.

[3 : 41] And they cast lots to divide his garments. And the people stood by watching, but the rulers scoffed at him, saying, He saved others. Let him save himself if he's the Christ of God, his chosen one.

The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine and saying, If you're the king of the Jews, save yourself. There was also an inscription over him, This is the king of the Jews.

One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us. But the other 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. And he said, Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom. And he said to him, Truly I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise. This is God's word. Let's ask for his help. Holy Spirit, we do ask that you would help us.

[4 : 52] Help us grasp things that are too great for us to comprehend. Amen. These are somber words, but really hopeful words.

They're words that in some ways are very familiar to us, and in other ways are just so far beyond us. Father, I pray that you would not let a single person in this room miss the message of the cross this morning.

The message of the Savior who is on it. Father, don't let me miss it. Don't let us miss it. May we hear you. Speak to us by your word, we ask in Jesus' name.

Amen. Luke doesn't, in this account, focus our attention much on the details of Jesus' physical suffering.

But as Jesus heads outside the city to be crucified, we're told something at the very beginning that reminds us what he suffered in the past 12 hours. Someone else has to come carry the cross for him.

[6 : 04] Remember the emotional agony? The physical torment in the garden, sweating drops of blood? That's only maybe 12 hours ago.

He's now been hit in the face and beaten. He's been scourged with the flagellum whip to the point that historians tell us bones and cartilage were visible.

A crown of thorns pressed into his head as blood runs down his neck. He's been so weakened that Simon has to carry that cross beam for him.

Because the omnipotent Creator, who by the word of his mouth spoke the trees into existence, has now humbled himself so far in the flesh to the point that he no longer has the strength to lift the wood that he made.

Just think about that for a minute. That's where Jesus is. I don't know about you, but I'm pretty selfish by nature. I'm told that not unlike many men, when I get just a little bit of a cold, that selfishness spikes, and I become all about myself.

[7 : 28] When I'm sick or weak, when I'm attacked, when I'm stressed or hurting, I become even more self-centered. I think mostly of myself.

And I've never endured anywhere near the physical, emotional, spiritual torment that Jesus is under. And I want you to watch what happens through this passage.

If you want to know what he's about, watch now as he puts his heart for others on display in the midst of his intense personal pain and weakness.

An incredible reminder that he came not for himself, but for others to be indeed good news of great joy for all people.

The first group he encounters is some women who are mourning. Verse 27, there followed him a great multitude of the people and of women who were mourning and lamenting for him.

[8 : 29] But turning to them, Jesus said, daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For behold, the days are coming when they will say, blessed are the barren and the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed.

Then they will begin to say to the mountains, fall on us until the hills cover us. For if they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry? Jesus not getting lost in self-pity as the consummate prophet continues to call God's people back to him.

Here he's warning them of coming devastation. It would happen first in about 40 years when Rome ransacks Jerusalem. And it would be terrible.

Terrible to the point that even a great blessing like childbearing will be considered a curse. If this crucifixion is happening to an innocent Jesus when the wood is green, imagine what judgment will come upon rebellious Israel when the wood is dry, so to speak.

And so the point of what Jesus is saying is the warning of impending judgment calls you to repentance. Just as the prophet Jonah's message to Nineveh, yet 40 days and Nineveh will be destroyed, it was meant to call them to repentance and to find rescue.

[10 : 01] So Jesus is calling Israel to respond in repentance. In fact, if they listen and watch closely, they'll realize their only ultimate hope is Jesus himself.

His judgment-bearing death on the cross. Jesus, on the way to the cross, preparing to endure the just punishment for sin, pleads the urgency of repentance.

Perhaps nowhere else better than the cross can we see the necessity of turning from our sins so clearly. As awful as the cross is, Jesus says weeping should be for those facing the just judgment for their sin with no protection from the eternal wrath of God.

Our sin deserves the cross and eternal death. Those, Jesus says, are the greater tears. But they push Jesus onward, out to Golgotha, the skull, where verse 33 says they actually crucify Him.

This means the actual nailing of His hands to the cross. One nail through each one. And after being raised up, likely then one nail through both feet together.

[11 : 30] Most of us can't imagine pain like that. The torn flesh, the severed nerves, literally excruciating pain.

A word just for this form of torture means pain from the cross. And I tell you that so that you can marvel with me at what comes out of Jesus' mouth at this very moment.

The words from this passage that have most stuck with me this week, Jesus says, Father, forgive them. Perhaps first referring to those Roman soldiers who are driving the nails into His hands and feet, but there are many whose actions have led to Jesus being here on the cross.

and He says, Father, forgive them. There is little worse that anyone could do to a person.

In fact, the crucifying of the innocent Son of God, whether they understood it or not, has to be characterized as the most heinous sin ever.

[12 : 50] At least from a divine perspective, what else would have incited God's wrath, kindled His just anger more than His Son being unjustly tortured and killed.

And to these sinners, Jesus' heart of forgiveness is on full display. Y'all, what's Jesus doing at the cross?

What's He come to the cross for? He's coming to forgive. He's got forgiveness so much on His mind as He is nailed to the cross that He is praying for those who are causing Him this intense pain.

I found so much encouragement lately in Jesus praying for me. As He prays for Peter that Peter's faith would not fail, that Peter's repentance would actually advance God's kingdom.

But this may be the best prayer that Jesus prays. The one I need to hear over and over. Jesus prays, Father, forgive them.

[14 : 07] He pleads for forgiveness for the worst sinners. Hear those words clearly in your heart today, especially if you think you've failed God.

You've blown it really big. You think no one, especially God, could ever really love you. Father, forgive them.

Maybe you've sung those words that it was my sin that held Him there. And you felt the weight of being just like those who yelled, crucify Him, crucify Him, and who drove the nails into His hands and feet and you felt ashamed and hopeless and you've given up hope for yourself.

You must listen to Jesus more than to your own condemnation, more than to the lies of Satan in your heart. Jesus says, Father, forgive them.

Who is Jesus? Oh, He's a forgiving Savior. That's why He's walking this painful road in the first place, isn't it?

[15 : 28] It's why He came, praise the Lord, He came to forgive. I'll show us that again in a minute. But first, Luke gives us a glimpse of the people around Jesus as He's offering forgiveness.

They're casting lots for His clothes in fulfillment of the Old Testament. Jesus and those around Him in this passage, one Old Testament prophecy after another being fulfilled by them.

But they're not just putting Him on the cross, they're also mocking Him. He's already got blood and tears covering Him. Now there's their spit and their jeers just landing on Him.

Verse 35, the people stood by watching, but the rulers, their religious leaders, scoffed at Him, saying, He saved others. Let Him save Himself.

If He's the Christ of God, His chosen one, soldiers are joining in too. They mock Him, coming up, offering Him sour wine, saying, If you're the King of the Jews, save yourself.

[16 : 42] And that's what it says, right? There's an inscription over Him, Pilate's written it. This is the King of the Jews. Mockery of this supposed Messiah King.

You hear what they're doing, right? It's His identity that's in question. Some King this is. He's seemingly powerless. Doesn't seem like a king.

Interestingly, they acknowledge that He has saved others. Perhaps they've seen or heard of those He's healed. The demons He's cast out. Even dead people He's brought back to life. And that's worried them a little bit. But here now, finally, they're back in control. They finally see proof, they think, that He has no real power. That we're really the ones in charge. They have won. They're stronger than He is after all. It always reminds me of the scene at the stone table in C.S. Lewis' *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe*.

[17 : 50] There's Aslan bound and being killed and the wicked white witch and all the evil creatures dancing around the great lion and calling him this little bound kitty cat with no power to scare them.

It seems victory is in their hands and Aslan has finally and decisively been defeated and died. See, in the minds of the mocking religious leaders and soldiers, the Messiah, the coming King would have always been stronger, right?

He would always defeat His foes and so this here is proof that He's not who He claims to be. Actually, it's Jesus who has read Isaiah 53, isn't it?

You remember that from earlier? It was long. It said the Messiah, the King, would actually be a man of sorrows, pierced, crushed, oppressed, afflicted, anguish of soul, the picture of a suffering servant, a suffering Savior.

Jesus has been telling him that His entire ministry, that this is what the Messiah must do, right? This would have to happen to Him. It's absolutely part of His kingship and it's the way that He as a king actually saves others unlike any other king they've ever heard of.

[19 : 30] They've never considered that this could really be the way a king saves. Do you see who Jesus is? One of the thieves does, doesn't He?

by some miracle of God in His heart, one of those being crucified on a cross next to Jesus sees through all the mockery and realizes the truth.

He sees through all the seeming weakness of this dying king and He realizes Jesus' ultimate strength that in order to save Him, Jesus can't get down.

He must stay on the cross. He has to even correct the first thief, doesn't He? Verse 39, one of the criminals who were hanged railed at Him saying, are you not the Christ?

Save yourself and us. Get down and help us out here. But the other rebuked Him saying, do you not fear God since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?

[20 : 35] And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds. These are not just petty thieves. They've committed capital offenses. They deserve to die and the thief sees that and knows that.

He's guilty before Rome. That's why He's on the cross. But even more ominously than that, do you not fear God? He sees He's guilty before God.

Justly under a sentence of condemnation for what He's done. And He sees that and somehow He also recognizes Jesus' innocence, doesn't He?

But this man has done nothing wrong. It's actually the fourth time in this chapter that someone pronounces Jesus to have done nothing wrong.

one after another has seen His innocence even as He heads to the cross. And so the thief sees a righteous king even as He hangs on a cross.

[21 : 44] And so what He does is He begs Jesus for mercy. He seems to realize that even as Jesus heaves His final breaths on the cross, there's much more to this king than you see.

There's a lot of life left in Him yet. And so He asks the king for what? Not for immediate relief from His death sentence, but for eternal remembrance by Jesus.

He said, Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom. And then the glorious, beautiful, hopeful words of Jesus, He said to Him, truly I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.

A promise with the immediate hope of today, with the unending joy of with me, the eternal comfort of in paradise.

paradise. What a word to hear as you die. What a promise. Today you will be with me in paradise.

[23 : 00] Simple faith in Jesus was all the thief had. Right? No record of good deeds. No pattern of trying to reform His ways.

No time to balance out the good with the bad so maybe things will go well when I die. Probably, I think, not even a perfect grasp of all the intricacies of reformed theology.

I don't know. Probably not. Only a faith that if Jesus remembered him, he would be safe.

If this guy remembers me, I'll be okay. I trust that the death of this king would somehow give him life. That's all he had.

He had no other opportunity. Not Jesus, get down and save me, but Jesus, stay on that cross and save me. That's his prayer and that's exactly what Jesus does, isn't it?

[24 : 04] He achieves and extends the forgiveness he spoke of earlier in praying to his father. He promises the thief his eternal and immediate presence in a paradise.

It's a garden. The cross is restoring all of creation to its good design. Well, there's another whole sermon there for not for this morning. But Jesus' immediate and eternal presence is certain even though and actually because right now he hangs dying on a cross.

salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Hallelujah! What a Savior!

In that moment he saves him forever. I want to give you a picture of this salvation that has been helpful to me.

Many pastors have used a version of this. Kids, you can draw this if you want to draw a picture. I think you'll understand what we're talking about. It might help you to draw it. But there were three men who were crucified who died on the cross that Friday.

[25 : 18] The first thief had a lot of sin in him. In his heart. His deeds, criminal deeds, his words of hate to Jesus and he hung there on the cross receiving the penalty for that sin.

The due reward of his deeds. In other words, his sin was on him too. He was paying the price, carrying the weight and the burden of his sin.

The second thief had a lot of sin in him too, didn't he? We don't know exactly what they were. Thieving. Perhaps creating riots.

Insurrection maybe. And when he came to the cross on that day, his sin was also on him as he walked and hung there. He was going to pay the earthly and then the eternal penalty for his sin.

But something changed. And this is what's really important to understand. Something changed. A man whose innocence this thief noticed who had no sin whatsoever in him was actually there dying on a cross next to him in the place of real sinners.

[26 : 50] Taking a punishment he didn't deserve. Dying for other sinners like you and me and like the thief who looks at him and says I trust him.

I want my sin on him. And so Jesus who had no sin in him actually has sin placed on him on the cross.

The sin in particular in this moment of that thief who's trusting him. he himself 1 Peter tells us bore our sins in his body on the tree.

Jesus with no sin in him has sin placed on him. He bears the penalty. He takes the death and the wrath of his father for sin so that as a result the thief who trusted him still hung there on the cross with sin in him.

That was still a sinful thief. But as he trusted Jesus his sin went on to Jesus there was no sin on him anymore.

[28 : 09] Instead what? An eternal hope promise from the one who took his sin. Y'all every single person in this room has sin in him.

Sin that deserves death and eternal punishment. Every single one of us you and me.

The question is which thief are you? will you go to your grave with the sin that is in you remaining on you?

Or will you trust the Savior who goes to the cross with the rescue and forgiveness of guilty sinners on his heart?

Please don't leave here this morning uncertain about the answer to that question. You've got to know. what's going to happen to the sin that you feel and know in your own heart?

[29 : 19] How will it be handled? Somebody will pay for it. God is just and holy. The question is will you or will Jesus? May it be that the forgiving Savior is the one you trust to handle your sin.

Might you say with confidence and joy he was pierced for my transgressions he was crushed for my iniquities by his wounds I am healed.

The message of the cross of Christ crucified is the power of God for salvation amen? That's our hope. And it's not just every single person in this room who needs Jesus' forgiveness it's every single person in your neighborhood in your school in your workplace every single one of those people has sin in her sin deserving death eternal separation from their father and unless she entrusts herself to the substitute who hangs on the cross in our place she also has that sin on her

do you understand that?

Won't you tell her and show her the good news of a forgiving savior it's our only hope it's their only hope see as Jesus hangs on the cross we see who he really is don't we he's innocent undeserving of death in fact the only person who ever stands that way before God his father he's the king the promised messiah the suffering servant who demonstrates what he has taught that glory comes from going down that strength is in willing weakness that those who appear most rejected are most welcomed by the true king he shows us his heart for others that he came to rescue to forgive even as he dies reaching out to weeping women to cruel enemies to a dying thief and ultimately to all his people who will ever trust him by staying on the cross for them he forgives and brings desperate sinners into paradise see the identity of Jesus is not merely a philosophical discussion is it it's profoundly personal ask ask the thief only the innocent son of

God son of man can suffer in my place and offer me eternal life I don't deserve he's the only one with space to take the sin that is on me on to him he's the only one who can do that and the good news is he has the heart to do it so sorry Jesus was committed to going to that cross and no taunts or pleas for him to get down or appeals to his self-love could get him down he is committed to staying there for you and for me Jesus paid it all if you trust him the payday for your sin when the bill is coming up and you have to give account for it is not ahead of you but is behind you you just read about it judgment full and final and punishment on your sin has been meted out on your savior and there is nothing else to be paid you will be with him free from sin victorious over death forever amen that's the good news of the gospel and we all need this forgiving savior don't we no matter where you are this morning listen

[33 : 59] Christian some of you are living in shame you've known Jesus maybe trusted him a long time but you can hardly walk into church you drag yourself into your father's presence occasionally but doesn't feel good you're sure that he's shaking his head rolling his eyes because your past sin your present struggle lift up your head this morning hear Jesus words father forgive them he forgives soldiers nailing him to the cross he forgives a thief who has no chance to earn it he forgives you completely you're free free to sing joyfully free to pray confidently free to live for him passionately some of you spend a lot of time around

Jesus you're very close to him you come to church you're near him a lot but you've never actually in faith asked him to take the sin in you on him don't remain like that other thief don't stay like the religious leaders who knew a lot about Jesus but left the forgiving savior at arm's length as someone much less than a real king happy not to have to deal with him any longer listen your eternity can be settled in an instant and your days here given purpose and meaning that are eternal I suspect some of you are here this morning and you have always written Jesus off you have spent your life ignoring him even though you have heard of him and some of his claims

I am glad you are here I would ask you to consider him on the cross this morning who is he why was he there either an utter failure or there is eternal forgiveness one of the most well attested events of human history Jesus of Nazareth on the cross why he says to forgive really big sinners you're not beyond hope in your brokenness pain he says to enter into the sorrows of the deepest suffering ones you're not alone in your pain he says he's there to make right every wrong including yours forever with him you're not stuck fending for yourself you've got one who will fight and win for you over your greatest enemies there is forgiveness there is purpose there is eternal hope because there is a savior hallelujah if you don't know him you can trust him today won't you trust him if you do know him oh friends there are so many not in this room right now who need to know him let's pray

Jesus for your death in our place we can never thank you enough we worship you we trust in you and we ask that you would keep Satan from our hearts and allow us to believe that someone could truly forgive us completely fully and finally and forever that you would love us that much would you so overwhelm us with the joy of that that we can't help but shout it from the rooftops to be the feet that bring good news to many who need a savior we are the first ones who need him and so father thank you for sending him for us give us joy in him even today we ask in his name amen for more information visit us online at [southwood.org](https://yetanother sermon.host)