

Luke 23:32-43

Jesus loves Criminals

³² There were also two others, criminals, led with Him to be put to death. ³³ 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. ³⁴ Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do."

And they divided His garments and cast lots. ³⁵ 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."

³⁶ The soldiers also mocked Him, coming and offering Him sour wine, ³⁷ and saying, "If You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself."

³⁸ And an inscription also was written over Him in letters of Greek, Latin, and Hebrew:

³⁹ Then one of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed Him, saying, "If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us."

⁴⁰ But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, "Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? ⁴¹ And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong." ⁴² Then he said to Jesus, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom."

⁴³ And Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise."

An elderly woman was coming out of the grocery story after doing her grocery shopping.

A) As she approached her car she noticed that 4 men were sitting inside of her car.

B) Thinking they were trying to steal her car – she stopped pushing her shopping cart –

1) She reached into her purse and took out a handgun pointing it at the 4 men – she screamed at the men –

C) Get out of the car now or I will shoot!

The 4 men didn't wait around for a second invitation they got out and ran like mad.

A) Now the lady proceeded to load her shopping bags into the back of the car and got into the drivers seat.

B) But there was a small problem, her key wouldn't fit the ignition.

C) See Her car was an identical make, model and color and was parked five spaces further down the Isle

Well she proceeded to drive to the nearest police station- to report what had happened

A) As she starting telling her story to the sergeant at the counter

B) He burst out laughing as he pointed to the other end of the counter

C) There were the 4 very terrified men reporting a car-jacking by a mad elderly white women....

D) No charges were filed.- Mistaken identity

Talk about being at the wrong place at the wrong time!

A) Well in the passage before us today – we find Jesus in a place that no one thought he would end up – **ON A CROSS.**

B) But he is exactly where he was supposed to be and surrounded by exactly who he is supposed to be with.

C) If you are taking notes – we want to first of all notice that Jesus was crucified between two criminals

D) Two men who are both hopeless, heartless, and Christ less

1) But we see that Jesus promises one of them heaven.

This might be a startling statistic to some of you – but 25% of Americans have a criminal record.

A) That means one out of every four people you meet has a criminal record

B) Story of many in our congregation – past that involves a criminal record

1) but lives have been transformed by the love of Jesus

C) Criminals, kakourgos is the Greek word.

1) It means really bad dudes, literally evil-working men.

Now we are not told what they did.

A) We are not told their names. We're just given this generic name, "criminals."

B) But the other two Gospels, the other two Synoptic Gospels, Matthew and Mark actually tell us what the crime was specifically.

C) In those gospel accounts were are told they were thieves or robbers – **but don't think of petty theft**

The word means bandits and it refers to bandits who pillage after they steal.

A) So these are not petty thieves, these are heartless criminals,

B) those who would steal and then take pleasure in hurting their victims or killing their victims

1) or abusing their victims.

C) Note Crucifixion was the means of death reserved for the worst of criminals and those who defied Rome.

1) These men fit that description

D) The Jewish people thought that anyone who was crucified was actually cursed by God – **“cursed is anyone ...tree!”**

So we have Jesus the innocent – crucified with these notorious criminals {Let that sink in for a moment

A) But that is exactly where he is supposed to be – this is not accidental – this is isn't random –

B) IT IS INTENTIONAL by design

C) 700 years before the crucifixion, the prophet Isaiah said that he would be **"numbered among the transgressors."**

1) In other words, it was always part of the plan of God that when Jesus died, he would die among criminals.

Why would that be in the plan of God?

A) Simply because Jesus was the friend of sinners.

B) Did you know he is called that in the Bible, the friend of sinners?

1) I wish more of us had that reputation. "Oh, she's a friend of sinners. He's the friend of sinners."

C) See, this has been Jesus' style all along.

Think about his birth - he was born among animals in a manger.

A) And When Jesus died, he died among criminals. This is divine humility on display

B) born among animals, died among criminals; born in a cave, died on a cross.

1) **This is the friend of sinners dying among sinners.**

2nd Jesus endured public ridicule

A) It came in every direction

³⁹ And those who passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads ⁴⁰ and saying, "You who destroy the temple and build *it* in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross." Matthew 27:39

B) Those who were walking by mocked him

⁴¹ Likewise the chief priests also, mocking with the scribes and elders, said, ⁴² "He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him. ⁴³ He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now if He will have Him; for He said, 'I am the Son of God.'" Matthew 27:41-43

C) The religious leaders were mocking him. –

Then Matthew adds this: ⁴⁴ Even the robbers who were crucified with Him reviled Him with the same thing. Matthew 27:44

D) Just when you thought it couldn't get any lower – even the two robbers were mocking him.

Luke gives us a clue as to what was being said by one of the robbers: 39 Then one of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed Him, – {railing on him} saying, "If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us."

E) **But then suddenly a miracle happens – one of the thieves has a change of heart**

⁴⁰ But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, "Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? ⁴¹ And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong."

⁴² Then he said to Jesus, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom."

Talk about a sudden change of heart. a 180-degree turn internally.

A) Instead of mocking, he stops, and he rebukes the other criminal who is mocking

B)What happened to this man?

C)I think his eyes were opened as he heard Jesus pray a shocking prayer – **Father forgive them -for they know not what they do.**

D)Who prays like that for their enemies/ their accusers?

When Driving – someone cuts you off – do you pray for them?–

A)Or are you yelling – you idiot what is wrong with you who taught you how to drive!–
mom why do all the idiots come out when Dad is driving

B)If you Pray – Lord help them get a ticket – flat tire – get them Lord

C)I don't think any of us are praying – Jesus forgive that guy – bless them today! **NO WAY**

D)Jesus is so different from us - While Jesus was doing the greatest work on earth, **dying for our sins**
1)he was uttering the greatest words on earth., "**Father, forgive them.**

E)Again let that sink in a minute

I think when this thief hears Jesus pray in this way – startled him – who is this man – Who prays like this.

A)Suddenly his eyes are opened – He believes in Jesus

B)The thief's conversion – note 4 things

C)**First of all, he confessed his guilt.** Verse 40, "**The other answered, rebuked him, saying, 'Do you not even fear God?'**

1) that must have come as a shock to the other criminal.

D)At first they were both blaspheming Jesus – but now this guy stops and is rebuking his friend. '**Do you not even fear God, seeing that you are under the same condemnation?**

E)We are getting what we deserve but this man has done nothing wrong!

He is suddenly thinking about his eternity –

A)He is struck by a fear of God – standing before God the righteous judge

B)The fear of God, is an acknowledgment. "I'm sinful - He confessed his guilt.

B)Second, he trusted Christ. Look at his words, "Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

C)Now there's a lot there. First of all, he recognizes Jesus as "**Lord.**"

1)He doesn't say, "Hey, you," "Hey, buddy," hey boss!

D)he says, "Lord." **He also recognizes him as King, because only kings have kingdoms. "Remember me when you come into your kingdom."**

And he recognizes that though this man Jesus is about to die, - he knew that nobody survives Roman crucifixion.

A)But somehow he has this sense that this isn't the end of Jesus

B)after this he is going to live again in a kingdom."

C)So he believes that Jesus is Lord that he is King that he's going to live after this in a kingdom.

1)That's a pretty clear Christology for a criminal on his deathbed---all in an instant this is in his heart/ mind

Third thing you should notice is he made it personal. "Remember me when you come into your kingdom."

A)You have to make it personal. Do not think salvation is a package deal.

B)There are no two-for-one specials.

1)My parents are saved – so I am just grafted in – NOPE it doesn't work that way. -**My spouse is saved coattails**

C)**No. You must personally must turn to Christ.** The Bible says, "**As many as received him, to them he gave the power to become children of God.**"

D)He confessed his guilt. He trusted Christ. He made it personal.

Let me tell you a fourth thing he did: He made it public.

A) He did it publicly. He had to say it loud enough so that Jesus could hear him.

B) And if Jesus could hear him, presumably those right there at the cross could also hear him say,
1) because it has been recorded, -

C) Luke wasn't there so someone who was there relayed this to Luke

D) So - He confessed his guilt. He trusted Christ. He made it personal. - He made it public

1) A true death bed – conversion

Jesus response: Jesus offers a gracious word of Hope!

⁴³ And Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise."

A) Paradise Now that's a very interesting term for heaven.

B) Paul said, 2 Corinthians 12 "I was caught up into the third heaven," right afterwards he said, "I was caught up into paradise."

C) Paradise was a very unique word. It's a Persian word that means a walled garden.

The Persian kings had beautiful gardens that were walled and watered. – Special place

A) And if the king wanted to honor someone, he made that someone what was called a **companion of the garden**.

B) This is what it meant – the king was inviting you to **walk with him in his own private garden**.

C) It was an invitation into friendship and companionship that was reserved for only a few pp

That is a great picture of heaven:

A) Not just a place of golden streets – no more death or tears

B) The ultimate in intimacy closeness – fellowship **uninterrupted companionship with Christ**.

Right now we see dimly – distance – then face to face – clearly – see him and be like him.

A) That blessing isn't just reserved for a few people but it is for everyone who simply believes

B) Anyone who like this thief confesses their sin –

C) Anyone who calls Jesus Lord – confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus – saved

D) Anyone who is ready to make Jesus their King!

E) Saved – The Hope of heaven! – Last breath in this life – next breath there

Notice also the word "today." "Today you'll be with me."

A) Not after 1,000 yrs of soul sleep – TODAY! Absent from this body – present with the Lord! – Glorious

B) Think about this: Here's two men dying next to Jesus, both having an equal opportunity to be saved!

C) Jesus is an equal opportunity Savior.

D) There are two men equally as close to Jesus,

1) both of them committed the same crime, both of them were dying the same death,

2) both of them were reviling the same Lord.

But One dies saved; the other dies lost.

A) Both had the opportunity---two different outcomes.

B) And you know why? **Because proximity and opportunity don't guarantee eternal destiny.**

C) Just because you were close, just because you observed, just because you heard,

1) just because you were exposed doesn't mean you'll be saved.

D) You have to make it personal

The Salvation of the thief on the cross is one of the greatest demonstrations of salvation by grace through faith, not works.

A) The thief didn't get baptized, he didn't go to church,

B) he didn't say a prayer he simply believed – **THAT WAS ENOUGH.**

C)The Barna Group did a research document called "What Americans Think It Means to Be a Christian."

- 10% of Americans think it means to be a good person;
- 11% think it means to go to church and be religious;
- 14% thinks it means to love and help others.

D)Let me ask you something: Did this thief on the cross do any of those things?

1)He simply believed – **Jesus said today.....**

He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him. Hebrews 7:25

A)He is able to save to the guttered most! – No one is out of his reach

B)Pastor and Author Max Lucado has shared that one of the greatest struggles he ever had, one of the most difficult truths he had to come to grips with was the greatness of God's grace to reach somebody like a Jeffrey Dahmer.

D)You remember Jeffrey Dahmer? He was the Wisconsin murderer who not only murdered his victims, but raped many of them,
1)dismembered them, and ate them.

E)Depravity at his all-time lowest!

Jeffery Dahmer is going to be in heaven: Radically saved

A)Roy Ratcliff who was a local pastor was invited to come to the prison because a prisoner wanted to get baptized,

B)He arrived and found out it was Jeffrey Dahmer who wanted to be baptized.

1)Pastor Ratcliff admitted he was skeptical at first

C)But in the weeks to come this pastor spent every week with him, one hour a week, talking to him, discipling him. – Really saved – and transformed

D)Lucado said, "I struggled with the idea. I know Jesus is Savior, but could he save somebody that bad, that vicious a criminal?"

1)And he finally said, "I've come to rest in the truth that forgiveness for criminals like Dahmer is at the very heart of the gospel." – **save to the uttermost**

Skip Heitzig tells the story of getting a request to visit a prisoner in NY named David Berkowitz,

A)Berkowitz is one of the most notorious criminals in American history. He was nicknamed "Son of Sam".

B)He went on a horrific killing spree before he was finally arrested.

1)By his own admission he was involved previously in the occult.

C)When he was arrested, he was sentenced to six life sentences, six life terms, 365 consecutive years in prison.

He got radically saved in prison – regularly listens to Pastor Skips Bible studies and is leading several Bible studies in prison.

A)Pastor Skip talks about how blown away he was in meeting him and seeing the work of transformation that Jesus has done in his life.

B)Now for many of us – those stories are hard to identify with because we think – **I am not a criminal – never been arrested – some never even... a ticket**

C)But the Bible says – that we are all criminals – because we have all broken God's law

1)**All sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.**

D)Never Murdered anyone: Angry without cause – same as murder

E)Never adultery – lusted the same

All guilty – all sinners in need of a savior

A)All sinners in need of forgiveness

B)Good news Jesus loves criminals of all sorts –

C)Came and died –pay the price – so that we could be forgiven

D)Paco – all is forgiven

Confess our guilt

Trust Christ as Lord

Make it personal – Remember me

Make it public – V42

Communion