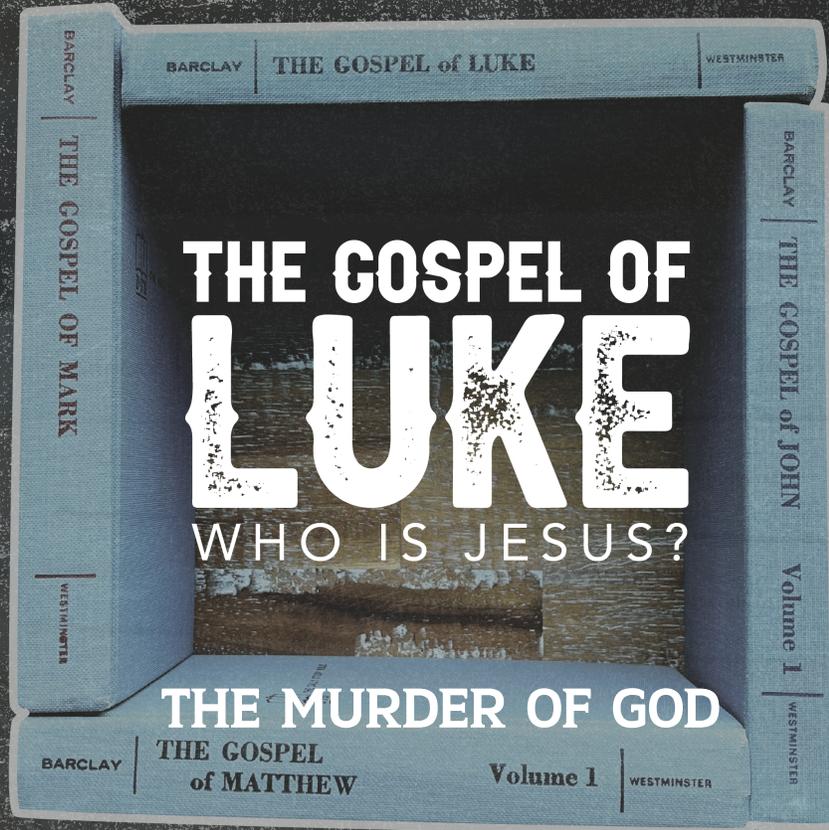


GRACE CITY CHURCH



Pastor Josh McPherson

March 27, 2022

Luke 23:26-49

Luke 23:26-49

26 As the soldiers led him away, they seized Simon from Cyrene, who was on his way in from the country, and put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus. 27 A large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wailed for him. 28 Jesus turned and said to them, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. 29 For the time will come when you will say, 'Blessed are the childless women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!' 30 Then

"they will say to the mountains, "Fall on us!"

and to the hills, "Cover us!"

31 For if people do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?"

32 Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. 33 When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left. 34 Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.

35 The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is God's Messiah, the Chosen One."

36 The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar 37 and said, "If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself."

38 There was a written notice above him, which read: this is the king of the jews.

39 One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!"

40 But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence? 41 We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong."

42 Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

43 Jesus answered him, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise."

44 It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, 45 for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. 46 Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." [e] When he had said this, he breathed his last.

47 The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, "Surely this was a righteous man." 48 When all the people who had gathered to witness this sight saw what took place, they beat their breasts and went away. 49 But all those who knew him, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.

Some Context

Luke 23 Verse 26 is where we'll start. "As the soldiers led Jesus away, they seized Simon from Cyrene who was on his way in from the country and put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus."

Quick context for us, if you've been following along in our series, Jesus has been in the Garden of Gethsemane. He's been sweating drops of blood, asking the Father to remove this cup of wrath from Him. The Father said, "No, that's the plan," and Jesus said, "Okay, I'm in," stands up, goes to the disciples who fell asleep because they were exhausted from sorrow. He says, "Wake up. It's time to keep praying."

Judas shows up with the Roman soldiers, betrays Jesus with a kiss. Peter cuts one of the guys' ears off. Jesus says, "Hey, no swords right now. This is not the time," heals the man's ear. For 30 pieces of silver, which is a couple 100 bucks, Judas betrays his closest friend, his Savior Jesus, and they lead Him into town.

They go through the trial that we looked at last week, and the mobs are demanding that He be crucified and they trade Jesus for Barabbas. All night long between the Garden of Gethsemane and the trial the next day, Jesus was kicked and beaten by Roman soldiers; blindfolded, bullied, and beaten. He shows up with a cloak around His shoulders and a crown of thorns on His head; razor-sharp two-inch thorns woven into a crown, pressed and smashed onto His head so that blood is flowing down His face. His swollen face, His beaten face, His bloodied face as He stands before Pilate who says, "I don't think this guy has done anything

wrong. We shouldn't kill Him." People respond, "We want Barabbas so please, please release the insurrectionist and murderer so we can crucify the righteous Son of God."

We know from the accounts of Matthew and Mark that Pilate then had Jesus scourged. That would be 40 lashes minus one. 39 lashes would be done by Roman soldiers, and they would do it two at a time. They would take the victim and bind his hands over his head exposing his arms and shoulders and back and buttocks. They led Jesus to where they were going to scourge Him. They tore the robe off of His back. So, the robe that had been put over His bleeding body and adhered to the wounds was now torn off His back and all the wounds previously created by the Romans beating Him the night before are now reopened causing immense, excruciating pain. Jesus is bound with His hands over His head and two Roman soldiers began whipping Him.

What they're using is called a flagrum. It's a stick with about four feet of leather strips. Woven into and braided into the leather strips are small steel balls and chips of razor-sharp bone. These soldiers began taking turns whipping and scourging the back of Jesus and then they would trade soldiers out so that soldiers wouldn't get winded and begin to flag in their enthusiasm, and so lessen the violence to Jesus' body. And so, every soldier would get four to six lashes and then they'd switch it out. As it goes with the guys, "I bet I can punch harder than you can punch," and so it became kind of a sadistic competition to see how much flesh they could peel from the back of Jesus.

Tradition tells us that it wasn't uncommon for chunks of ribs to fly into the air as the steel balls would create deep contusions in the back and then the bone chips would cut into the back, in the flesh. As they sunk in and then were torn out, the back became a bloody unrecognizable mess of sinew and tissue and muscle and quivering ribbons of flesh and exposed rib cages and spine.

This continued for about an hour. When they were done with that, we get to verse 26. They put the cross on Jesus and made him carry it. This would have been like a 70 to 90 pound railroad tie. You need to think. This isn't a two by four, this is a railroad tie. Now, understand that railroad tie is not a polished railroad tie; it's a rough-cut railroad tie with lots of splinters, lots of probably blood and feces and urine from past victims who've been crucified on it, and they put it on Jesus's back and they would have tied His arms to it so that it wouldn't slide off, and then they made Him walk from where they scourged Him to the hill where they were going to crucify Him.

History tells us that oftentimes victims carrying the beam would trip and fall and fall on their face, and scientists have replicated the blow and the effect. Essentially, if you fell with a 70- to 100-pound beam on your shoulders and you fell on your face with no ability to put your hands out in front of you to stop the blow, it would have the same physiological effect as being in a head-on car collision at 45 miles an hour with no airbag.

So, Jesus was stumbling and making His way down the *Via Dolorosa* and the soldiers at some point get tired of this, "Let's go into the action. This is fun." Jesus is of course bleeding, He's dehydrated, He's already probably experiencing some measure of muscle cramping and they're like, "You know what, let's get this show on the road." They took it off Jesus and they grabbed poor Simon of Cyrene who was on his way in from the country, and they put the cross on him and they made him carry it behind Jesus.

What Should We Weep Over?

Verse 27, *"A large number of people followed him including women who mourned and wailed for him. Jesus turned and said to them..."* Now, what would you say to them in that moment? You've been betrayed by the ones who were closest to you, you've been beaten all night by Roman soldiers, you've been wrongfully accused, you've been wrongfully condemned, you've been traded for a criminal. You've had justice that's been aborted because the mob demanded that your blood be spilled. You've just been scourged, 40 lashes minus one, by multiple Roman soldiers enjoying their sadistic little competition, you're bleeding, you're bloodied, you're torn, you're disfigured, you have two inch razor thorns pressed into your scalp, you're exhausted, you haven't eaten for 24 hours, you probably haven't drank anything, you're dehydrated, and the people that you know as friends and family are weeping and mourning alongside you and you turn to them, what do you say in that moment?

Jesus said, *"Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me. Weep for yourselves and for your children. For the time will come when you will say, 'Blessed are the childless women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed.' Then they will say to the mountains, 'Fall on us!' and to the hills, 'Cover us!' For if people do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?"*

What's Jesus saying? Jesus is enduring excruciating pain. *Excruciating* – we get the word from the Latin, *excruciate*, meaning of the cross or out of the cross. Jesus is experiencing pain and is about to experience more excruciating pain, and He turns to the women there and He says, "Weep not for me but for yourself and your children." What's He saying? If things are this bad while I'm here, what will they be like, do you think, when I'm gone?

Jesus has already predicted the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple that will come about 40 years later in 70 AD. Historians have given us the account of that event and the besieging of the city. Women were starving and babies were dying from lack of nutrition, water supply cut off, food supply cut off, and they slowly choke the life out of a city where people watched their children starve in front of them over the course of many days. Cannibalism was known to have taken place because people were so desperate to stay alive, and this was all coming in just a few short years after Jesus's death.

What Jesus is saying is weep not for me; I'll soon be in the presence of the Father. Weep for yourself because things are about to get worse. I think what Jesus was saying to those women there and to us here this morning was if you die having failed to mourn your sin and therefore

turn from your sin, my pain and my suffering will pale in comparison to what you will experience for eternity.

Mourning Over VS Managing Your Sin

Jesus is saying, have you wept over your sin? Have you mourned over your sin? Maybe you're here this morning and you felt condemned for your sin, you felt shamed because of your sin, you have felt accused by the enemy of your sin, you have been discouraged by your sin, you've been bummed that you got caught in your sin, but you've never mourned over your sin. Mourning over your sin is where you realize that you've sinned first against God, not your girlfriend; you sinned first against God, not your business partner; you sinned first against God, not your parents; you sinned first against God, not a teacher, not a coach, not your children, not your spouse. You've sinned first against God and you see Him in light of His Holiness and you see yourself in all your rebellion, and it breaks your heart. That's called mourning over your sin.

If you get caught in your sin and then apologize for it and mount a PR campaign so as to hopefully get yourself back in good graces with the public, that's not mourning your sin. That's managing your sin. Managing your sin does not lead to repentance and salvation. Managing your sin leads to more sin down the road. It leads to covering up your sin.

The doctor tells you the you have cancer. "Oh, okay, well, I'll go buy some new clothes. Man, this color takes 15 pounds off me. Whoa!" Okay, so you look better in the mirror but you're still dying of cancer.

When we manage our sin, we may look better to ourselves in the mirror or look better to ourselves in the world, but we're still dying of sin.

Jesus is saying here, unless you mourn for your sin, you can't be saved from your sin. But when we mourn over our sin, it causes us to then look for a solution, look for an answer. Jesus says, "Look to me." You mourning over your sin leads to you turning from your sin, leads to you repenting of your sin, leads to salvation from your sin. Jesus says, as bad as it is to look at me right now, this is nothing in comparison to what one will experience if they die apart from having mourned their sin and turned to me.

Crucifixion

Verse 32, "Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. when they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified Jesus there along with the criminals, one on his right, the other on his left." Now, Luke, who is a physician and a detailed historian, doesn't give us a lot of details here in explaining crucifixion because he wouldn't have needed to because the people reading this would have been very familiar with this unique Roman form of elongated capital punishment. This was designed to be slow, this was

designed to be horrific, this was designed to be shame-filled, this was designed to be public, and it was designed to inflict as much suffering on the victim as humanly possible.

Now, the Romans didn't invent crucifixion. It's believed that the Persians invented it, but the Romans perfected it. Josephus gives us a historical account after one Roman victory besieging a neighboring country. Ring any bells? We've been reading accounts coming out of Ukraine of the atrocities done by soldiers to soldiers and Russians to Ukrainians and Ukrainians to Russians. Who knows what is actually happening, but we do know that there's a body count rising and there's been horrific things being done; 30 bodies here, 200 bodies there, mass grave here.

Josephus gives us an account of, after one Roman conquest, 6000 crucified men, women and children lying in a 15-mile stretch of road. Six thousand, 15 mile. This was walking from here to Leavenworth and just row after row after row. Three thousand on this side, 3000 on this side, crucified, agonizing, weeping, screaming, horrified victims impaled on a wooden cross.

There was no need to go into detail for Luke because people were very conscious and aware of the horrific nature of crucifixion. It was done publicly so as to deter crimes. In fact, the Romans had a law. Crucifixion was so horrific that at first Roman senators, Roman soldiers and then, by extension, Roman citizens were not, by law, allowed to be crucified because it was considered to be so disgraceful. It was below a Roman citizen, unless you were a soldier who had abandoned his post. Other than that, it was safe for foreigners and non-Roman nationals.

Jesus had arrived at the hill of the Skull or Golgotha. They would have taken the beam off of Simon and laid it on the post. As was most common, a hole would have been dug for the main post to sit at the front of. They would lay Jesus down; His torn, shredded, meatloaf back on that wood crossbeam. His right hand would have been extended and a six-inch Roman railroad spike, essentially, would have been driven through His wrist. You see some nice pictures of Jesus holding His nail-pierced palms out. That's a wonderful artistic description. It's not how it would have happened. They learned very early on that if you put a nail spike through the palm, the force against the body would tear it out and the body would fall off the cross. So, the nail would go through the wrist.

Several things were beneficial to the Romans for this. One, it had bone structure so you could go under the wrist and the arm bone so as to hang more weight on the nail. Secondly, there's a cluster of nerves in the wrist that would cause massive shooting pain up the arm and down the back. Railroad spike was driven in Jesus's right hand, pulled across. Railroad spike had been driven through Jesus' left hand. He's now been crucified to the cross...His upper body.

They would have then taken His feet. There was two ways to do it. One, you could cross them over or, two, you could put them together and turn into the side so the victim is twisted. Either way, the point is to get the victim completely impaled on the cross. It would have taken the railroad spikes to the top of the foot or side of the foot just behind the ankle bone so as to

provide maximum support. Because here's what would happen, crucified victims would die from suffocation or they would drown on dry land because as the body is trying to respond to the trauma, fluid would build up in the lungs so that they would have the experience of drowning. The terrifying experience of drowning, they're getting the benefit of experiencing that on the cross on dry land. You're taking all sorts of different kinds of trauma for different kinds of death and combining them into one experience. And so, the victim would drown.

Because people were familiar with crucifixion because they observed it so often, if people knew they would get crucified, they knew – and this is a crazy record of history – victims knew that they could quicken the experience of death if they would sag and essentially suffocate themselves. And so to prevent that, oftentimes the Roman soldiers would build a little seat or bench into the cross just under the buttocks of the victim so that they couldn't sag so that it would keep them alive longer.

Records show that crucifixions will last anywhere from three hours to four days, with several accounts being documented in history of some victims lasting for as long as nine days. This was not something that was over quickly like the hangman's noose or the firing line or the injection of a lethal injection. This was something that went on for hours and hours and sometimes days. Contributing to that was the health of the victim. Jesus was 33 years old, in the prime of His life. We know He was in great health. He was hiking and walking and teaching. He kept up a vigorous schedule. 33 years old, young, strong, which would have elongated the time that Jesus would have experienced pain.

Driving the nail spikes through his feet, Jesus is now crucified on the cross. Nerve centers are screaming pain; He's experiencing muscle spasms and convulsing. Have you ever woken up in the middle of the night with a muscle spasm in your calf, screaming to the high heavens? Just take that and extrapolate that over the entire body. It's impossible to quantify the measure of pain Jesus is experiencing, and they haven't even got Him up in the area. With a crown of thorns on His head, nail spikes, railroad spikes through His wrists, railroad spikes through His feet, the Roman soldiers then, not being dainty, not caring about the pain of the victim, would lift the cross up, the cross would slide into the hole. It would jar into place and Jesus is now crucified.

Now, in the most artistic renderings of the cross, you have three crosses up in the air. There's quite a bit of separation between people observing the cross and the person crucified. They're on like these 15, 20-foot crosses. They're up creating silhouettes on the skyline. It makes for a great picture. It's not historically accurate, but most crosses and weapons of death and destruction that had been uncovered archeologically were six to nine feet. Meaning, Jesus was not up and above everyone else looking down, Jesus was eye level with those who are mocking Him.

The cross was low and intended to be low so people could see the pain in the face of the victim and for the point to be driven home, "Whatever they did, be sure not to do that. The

Romans had to do this. They did this. You should do what the Romans said that you should do because when you buck tyranny, you get that." It was a very personal and very public way to die. Jesus is now on the cross. They have just done that to Him.

Jesus Is Categorically Different than You

Look at the next verse, verse 34. *"He was crucified there along with the criminals; one on his right, the other on his left. Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.'"* Jesus is not just better than you. Jesus is categorically different than any other human being who's walked the planet. Jesus was not just a really good man; Jesus was, of course, the God-Man, fully God, fully man. Not just a better version of you on your best day, Jesus was categorically different than you on your best day because nobody in here in their own rights has these things done to them – beaten all night, falsely condemned, crown of thorns, robe turn off their back, scourged 40 times minus one, publicly humiliated, railroad spiked to a cross, hung for all to see, – and their first thought is "Father, please forgive them, they just don't know what they're doing."

I had somebody do something to me this week, fairly mild in relationship to what we're talking about here, and I went nuclear. It's like, I want the best attorney in town, I want to go play the lottery to win 10 million bucks and I'm going to bury that guy. That's what went through my mind in the course of about 15 seconds. And then about a few hours later, as Providence would have it, I sat down to study this passage and I thought,

"Wow, Jesus isn't just a little better than me on my best day; Jesus is categorically different from me."

He says, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing," and they divided up His clothes by casting lots. He's asking for God to forgive the ones who just drove nails through His wrists and are now dividing up His clothes and mocking Him publicly. Jesus was probably hanging on the cross naked in front of His mom, the ultimate experience of shame for any man.

Verse 35, *"The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at Jesus. They said, 'He saved others; let him save himself if he is God's Messiah, the chosen one.' The soldiers also came up and mocked Jesus. They offered him wine vinegar and said, 'If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.'"*

Now, I used to think when they offered Him wine vinegar that this was a nice expression of kindness, like "Hey, it looks like He's had a rough day. You got some Gatorade for Him?" But that's not what has happened. The wine vinegar was designed to shock the body to give the body some energy so as to keep the body alive longer so as to extrapolate the suffering and draw it out as long as humanly possible. "Let's keep Him alive." This is the proverbial cat playing with the mouse. "Let's not kill Him yet. It's too fun watching Him suffer."

"They offered him wine vinegar. 'If you're the king of the Jews, save yourself.' There was a written notice above him which read Jesus, the King of the Jews. One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him, 'Aren't You the Messiah? Save yourself and us.'" He's being mocked by a sinner next to Him, He's being mocked by the religious scoffers who are making snide comments, and He's being mocked by the soldiers that just crucified Him.

Now, if I'm there in that moment and I had the potential to have at my beck and call the armies of heaven and they start challenging me, "You're the Messiah, you're the Son of God. You save other people, why don't you save yourself?" If I'm hanging there like this – naked, shamed, beaten, bloodied, muscle spasms, ribs hanging out my side, face disfigured, thorns driven into my head, muscle convulsions – and they start challenging me, I look down on them and I'm telling you, 100 times out of 100, Josh McPherson goes, "Watch this, you son of a beep." Snap the fingers, and angels, thunder from Heaven, all of my enemies before me are eviscerated. And then I pull myself off the cross and I go, "Who's the Bad Mama Jama now?" That's what I'd do. I'd say, "You little worm, you little weasel, you have no idea what you're doing," and I would use it as an opportunity for revenge on those who had done this against me.

Jesus uses the logic that you don't know what you're doing as a reason to petition the Father to forgive them. Jesus is categorically different than any other man who has walked the planet because what Jesus was dying for was not only for the sin of the soldier mocking Him or the scoffers making snide remarks about Him or the sinner who was asking Jesus to save Him physically, Jesus was dying for the sin of humanity.

Jesus' Remarkable Self-Control

Romans 4:25, He was crucified, He was lifted up for the sin of the world. Which means, friends, if you haven't connected the dots yet, what Jesus was enduring was the wage or the punishment that your sin was incurring. Had Jesus done what Josh would have done, which is snap the finger and annihilate His enemies, you and I, today, would have no way to get the debt our sin incurred waived. It's just there, and it's on us.

Here's the thing, we often thank the Lord for His patience. "Thank you, Jesus, for your patience, for your kindness, for your mercy." Have you ever thanked Jesus for His self-control? I mentioned this Thursday night. It wasn't until I started riding with cops and went through the academy and became a reserve cop for six years that I realized or appreciated how much self control our officers exercise on a daily basis. As an officer working a shift or two a week, three or four or five shifts a month, there were seven or eight different times when I would have been warranted to use lethal force, and that's hardly ever even working. There's not an officer on the street that hasn't been in a situation that warranted lethal force that they chose not to use, to try to resolve the situation in some other way.

The self-control of law enforcement officers was overwhelming to me when I got into it. I use that as an example to say that the self-control of Jesus in this moment is staggering. Because

it would not have been wrong for Him to say, "You know what, I'm done. I'm perfect. I'm sinless. I'm righteous. This is a cosmic act of injustice and I think we're just going to let them figure out how to make themselves right with God. I'm done with this." That would not have been an act of injustice. That would not have been an act of unrighteousness. That would have been a veering from the plan He and His Father had made, but it would have been understandable.

Jesus' Primary Concern from the Cross

It's interesting to note that on the way to the cross, Jesus wasn't worried about social justice. Have you noticed that? It's a big phrase these days, social justice. Churches are jumping on board. It's not new. It's being packaged in a new way, but if you're really a Christian, you're going to care about issues of social justice, and issues of racial reconciliation and issues of blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. Now, should Christians care about alleviating the suffering of the poor, of the weak, of the minority, of the oppressed? Yes, and absolutely. There are necessary implications of the Gospel. But the problem is when those issues trump the reality and the essence and the nature of the Gospel.

"We need to stop being so offensive with our proclaiming the Gospel and we need to start being more transformative in our demonstrating the Gospel." Friends, the Gospel can't be demonstrated. The Gospel must be spoken. The Gospel is the truth. Christianity is not an ideology, it's not a system of philosophy. Christianity is a person.

Christianity is about the Good Lord, Jesus Christ – His life, His death, His resurrection – and nothing could be more important than you figuring out where you land in relationship to who He said He was.

Paul said, "I give you this of first importance, that Jesus Christ was crucified, buried, and raised from the dead." Whatever other problem you have in your life right now pales in comparison to the problem of Jesus. Who do you say that Jesus is? What do you say that He did? Friends, do not be deceived. Social justice issues can often times be a Trojan horse into the Church for heresy to take root. Because if we make the whole focus of this church family to alleviate the suffering of the poor without the name of Jesus on our lips, and then they die and go to Hell, how much suffering did we really relieve?

A cup of cold water in the name of Jesus, yes. A cup of cold water for a cup of cold water's sake? Not so much. It's interesting to note that in the most important moment in history, Jesus didn't turn and say make sure the poor are cared for. Jesus didn't turn and say make sure racial reconciliation is your number one priority. Jesus didn't turn and say make sure XYZ is on the social-justice bucket list right now. Jesus turned and said if you don't mourn for your sin, there will be no cosmic justice for you.

The Church's first aim is not to bring about social justice, but to preach and proclaim the availability for cosmic justice – that your sin can be paid for and you could be forgiven of that sin because of the Man, Jesus Christ.

When that transformation takes place, friends, it ripples out socially.

Talk to the 50 people getting baptized next week. I've talked with some of them. It's remarkable. Alcohol, gone. Porn, gone. Illicit relationships, gone. Dishonesty at work, gone. Ambivalence to society, gone. Broken relationships and uncaring attitude toward them, gone. Replaced with sobriety, seriousness, somberness. Replaced with a desire to forgive. Replaced with a desire to reconcile. Replaced with honesty, integrity, and work ethic they didn't know they had. You don't think that's going to ripple out in the society?

Social Justice comes as the Church preaches and proclaims cosmic justice available through the Lord Jesus Christ.

If you remove one to trump the other, you're not a church anymore; you're a glorified social club or you're an outpost of Satan. Paul says, "We preach Christ crucified and nothing else." Jesus was crucified and He turns and He says, "Father, forgive them."

The Veil Was Torn

Verse 40, "After the criminal hurled insults at Jesus, the other criminal rebuked him saying, 'Don't you fear God,' he said, 'since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.' Then he said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.' Jesus answered him, 'Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.'" Some creeds changed history and stated that Jesus descended into Hell. I believe Jesus went to be with the Father because that's what Luke says.

Verse 44, "It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, for the sun stopped shining." What does that mean? Does it mean clouds rolled in and they couldn't see the sun, or does it mean that the Father just reached over to the sun switch and it went out? Or does it mean that creation itself looked on what's happening and the sun said, "Can't do it, can't put light on this anymore," and just gave itself up for a few hours? I don't know. But it says, "the sun stopped shining and the curtain of the temple was torn in two."

You know what's happening there, right? In the temple? The holy of holies, the place where the Shekinah glory, the presence of God, would come and only one man was allowed in one time every year and it was the high priest. After cleansing himself and going through all the traditions and preparing himself for days and weeks and months, he would prepare the sacrifice and he would go in, in all of his robes.

They'd have a rope tied to his foot on the off chance the Shekinah glory just knocked him out or caused him to go unconscious or sent him into shock or killed him, which sometimes happens, so they could drag him out. People were like, "I'm not going in there. The presence of God is in there. Are you kidding me? Just fish that guy out." He'd go behind the curtain said to be 18 to 24 inches thick to protect the rest of the people from the presence of God that would descend and consume the sacrifice.

That curtain, like a phone book in the hands of a muscle man, was torn from the top down when Jesus died.

Much more than a symbolic act, it was a very real reality saying what was between God and man is now gone. There has been made a way for the common man, for the ordinary woman, to come into the very real presence of God because the great high priest, Jesus Christ, has entered into the holy of holies and made a sacrifice once and for all. The veil was torn that separated you from God.

Jesus Died Like a Man

Verse 46, "Jesus called out with a loud voice, 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.'"

Here's what makes this statement so remarkable as medical physicians have examined historically the effects of crucifixion on the human body. As I mentioned before, fluid would fill the lungs and a slow suffocation process would take place. Sometimes shoulders would dislocate because as the victim is trying to breathe, even though the body's wanting, or the crucifixion is causing certain death, the body can't help fighting to survive.

People who oftentimes have talked about throwing themselves off a bridge to drown can't stop the body from fighting for air and fighting to survive and swimming to the top and then swimming to the shore. The body is fighting to survive. And so, as the body would fight to survive, the victim would pull on their hands and push on their feet to try to get enough air in their lungs, and then they settle down. That pushing and pulling would rake the back of Jesus up and down that bloody wooden cross like a back on a cheese grater, and it would happen over and over and over again. What would happen is victims would lose their ability to speak because they had no wind or air.

And so – the sobbing, the crying, the screaming, the begging – all the things that would typically happen the first hours would go away because the victim had no air in their lungs.

And yet, "Jesus," it says here, "called out in a loud voice, 'Father into your hands I commit my spirit.' When he had said this, he breathed His last." Jesus didn't die sniveling and begging for mercy. Jesus died like a man. Jesus died like a man. He managed to somehow get enough breath in His lungs to call out – not whimper, not squeak it out, but to call out – in an authoritative voice, "Father, I'm coming home."

It was very common for Roman soldiers to break the legs of victims below the knees so as to inhibit their ability to push up. It would then hasten the cause of death. If they had a movie to go see or had a dinner date they needed to get to, or if they needed to clean the river raft off the hill for the next wave of crucified victims, they could break the leg of the victim below the knee, which is barbaric in and of itself. The sounds would be horrific. No ability to push up, no ability to pull up, shoulder dislocated, they drown.

Jesus' legs were not broken. A soldier, instead, pierced His side with a sword probably up to the 6th rib, and it says blood and water flowed. Conclusive medical evidence said Jesus died not from drowning or suffocating, but died from His heart exploding. Jesus had a catastrophic cardiac event on the cross. He died of a broken heart, people. Naked, bleeding, bloodied, feces and urine because of loss of body control running down the cross in front of His mom, Jesus asked God to forgive everyone there who had done that to him, and He called out in a loud voice, "Father, I'm coming home."

The Three Kinds of Onlookers

Verse 47, "The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, 'Surely this was a righteous man.'" He's standing there watching the whole picture. He was in charge of the whole thing. He was like, "Hmm." He gets up on the cross, the sun stops shining, earthquake happens, the curtain veil is torn. Mark and Matthew and John give us accounts of dead people coming back from death literally like, "There's Uncle Bob. Didn't he die three years ago?" "Yeah." "This is crazy. What happened?" "Well, about 3:30, when they say Jesus died, he got up out of his grave and started walking around and asked for a cheeseburger." They're looking around going, okay, creations responding to this, weather systems are changing, the earth is grumbling and groaning and earthquaking, dead people are rising, and the curtain veil is being torn. He says, "Holy smokes, this guy must have been who He said He was."

"When all the people who had gathered to witness this site saw what took place, they beat their breasts and went away. But all those who knew him, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood in a distance watching these things." There were three kinds of people looking in this scenario.

#1: The passive unbelievers, sitting back, watching what's happening, no vested interest. Not crying for Him, not jeering at Him, just watching. Maybe that's some of you. You're like, I don't hate Jesus. I mean, I don't love Him, I don't worship Him, but I have nothing against Him. He wants to say He's God, whatever. No harm, no foul. Just don't hurt other people, I'm fine. Maybe you're the passive unbeliever.

#2: Then there's the active unbelievers. The soldier, the sinner, the scoffer. They were actively murdering Jesus, actively mocking Him, actively making fun of Him, actively challenging Him and chiding Him with their snide comments to "help yourself off the cross."

#3: We have the passive unbelievers, we have the active unbelievers, and then we have the believers. I think Simon was potentially a believer. He had two sons, Alexander and Rufus. Paul mentions people of those names in one of his letters who were actively helping churches get planted. I wonder if Simon had gone to Jerusalem on an errand. Coming out of the mountains on his way to go somewhere else, he gets caught up in this galactic drama. He's carrying the cross of Jesus. He stands there and he watches what happens and he says, "I want to give my life to following that Man," and then he passes it on to his son.

We have the soldier who looks around at the effect of what happened and said, "I've crucified three or four hundred people and the sun never said "I'm out", the veil was never torn, and dead people didn't get up and go to dinner with their beloved family members. I think this guy is who He said He was."

Then there's the sinner. The one on His right was mocking Jesus, but the one on His left saying, "Have you no fear of God? You and I are up here because we deserved it. He's done nothing to deserve this. Jesus, would you remember me in Paradise?" See? That's where Christianity starts, you own your sin. You say, "You shouldn't be up here. I deserve to be up here. You don't deserve to be up here. Would you remember me in Paradise?" That's how the journey to Christianity begins, you take ownership of your sin and then you repent of it and you say, "Father, I realize that I should have been crucified, not Jesus, but I will accept His finished work as my justification by faith and I'll receive that gift of mercy with worship and thanksgiving in my heart. Would you save me?"

So, which one are you? Romans 4:25, He was delivered up for our transgressions.

1 Corinthians 15:3, I give you now that which is of first importance, that Christ died. He suffered, but He rose again. Friends, there could be nothing more important than you figuring out what you think about who Jesus was and what he did.

Are you a passive unbeliever? "I don't hate Him, I'm just not going to worship Him." Okay, your day is coming. Are you an active unbeliever in that you have mocked and ridiculed Jesus? If so, you can mourn your ignorance and your sin, you can repent of that sin and you can turn to Him and be saved today.

Three Takeaways

Because what we see in this text are three things.

#1: Sin is a bigger deal than you thought. This is the hideous reality of your sin. If you've ever had the thought that sin wasn't that big a deal, just look at the cross of Jesus. This is how big a deal your sin is. It required this be done to the Son of God. Your sin is a big deal.

#2: Secondly, we see that Jesus can save anyone from anything. If those who murdered Him could be saved, friend, I think there's a shot for you. You're like, "Well, you don't know what I've done." "Well, did you murder Jesus?" Okay, I think there's a shot for you.

Jesus was dying for the sin of the world including those who mocked Him, lied about Him, and knowingly unjustly crucified Him. How much more is there blood and grace for you?

#3: Your sin is a bigger deal than you've ever thought, Jesus can save anyone from anything, and it's never too late. I mean, this criminal had lived a life of sin and rebellion and crime leading up to this moment in time. He is seconds away from death, and he says to Jesus, "I'm up here because I deserved it, you're up here because of some screwed-up court case that I don't understand and some cosmic redemption going on that I don't quite fully grasp, but I do know that you are who you say you are. Would you forgive me?" "Today, you'll be with me in Paradise."

Friends, the 11th hour doesn't come any closer than that. "I'm literally bleeding out. I may not have the air to make the request in 30 seconds, so I'm making it now," and Jesus says, "you and me, you're in." Friends, your sin is a bigger deal than you thought when you walked in the door. Jesus can save anybody from anything and you can do it at any time.

Some of you in here have a decision to make. You may not be bleeding out, you may not be drawing your last breath, but friend, you don't know what's going to happen on the way home today, and you don't know what's going to happen on Tuesday, and you don't know the phone call coming from your doctor on Thursday. Friends, don't hang on the cross, be bleeding out, and go, "Oh, I'll ask Him tomorrow." You may not have tomorrow.

Friend, if you're here with a loved one that doesn't know Jesus, I just want to encourage you. The story is never over. The story is never over. God is at work. Jesus is on the move. You trust the Lord, you pray, you call, you invite, you reach out, you love.

The story is never over because Jesus can save anybody from anything at any time.

Isaiah 53

So, what I want to do, as the band comes out to prepare us for communion, is I want to read another account of the story to us. I'm going to invite you to bow your heads and I'm going to

read this to us. This is a historical account of what we just read, and I'm going to use this as a way to focus our meditation on the cross of Jesus this morning as we prepare to come to take communion together and prepare our hearts for the Tenebrae service on Thursday and then the Easter celebration on Sunday. This is a historical account of what we just witnessed taking place and all that was going on in that moment.

"See, my servant will act wisely. He will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted. Just as there were many who were appalled at him, his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any human being and his form marred beyond human likeness, so he will sprinkle many nations and kings will shut their mouths because of him. For what they were not told, they will see and what they have not heard, they will understand.

"Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? He grew up before them like a tender shoot and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering and familiar with pain.

"Like one from whom people hide their faces, he was despised, and we held him in low esteem. Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities, the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.

"We all, like sheep, have gone astray. Each of us has turned to our own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth. He was led like a lamb to the slaughter and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.

"By oppression and judgment, he was taken away. Yet who of this generation protested? For he was cut off from the land of the living, for the transgression of my people he was punished.

"He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence nor was any deceit found in his mouth. Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer. Though the Lord makes his life an offering for sin, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand. After he has suffered, he will see the light of life and be satisfied.

"By His knowledge, my righteous servant will justify many and he will bear their iniquities. Therefore, I will give him a portion among the great and he will divide the spoils with the strong because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered

with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many and made intercession for the transgressors."

Friends, that's Isaiah 53 written seven hundred years before Jesus was crucified. Jesus knew exactly what He was getting into and knew exactly what He was walking toward when He climbed the hill of Golgotha, and He did it for you. That's why we call it good news, because Jesus endured what you should have rightfully endured, and offered you freedom and life in the place of His death.

That's what we'll celebrate next Easter. That's what you can tap into and access yourself if you simply mourn your sin, repent of your sin and turn to Jesus.

Closing Prayer

Father, as we reflect this morning on all that Your Son endured for our sake, we pray that it would move us to a place of serious reflection, that we would take sin seriously, that we would take grace and mercy seriously, that we would be a somber-minded people, and that You would properly posture our hearts to celebrate rightly next Sunday when we come back together to glory in the empty tomb.

Father, as we work our way through this week with a Tenebrae service and our own Bible readings and contemplations of our heart, Father, would You keep the busyness of life back and would You prevent us from being so distracted that we just land at Easter going 100 miles an hour asking, "What are we here for?" Lord, we ask that You will prepare our hearts to rightly cheer, to rightly sing, to rightly rejoice, to rightly celebrate the good news and the reality that the tomb is empty, that though they killed the Son, the Father raised Him back to life, and Jesus can save anyone from anything at any time.

We love You, Father, and we're grateful for Your kindness to us.

The Crucifixion

The Gospel

Responses to Jesus

Atonement

The Cost of Sin

Repentance