

## Luke 23: 26-38

### "Christ Crucified"

These Vs open to us w/Christ being led as a Lamb to the slaughter. He has been tried, He has been chastised (scourged by the Roman flagellum), He has been sentenced & condemned to be crucified. In the words of Isaiah, *"He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, And as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth."*<sup>1</sup>

He didn't try to fight it, He didn't kick against it; it was the purpose for which He'd come. To die for the sin of the world, the Innocent for the guilty, the Just for the unjust, the Sinless for the sinful, the Righteous for the wicked... little did they know the magnitude of the event that was unfolding before their eyes, the eternal consequences that would result from His obedience. Jesus inherited condemnation that we might inherit salvation, Jesus became accursed of God that we might be blessed of God, He was separated from God that we might be drawn near, never left & never forsaken of God. He died for us that we might live forever w/Him. It's no wonder that as the apostle John meditated upon the magnitude of these things that he would draw our attention to think it through, *"Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!"* 1 John 3:1 In the words of the psalmist, *"Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; It is high, I cannot attain it."*<sup>2</sup> That God should give His only begotten Son to die the death that I deserve so that in believing upon Him I would never perish, but have everlasting life. Yet that's exactly what He did & exactly what we see Him doing in our text today as Jesus lays down His life for you & for me.

### Vs 26

We learn from the other gospel accounts that Jesus was so physically weakened from the abuse that He'd endured that He *couldn't* carry the 80lb (give or take a few lbs) cross beam they laid on His back. *Oh He carried it as far as He could down the 650 yard trail from His trial toward Calvary, but the fact that He could carry it at all is nothing short of a wonder in & of itself.* Dr. William Edwards commenting on the scourging alone says, *"As the Roman soldiers repeatedly struck the victim's back with full force, the iron balls would cause deep contusions, and the leather thongs and sheep bones would cut into the skin and subcutaneous tissues."*

<sup>1</sup> *The New King James Version*. 1982 (Is 53:7). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>2</sup> *The New King James Version*. 1982 (Ps 139:6). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

*"Then, as the flogging continued, the lacerations would tear into the underlying skeletal muscles and produce quivering ribbons of bleeding flesh. Pain and blood loss generally set the stage for circulatory shock. The extent of blood loss may well have determined how long the victim would survive the cross." He continues on, "The severe scourging, with its intense pain and appreciable blood loss, most probably left Jesus in a pre-shock state. Moreover, hematidrosis had rendered his skin particularly tender. The physical and mental abuse meted out by the Jews and the Romans, as well as the lack of food, water, and sleep, also contributed to his generally weakened state. Therefore, even before the actual crucifixion, Jesus' physical condition was at least serious and possibly critical."*

Here's the point, it shouldn't surprise us to see the need for another to bear His cross after Him. But if you think it through it goes beyond that, to carry the cross was a symbol of guilt, Jesus was innocent. So He didn't carry it, a guilty one carried for Him.

Who was that? Simon, this man from Cyrene (present day Libya) who'd traveled some 800 miles to partake of Passover who now would be unable to because of being forced to enter into a state of ceremonial defilement by being forced to carry the cross of this Man who'd been condemned to die as a criminal. **But when Rome tapped your shoulder w/the point of their spear & said, "Do it!" Guess what? You did it. So here he is in the midst of this multitude being humiliated on this most holy day...**

No doubt he's thinking, "Pick someone else, I've traveled 800 miles for this moment, for this day & now you're humiliating me, defiling me, ruining this occasion...why me?"

**But here's the good news & something I've discovered about God (perhaps you have to). What seemed to Simon to be a catastrophe would turn out to be the privilege of his life & an incredible opportunity.** It was through this seeming catastrophe that he would be brought in contact w/& forever changed by Christ. (BTW, where's the other Simon? You know, the one who promised Jesus he'd go to prison & death w/Him?)

He wouldn't need the ceremony of the Passover, He was covered by the blood of the Passover Lamb of God who was shedding His blood even in that moment to cleanse him (& the rest of humanity) of sin. **You see, evidently (as one might imagine) this experienced changed Simon's life & this encounter w/Christ would make for his salvation. In Mark's gospel (Ch 15) Mark identifies him as the father of Alexander & Rufus, men that he assumed his Roman readers would know. In Roman's 16 Paul mentions Rufus by name so it would seem that after this Simon & his sons would become well known & held in honor by the early church.**

Simon had the privilege of carrying the cross of Christ. Here's the application; God can (& often will) use unexpected & difficult situations (even humiliating situations) to bring people into contact w/Christ so that He can work transformation/salvation in their lives. We think, "Why me? What have I done? I'm just trying to do lead my life & do the right thing." But eventually we discover that what seemed like catastrophe winds up being a heaven sent opportunity that will change us forever...

It's the one who loses his life for Christ's sake that will find it (Jesus said), it's the one who will take up their cross & follow Him that will be where He is. Simon took up that cross (literally) & followed Jesus. He saw 1<sup>st</sup> hand the meaning of a crucified life & it changed him forever. Now listen, when you pick up your cross, & you follow Jesus, & you begin to get a glimpse of what it means to be crucified w/Christ, the world crucified to you & you to the world &, it'll change your life forever as well.

### Vs 27-31

We note 2 things about Jesus in this particular passage #1 His Compassion & #2 His Composure. I believe we can say matter-of-factly that Jesus is the single most compassionate individual to ever walk the face of the earth. Never mindful of Himself, always thinking of others; here His compassion radiates, it shines like a beacon of light in the darkness of night.

Who among us could be torn open, bleeding profusely, beaten, bloodied & on our way to be subjected to the death penalty & be thinking of the well being of others, even those meting out the sentence? Jesus was never thinking inwardly, He was always concerned for others, even in the final hours of His life. This multitude of people are following Him, these women are weeping & wailing for Him & He turns to them & says, "Daughters of Jerusalem don't weep for Me, weep for yourselves & for your children."

Now often times guys like me will want you to understand in detail the physical realities of things like scourging & crucifixion so as to give you a glimpse of what Jesus endured for us. But the bible doesn't do that, it doesn't describe in morbid/graphic detail the excruciating facts of what happened in these processes. Jesus didn't do these things to invoke our sympathy or our pity, quite the contrary.

It's not Jesus we should pity in this. Weeping over what Jesus went through is like weeping over the finding of a cure for cancer. We weep over the cancer, not it's cure! The cross was not the downfall nor the demise of Christ; it was His victory over sin & death!

We weep over the brutal reality that it's *our sin* that caused this to be necessary, that we're the reason the cross of Christ needed to transpire at all! The death of Christ isn't like the death of a martyr, or a friend we're parting with. **It was a very peculiar thing, it was the purchase price of eternal life for us, it was our deliverance & His triumph over His enemies. So we don't weep for Him, we worship Him in that He loved us so much that He chose this path, He's not the victim of circumstance, He orchestrated the event & is in complete control.** What that invokes in us is a sense of awe & an inward compulsion to want to worship Him & praise Him for His great love.

What's so sad is the fact that our sin is so heinous, so atrocious, so monstrous that it made this necessary. But brothers & sisters don't weep for Jesus, worship Jesus, He doesn't want our pity, He's worthy of our praise.

**But when Jesus says, "Weep for yourselves & for your children" the basic gist of that is, "Don't weep for me, weep for those who reject me." The nation (generally) had rejected Him. Jesus says, "That's the true tragedy, weep for the reality that will come upon those who've rejected Me."**

...This is where the *composure* of Jesus comes into play. He is so composed, so compassionate that even now as He's bleeding out & His body is wracked w/pain He gives them both a prophecy & a parable. He tells them that the day is coming when it will be considered a blessing to have a barren womb (the quintessential curse to the womanhood of a Jew in that day) because of the judgment that's coming due to the nations rejection of Him. **Of course this would be fulfilled approx. 40 yrs later when Rome sacked Jerusalem & over 1 million Jews died and approx. 100,000 more would be taken back to Rome as slaves for life or to be killed for entertainment in the coliseum. It will be fulfilled again in the Great tribulation but here's the point, those who reject the means of salvation are left to inherit the wages of condemnation.** Those who refuse to be acquitted from sin *through* Christ are left w/no other recourse other than to be judged in their sin *outside* of Christ.

Then He utters this phrase, "For if they do these things in the greenwood, what will be done in the dry?" You read that & you go, "What does that mean?" Here's the idea, greenwood isn't meant to burn, it's meant to be fruitful, dry wood is for the fire. **Jesus is referring to Himself when He mentions the greenwood & what's become of the nation when He mentions the dry. The idea being, "Hey, if this is happening to Me (the fruitful, sinless Son of God), you can only imagine what is going to happen to those who've rejected Me becoming dry & fit for the fire."**

“If this is the fate of the Innocent, what will be the fate of the guilty?” Warren Wiersbe paraphrased these words like this, “If the Roman authorities do this to One who is innocent, what will they do to you who are guilty? When the day of judgment arrives, can there be any escape for you?”<sup>3</sup> You know, “If the word deals this way w/the Innocent One, how do you think God will deal w/the guilty ones?” “If this happens to the Sacrifice for sin, what will happen to the sinners themselves?” That’s the essential nature of what’s being communicated here.

### Vs 32-34

Believe me when I tell you that time would fail us to search out & consider exhaustively all of the things prophetically that are being fulfilled here in these few brief Vs.

We discover here that Jesus wasn’t crucified alone that day but there were two others (criminals) who were led out and crucified alongside Him.

The thing that strikes us about this (at least Vs 33) is that the single most significant act in human history (& perhaps all of eternity) happens here & yet it’s w/a profound simplicity that it’s made known to us in only 4 words, “...there they crucified Him.” That’s it, that’s all we get. Here’s why, it’s all we need to know. Herein lies the power of the gospel in the message of the cross, J.C. & Him crucified. It’s the center of human history, all of the OT working *up to it* & all of the NT working *out from it*. The cross becomes the hinge upon which human history swings.

They led our Lord out to a very particular place outside the city walls where criminals were put to death by means of the cross & there they crucified Him. That’s where our salvation was won. The place was called “Golgotha” to the Jews, in Latin, “Calvary” which means “the place of the skull”. Would you go to a church called, “Skull chapel”? Of course you would, you do! We don’t know if it got it’s name because the hill looked like a skull or simply because of the capital punishment that was meted out there but that’s where they took Him, that’s where He was crucified in the midst of criminals & that’s where He paid the purchase price of our salvation.

Now crucifixion was designed to both torture & humiliate the victim. It wasn’t invented by the Romans but it was perfected by the Romans in such a way as to produce a slow death w/maximum pain & suffering.

<sup>3</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Lk 23:27). Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books.

Outside of the fact of the searing pain & claw like grip that the severing of the median nerve caused when the wrists were nailed to the cross & further aggravating of the contaminated wounds by rubbing your back (that had been torn open from the scourging) up & down on the rough upright post just to get a breath... One of the primary effects of crucifixion was to stifle normal breathing. **The weight of the body, pulling down on the arms and shoulders would tend to fix the respiratory muscles in an inhalation state, and would hinder the ability to exhale. The net effect being severe muscle cramps from a lack of adequate respiration which of course just made it all the harder to breath. It was a viciously painful cycle.** To get a good breath, the victim had to push against the feet, and flex the elbows (twisting the hands hanging on the nails), pulling from the shoulders. So each effort to get a proper breath was agonizing, exhausting, and led to a sooner death.

According to Dr. Edwards, *“Not uncommonly, insects would light upon or burrow into the open wounds or the eyes, ears, and nose of the dying and helpless victim, and birds of prey would tear at these sites.”*

**So, someone dying from crucifixion meet death in a # of ways: acute shock from blood loss; suffocation (being too exhausted to breathe any longer); dehydration; stress-induced heart attack, or congestive heart failure leading to a cardiac rupture. If the Romans didn't think you were dying quickly enough, they would break your legs so that you couldn't breathe & that's how you'd die.**

Now again the gospels don't focus on the torment that Jesus endured, they focus on the significance of His death. Not what happened in the midst of it but what it was that resulted from it.

**But even still Jesus is concerned for others as even in the midst of them crucifying Him He's praying for them. He says, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.”** Even in His agony He fulfills His own command when He said, **“But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you,” Matthew 5:44** They're seeking to murder Him, He's praying for them... that's the love of Jesus.

Now the truth is that more than likely He prayed this way for His enemies all the time; but now we hear it from His lips because He has no private place to pray. **But He recognizes their ignorance (not their innocence, but their ignorance). Paul acknowledged that had they known they wouldn't have crucified the Lord of glory.**



But they didn't know, nor did they believe in who He was in truth, so Jesus prays for their forgiveness. Of course we're convicted on this note. If Jesus prays for those who are torturing Him literally, how much more should you & I pray for our enemies who perhaps don't like us or try to impose some kind of misery upon us?

These guys were even casting lots for His clothes as He was hanging upon the cross. Jesus came all the way down the ladder for us. He let go of everything, even His clothing... becoming poor for us that we might be made rich in Him.

### Vs 35-38

Now we'll pick up on these things, perhaps comment a bit further on them next time. But there are a couple of things to consider here & then we'll close.

It's important that we realize that the most significant aspect of Jesus' suffering was that He wasn't in any way the victim of circumstances. He was in complete control throughout all of this. Jesus said very clearly in John Ch 10 *"I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again."*<sup>4</sup>

Now it's terrible to think of being forced to endure such torture, but to freely choose it out of love is beyond me. Again I say, behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called the children of God...

Finally we draw attention to Vs 35, "He saved others, let Him save Himself if He's the Christ, the chosen of God." Here Jesus is displaying a love for mankind that's beyond description & rather than being honored, adored & worshiped, He's mocked, sneered at sarcastically & ridiculed. *But what they failed to understand is that it's precisely because He didn't save Himself that He could save others, it was our sin that nailed Him to the cross but it was His love that held Him to the cross.* I'm so glad...He didn't save Himself... we wouldn't be sitting here today, we wouldn't be recipients of grace, we wouldn't experience salvation, we'd be left under the heavy hand of condemnation.

So let's not weep *for* Him, let's render the worship of our hearts *to* Him for His great love & the laying down of His life for you & me... Amen?

<sup>4</sup> *The New King James Version*. 1982 (Jn 10:17-18). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

### Prayer Points:

God You have so loved us, that You've given Your only begotten Son J.C. for us that should we believe in Him we'll never perish but have everlasting life. I pray that, that would yield an appropriate response from us of worship, adoration & service unto You. That as You (Jesus) laid down Your life for us, that we would understand what it means to lay down our lives as *living sacrifices* for You. That our lives would shine Your glorious light into a dark, hurting, hopeless & lost world.

Salvation is found in the power of Christ crucified. Don't ask me to explain it, or make rational sense of it, the question is simply, do you believe it? God loves you, He's given J.C. for you & now it's up to you. Salvation, or condemnation, acquittal from sin, or left *in* sin & the consequences thereof. God has given His very best, He's done all that He can & has made it as easy as possible for you to be saved. Just believe on the Lord J.C. ... not from your head, but from your heart, God wants your heart, it's up to you to surrender it...