

To Suffer for Our Sins (Luke 23:26-56)

Pastor Tim Rech

One significant theme in Luke and in all the gospels is the course of suffering that had been marked out for Jesus by the Father.

Now Jesus suffered throughout His earthly life simply by living in the midst of a fallen world. However, His suffering would intensify as the cross approached. Jesus had actively obeyed His Father throughout His life on earth and now He would passively obey by letting sinful man have their way with Him and by ultimately letting His Father bring Him the greatest suffering.

As we begin in 23:26, we know that Jesus had just been seized by a crowd during the night, denied by Peter, and mocked and then beaten much of the night by those who held him in custody. He was tried unlawfully by a kangaroo court of Jewish religious leaders, charged falsely before Pilate and Herod, and then received a crucifixion verdict in lieu of a hardened lifetime criminal. He was condemned to death. According to Isaiah 52:14, Jesus had been beaten and bloodied beyond recognition. It had been a long dark night and early morning for Jesus.

The Father's path for Jesus as outlined in the OT Scriptures was proceeding right on time. Jesus had come to earth to suffer and to die for His people. And the climax of such suffering had arrived.

Let's begin in 23:26...

ON THE WAY TO THE CROSS (23:26-31)

26 And as they led him 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. 27 And there followed him a great multitude of the people and of women who were mourning and lamenting for him. 28 But turning to them Jesus said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. 29 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!' 30 Then they will begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall on us,' and to the hills, 'Cover us.' 31 For if they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?"

After being condemned by the Jews and the Roman government, Jesus was led away to be crucified. It was the practice of the Romans to require its condemned criminals to carry the crossbar of their cross on a long march, typically across the city. The purpose was partly to send a message to other aspiring criminals, partly to proclaim the person's condemnation, and partly sadistic. Jesus was treated no differently.

Suffering Shared (23:26)

Along the way, the soldiers forced a man named Simon to carry Jesus' cross. Simon was from Cyrene located in North Africa. He, like many Jews at this time of year, had traveled to attend Passover in Jerusalem.

Why was Simon forced to carry Jesus' cross? Jesus' physical condition was poor because of the scourging He received and therefore He was unable to carry the cross beam that weighed up to 100 lbs. This is the apparent reason for the soldiers to pull in Simon. Yet there is deeper significance – only the guilty carried their cross – and Jesus was innocent! Luke will point to Jesus's innocence repeatedly in our text today.

For the average observer that day and the contemporary reader of Luke's gospel, this exception to the Roman crucifixion process was striking – something was different about this day and more importantly about the “condemned” man that day.

For Simon, his surprise and humiliation would turn to something else. He was a Jerusalem outsider expecting to celebrate Passover and had simply joined the curious crowd that day. But then he was unexpectedly snatched from the crowd to participate in this death march – what a surprise! Struggling up the street carrying a condemned man's cross! There had to be a mistake. Or was it? As Simon carried the cross, he was given a unique vantage point of the suffering Jesus - beaten and bleeding, struggling to walk. Simon received far more than he ever imagined by coming to Jerusalem – a firsthand experience with Jesus, the Son of God. The bible is silent on Simon after this narrative but his sons Rufus and Alexander are mentioned to the reader in Mark 15:21 as believers. In fact, Paul mentions Rufus in Romans 16 as one of the pillars in the Church of Rome. There is good reason to believe God saved Simon that day or in the days and weeks shortly after. Unknowingly, Simon became a picture of a Christ disciple and was graciously drawn to Christ as he carried His cross that day.

Amidst Great Mourning (23:27-31)

Verse 27 tells us that a great multitude was following to see the spectacle of Jesus. These people were largely from Jerusalem. And among the crowd there were women who mourning and lamenting over the scene. Some of them were simply professional mourners but the group was kind and sympathetic to what was happening.

But Jesus surprises by turning to address the women – addressing them as the representatives of the nation. This was unusual in this time but not for God who did it often in the Old Testament. Pointing to Zechariah 12, His message to them was, that as bad as this day was, it would be nothing compared to what was prophesied for them and the next generation in Jerusalem. ***“Do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and your children.”*** He was thinking of them! Do you think of others when you suffer?

The terrible judgment by God of Jerusalem through a Roman siege in AD 70 was in view. Jesus tells them that barrenness, a source of heartbreak and disgrace for a women, would in this coming judgment be a blessing. The people would even cry out in the language of unfaithful Israel in Hosea 10:8 for the mountains to fall on them and the hills to cover them. “Put us out of our misery!” would be their cry – a cry that will rise up again on that great Day when the Lord returns.

Jesus prophesies in order to call the people to repentance. He was also extending grace. For in the explosion of conversion that would occur after Jesus's resurrection, many would be saved and spared

from this judgment. Remember in Acts that God would cause events to drive Christians from the city – even the readers of this gospel in Luke’s day would have understood.

Far worse days were coming for the nation. He closes His warning with a proverb. Green wood does not burn very well but dry wood does. If such judgment comes upon the righteous Jesus (the green wood), then what do you think will happen to the sinful nation (the dry wood)?

AT THE CROSS (23:32-49)

32 Two others, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. 33 And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. 34 And Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”[a] And they cast lots to divide his garments. 35 And the people stood by, watching, but the rulers scoffed at him, saying, “He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!” 36 The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine 37 and saying, “If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!” 38 There was also an inscription over him,[b] “This is the King of the Jews.”

In Its Physical Agony (23:32-33)

Two other condemned men joined Jesus on this death march. They were criminals and the sense of “criminal” here means they were serious criminals – armed robbers likely. The prophecy of Isaiah 53:12 is brought to mind, **“because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors”**

Jesus and the two criminals, prodded along by the Roman soldiers, arrive to the place called “the Skull” or what we refer to as Calvary. It was the rounded hill outside the city. There Simon drops the humiliating cross beam. Jesus and the two criminals were promptly crucified and lifted into the air with Jesus in the center and flanked by the two criminals.

Luke gives very little detail here and that is no surprise. The reader in his day would need no further explanation here since crucifixion was a common occurrence under Roman rule. But let us pause for a moment to understand what is involved here. Jesus was laid across the cross beam and his hands were nailed to it. The physical pain would have been traumatic with nerve endings exploding. The nailing would often paralyze the body leaving it to quiver from the shock. Then the soldiers attached the cross beam to the post and drove nails through Jesus’ feet. The fully assembled cross with Jesus on it was then raised and planted upright into the ground. Crucifixion was not only excruciatingly painful but also a constant struggle to breathe; reflexively a person would continually try and raise himself up to breathe and in doing so, put further pressure on his pierced limbs especially the feet. Crucifixion with its unimaginable pain was essentially a death by suffocation. The Romans and mankind could hardly devise a more cruel form of punishment and execution.

For the Roman soldiers this was a just another day at the office. They were professionals and the best fighting men in the world. But they were also bored and often despised being in occupied lands especially one as troublesome as Judea. Executing criminals was a welcome diversion and they did their duty with a vengeance. Kindness and compassion were not their long suit.

But then here we are surprised by Jesus again. Through his unimaginable pain and suffering, he fixes his eyes upon the soldiers and prays to His Father, ***“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”*** Now notice He is forgiving the soldiers alone and not the entire crowd. And also note He is not forgiving them for their sins overall or their sinful condition but rather for this specific sin – they were truly ignorant. But do not miss it - unlike natural man, it is Jesus reflex to forgive, even in the face of the most awful sin against Him. Is this your reflex?

In Its Scene (23:34-38)

So here we see Jesus suffering in a horrifying way, nailed to a wooden cross and hanging for all to see. Luke then completes the scene by describing what was going on around Jesus.

The soldiers, unmoved by Jesus’s intercession on their behalf, were gambling at the foot of Jesus cross to see who would get His clothes.

The people stood by silently watching but the Jewish religious leaders scoffed at Him saying that if He was God’s Chosen One, then ought He not save himself like He saved so many others. They had Jesus right where they had always wanted Him; disgraced, seemingly powerless, and about to die.

The Roman soldiers joined the leaders in the mocking of Jesus, “save yourself if you are what the sign says, ‘the King of the Jews’”. They also stuck sour wine in His face but Jesus refused. He wanted all of His senses for what would lie ahead.

Psalm 22 comes to mind here,

***6 But I am a worm and not a man,
scorned by mankind and despised by the people.***

***7 All who see me mock me;
they make mouths at me; they wag their heads;***

***8 “He trusts in the Lord; let him deliver him;
let him rescue him, for he delights in him!”***

***16 For dogs encompass me;
a company of evildoers encircles me;
they have pierced my hands and feet[b]—***

***17 I can count all my bones—
they stare and gloat over me;***

***18 they divide my garments among them,
and for my clothing they cast lots.***

So in this scene, sinful man told God what he really thought of Him. Do not ever let anyone tell you that man is inherently good. Apart from becoming a new creation in Christ, there is no righteousness down here.

Jesus on this day had united Jew and Gentile - united them in their hatred of God. He would later unite them and us in a far different way – praise God!

Amidst Those Dying (2:39-43)

39 One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him,[c] saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!" 40 But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? 41 And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong." 42 And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." 43 And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise."

Having shown us the larger panorama, Luke now zooms into the interaction between the two criminals and Jesus – three men condemned, hanging or crucified, and dying. Jesus, flanked by the criminals, draws two opposite reactions from them:

One Unbelieving

The first does not believe who Jesus is and does not fear God. He joins the chorus of insults hurled at Jesus by essentially telling Jesus He is a fraud - if He were God, He would save Himself and them. Besides, that is what his version of God would do. He did not believe and was not repentant of his sin. And Jesus does not respond to him.

One Believing

The other criminal was a different story. He arrived at the right conclusion that Jesus was perfectly innocent and was God and Savior and that he himself was a sinner in desperate need of mercy. He makes this confession in the form of a rebuke to the first criminal, "Fear God. You have been condemned just like me and Jesus and you will meet God shortly. And more importantly, you and I are guilty and deserving of death, getting what we deserve – but this man is innocent, and if he is innocent, where does that place us?" The Lord had opened his eyes to the truth.

The man then turns to Jesus with a simple request, "**Jesus remember me when you come into your kingdom**" – a cry for mercy – a cry of helplessness – a cry of I cannot save myself, but you can Jesus – a cry of faith.

He then hears the sweetest words a dying man seeking mercy could ever hear, "**Today, you will be with me in paradise.**" Jesus says I will not only remember you but you will be with me in heaven! Jesus surprises us again; in the depths of incredible suffering, Jesus extends saving mercy and grace.

Up to this point, Jesus had experienced tremendous suffering at the hands of men. Now great spiritual suffering and death would follow. We read on...

23:44-49 (Isa 53:5-6, 10-12)

44 It was now about the sixth hour,[d] and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour,[e] 45 while the sun's light failed. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. 46 Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" And having said this he breathed his last.

In Its Spiritual Agony (23:44-45)

It was now the sixth hour or noon. By this time, Jesus hung on the cross for three hours; torn, bleeding, and in agony. There were three hours to go. Luke tells us darkness covered the land beginning at the sixth hour or at noon and lasted until 3:00 pm or the ninth hour – it was midnight at midday because **“the sun’s light failed”**. As we know from the Old Testament, darkness was significant and meant mourning and judgment – think for example of the first Passover in Egypt and also of the prophecies of the Lord’s return (the Day of the Lord).

Nothing apparently happened to the people in this day of darkness, so what did happen? Well, much happened. Jesus’s suffering would reach its climax in the darkness.

Bearing Our Sin

For during this time, Jesus fully became “sin for us”. Isaiah 53:6 says:

***⁶All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have turned—every one—to his own way;
and the LORD has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.***

And 1 Peter 2:24:

***²⁴He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.
By his wounds you have been healed.***

God the Father placed our sins upon Christ. The Father did not think that Jesus committed these sins or had a sin nature but rather considered the guilt for our sins (what had to be punished) as belonging to Jesus and not to us. And Christ volunteered to do it – He was not forced to do it. Righteous Jesus hung upon the cross in the darkness fully conscious and endured wave after wave of our sin being heaped upon Him; our lies, deceit, pride, murderous thoughts and actions, adulteries, stealing, selfishness, pride, idolatries, hatred, jealousies, dissensions, bitterness, covetousness, violence, a complete disregard of God....and the list goes on. He took on all of our sins past, present, and future. Laid upon Him were the sins of all those who had believed and would believe in the future. Isaiah 53:12 says, **“Yet He bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.”**

Abandoned

We know the disciples had already fled – no earthly friends remained. But the abandonment went deeper. Hanging on the cross in utter darkness, Jesus no longer even enjoyed sweet fellowship with His Father. The Father turned away from His Son – something that had never happened before and would never happen again. Jesus bore the guilt of countless sins all by himself.

Bearing the Wrath of God

And we know that before a holy God, sin, our sin, must be punished. God the Father had patiently withheld such punishment but now let loose of His fierce wrath over our sin upon His Beloved Son. Jesus suffering was at its peak – a spiritual suffering; all alone, bearing the guilt of our sin load, and facing His Father’s righteous wrath.

As this period of darkness came to an end, the curtain of the temple, which was as thick as a man’s hand, was torn in two. The judgment of nation Israel, which would end in the destruction of the temple, had begun. But more importantly, this tearing signified spiritual access to God – an access afforded by Jesus completing His mission to suffer for the sins of His people.

In Death (23:46)

There was only one thing left for Jesus to do as the perfect sacrifice for our sin and that was to die. Jesus gives His life in verse 46. He would have surprised the Roman soldiers and the onlookers because He had unusual energy to call out with a loud voice. Typically by this time, the crucified person would be weak and headed for unconsciousness. But not Jesus – He cried out, ***“Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!”*** The road of suffering had ended in a cry of victory!

And like He did throughout His life, Jesus placed His full trust in the Father at His death. His commitment to His Father’s will and trust in Him was complete to the end.

Jesus’ body hung lifeless upon the cross and brought varied reactions. We read...

Its Resulting Reactions (23:47-49)

47 Now when the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God, saying, “Certainly this man was innocent!” 48 And all the crowds that had assembled for this spectacle, when they saw what had taken place, returned home beating their breasts. 49 And all his acquaintances and the women who had followed him from Galilee stood at a distance watching these things.

A Centurion

The centurion overseeing the crucifixion had been moved by what had happened and makes another confession among those there that Jesus was innocent. It does not appear that at that moment the centurion expressed saving faith. But he certainly glorified God in that moment with his praise and confession.

The Crowd

Luke notes the reaction of a second party – the crowd. They had come to see the spectacle but did not expect to be moved to the extent they did by what they saw. As they dispersed, they expressed deep grief and mourning. Seeing the righteous Jesus and how he suffered produced deep guilt and conviction over their sin.

Was the centurion or anyone from the crowd saved that day? Luke does not tell us but it is obvious that God was graciously preparing many for salvation in the near future. Remember Pentecost was not far

off and the gospel proclaimed by the Spirit filled apostles on that day would save thousands in the city in a short period of time – Jews and Gentiles. God had promised in the OT this would happen and was already graciously moving in the hearts of men and women.

Those Who Knew Him

And Luke notes a third party – those who had followed Jesus from Galilee – those who already knew and loved Jesus. They simply observed from distance, obviously grieved and limited in understanding. The risen Christ would soon rebuke them for their slowness of heart to believe what He had told them earlier. God would soon use this ragtag band from Galilee to carry the good news of the gospel throughout the city, Judea, Samaria, and beyond. Note that Luke specifically makes mention of the women among them. They would play vital roles in the coming narrative.

BURIED ACCORDING TO THE SCRIPTURES (23:50-56)

50 Now there was a man named Joseph, from the Jewish town of Arimathea. He was a member of the council, a good and righteous man, 51 who had not consented to their decision and action; and he was looking for the kingdom of God. 52 This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. 53 Then he took it down and wrapped it in a linen shroud and laid him in a tomb cut in stone, where no one had ever yet been laid. 54 It was the day of Preparation, and the Sabbath was beginning.[f] 55 The women who had come with him from Galilee followed and saw the tomb and how his body was laid. 56 Then they returned and prepared spices and ointments. On the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment.

A Righteous Man Acts (23:50-52)

Verse 50 introduces Joseph of Arimathea. Joseph was a believing Jew, a good and righteous man longing for the kingdom of God, who sat on the religious council, the Sanhedrin. It seems he was not in attendance the night before at the unlawful trial of Jesus for he would have had to give his consent. It also seems clear that his thinking and beliefs were known among the other religious leaders and therefore he was not invited that night.

A Prophecy Fulfilled (23:53-54)

Upon Jesus's death, Joseph acts courageously and decisively using his access as a religious leader to Pilate to ask for Jesus's body. He took the body, wrapped it, and laid it in a tomb – a tomb cut in stone and never used before. Once again, Isaiah 53 had prophesied:

***And they made his grave with the wicked
and with a rich man in his death,
although he had done no violence,
and there was no deceit in his mouth. (Isaiah 53:9)***

Joseph's actions were risky and courageous. But he had to act. Jesus must be buried with honor and care and quickly. It was after 3:00 pm and the Sabbath began at sunset which was 6:00 pm.

Devoted Witnesses (23:55-56)

Joseph's work did not occur without witnesses. The women of Galilee followed and observed how Joseph handled the body of Jesus. Their witness would later refute those who argued that Jesus never really died. The women noticed that the burial was incomplete and planned to complete it after the Sabbath day which was Saturday – for now they could only return to where they were staying and prepare the traditional spices and ointments.

Joseph and the women from Galilee – surely great sadness had gripped them – they were without hope since they did not understand Jesus's suffering and death in light of the Scriptures. This would change in the coming days. But for now, they did what they could and expressed their deep love and devotion to their beloved Jesus.

REFLECT AND RESPOND

Jesus voluntarily gave His life for His people. His suffering and death fulfilled the Father's plan and purpose. This is to what the OT Scriptures have always pointed.

Jesus never wavered from the Father's plan – a plan for Him that did not end in the grave but with a glorious resurrection and ascension in the coming days. As a result of His fulfilling the Father's plan, many throughout time would be saved from their sins.

For the Gentile hearer of Luke's day, this account would have brought joy since Jesus suffered not only for Jews but for them today. And as we know from Acts, God would draw many to salvation.

But where are you today? Does this account move you?

Maybe this is just another story from the Bible that you have heard repeatedly – 2,000 years removed and distant from you? You might say, "so what." I urge you to look and hear beyond the nails being driven, the mocking, and the darkness in this passage. See the mercy and grace extended by God through the suffering Christ. There is hope in this life and in the next for those who receive Him as Savior. Wake from your slumber – see your need – come to the Christ.

Perhaps today you find yourself drawn for the first time to this Jesus Christ. Your heart has warmed as you hear of Jesus sacrifice and how He extends grace and mercy to your sin laden heart. You are like Simon who did not want to be here but have unexpectedly encountered Jesus Christ. You can now see Him up close and personal. Draw near. Receive Him as your Lord and Savior, be saved, and come into relationship with Him.

And dear Christian, take heart. Your sins were paid for at the cross of Christ. Leave your guilt there. Rejoice in Jesus, praise and thank Him. Sing to Him. Serve him with a renewed heart. And also remember you are called to follow in the footsteps of the Lord – taking up your own cross and dying to self. It is not an easy road but Christ Jesus has gone before us. Keep going – persevere – we will soon be safely home with Him.

Sing to Jesus

[Fernando Ortega](#)

Come and see, look on this mystery
The Lord of the universe, nailed to a tree
Christ our God, spilling His Holy blood
Bowing in anguish, His sacred head
Sing to Jesus, Lord of our shame
Lord of our sinful hearts, He is our great redeemer
Sing to Jesus, honor His name
Sing of His faithfulness, pouring His life out unto death
Come you weary and He will give you rest
Come you who mourn, lay on His breast
Christ who died, risen in Paradise
Giver of mercy, Giver of life
Sing to Jesus His is the throne
Now and forever He is the King of Heaven
Sing to Jesus, we are His own
Now and forever sing for the love our God has shown
Sing to Jesus, Lord of our shame
Lord of our sinful hearts
He is our great redeemer
Sing to Jesus, honor His name
Sing to Jesus His is the throne
Now and forever He is the King of Heaven
Sing to Jesus, we are His own
Now and forever sing for the love our God has shown

1. Songwriters: FERNANDO ORTEGA, JUAN F. ORTEGA, RICH NIBBE
© Warner/Chappell Music, Inc.