

# **To Seek and to Save the Lost**

## **The Crucifixion of Jesus**

*Luke 23:26-43*

**Rev. Freddy Fritz**

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# The Crucifixion of Jesus

## Scripture

The Jews called for Jesus to be crucified. Both Herod and Pontius Pilate found that Jesus was not guilty of anything deserving death. Nevertheless, the Jews were urgent, demanding with loud cries that he should be crucified. Pilate relented and decided that their demand should be granted. So, he sentenced Jesus to death by crucifixion.

Let's read about the crucifixion of Jesus in Luke 23:26-43:

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

**<sup>32</sup> Two others, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. <sup>33</sup> 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. <sup>34</sup> And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." And they cast lots to divide his garments. <sup>35</sup> 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!" <sup>36</sup> The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine <sup>37</sup> and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" <sup>38</sup> There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews."**

**<sup>39</sup> One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!" <sup>40</sup> But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under**

**the same sentence of condemnation? <sup>41</sup> And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.” <sup>42</sup> And he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” <sup>43</sup> And he said to him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.” (Luke 23:26-43)**

## **Introduction**

What do people say when they know they are going to die soon? Many times people are not well, and may not even be conscious in the hours or days before their death. Sometimes people die suddenly, as in accidents or cardiac arrest. But sometimes people know that they are coming to the end of their earthly journey, and what do they say then? I am sure one would want to get important messages or statements out to those around one in those last few hours. Messages of love and concern and forgiveness and hope and so on.

The last few hours before his death, Jesus spoke a number of significant statements. There is a lot that we could examine in Luke 23:26-43, but today I would like to examine the passage from the perspective of three significant statements made by Jesus on his way to be crucified and while hanging on the cross.

## **Lesson**

The crucifixion of Jesus in Luke 23:26-43 shows us three significant statements of Jesus.

Let's use the following outline:

1. Jesus' Statement to the Daughters of Jerusalem (23:26-31)
2. Jesus' Statement to the Executioners (23:32-38)
3. Jesus' Statement to the Thief on the Cross (23:39-43)

### **I. Jesus' Statement to the Daughters of Jerusalem (23:26-31)**

First, let's look at Jesus' statement to the daughters of Jerusalem.

Pilate finally – and reluctantly – granted the Jews their request to have Jesus sentenced to death by crucifixion. Jesus was a carpenter by profession, in his early thirties, and a strong man. But by this time he had been scourged. Scourging was done with whip known as a *flagellum*. It consisted of thongs that had bones and lead tied in at the ends of the thongs. The ancient historian, Eusebius, says that people who were whipped “were torn by scourges down to deep-seated veins and arteries, so that the hidden contents of the recesses of their bodies, their entrails and organs, were exposed to sight” (*Ecclesiastical History*, IV, XV, 3–5).<sup>1</sup> Jesus was now a bloody mess, with bone and cartilage showing. In addition, he was exhausted, not having slept for more than 24 hours. Isaiah’s prophecy of Jesus was certainly true: “his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the children of mankind” (Isaiah 52:14).

**And as the Roman soldiers 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 (23:26).** Jesus would have been carrying the cross beam for the cross. Clearly, he was so weak that the Roman soldiers did not think he would make it to the place that is called The Skull, and so they drafted **one Simon of Cyrene** to carry the cross. Apparently, the Romans had the power to draft anyone to do that kind of thing. (I wish I could tell you more about Simone of Cyrene, because it is very likely that he became a Christian, but we don’t have time today to focus on him.)

**And there followed Jesus a great multitude of the people and of women who were mourning and lamenting for him (23:27).** The **great multitude of the people** who were following Jesus were curious to see what became of him. However, the **women who were mourning and lamenting for him** may have been sympathizers. Nevertheless, their mourning was misdirected, as Jesus said to them in verse 28b, **“Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.”** Jesus was following

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<sup>1</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Luke: That You May Know the Truth*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998), 373.

the Old Testament pattern of addressing the women as representatives of the nation of Israel. His basic message to the nation of Israel was, “Don’t weep for me. Weep for yourselves.”

Jesus followed this statement with a prophecy and a proverb.

First, the prophecy. Jesus said in verses 29-30, **“For behold, the days are coming when they will say, ‘Blessed are the barren and the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!’ Then they will begin to say to the mountains, ‘Fall on us,’ and to the hills, ‘Cover us.’”** Jesus was referring to the coming Fall of Jerusalem to the Romans in 70 AD. This was at least the seventh time that Jesus prophesied Jerusalem’s destruction (cf. Luke 11:49-51; 13:6-9; 13:34-35; 19:41-44; 20:16; and 21:20-24). Things would be so terrible during the Roman attack that people would wish themselves to be destroyed.

But Jesus also gave a proverb. He said in verse 31, **“For if they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?”** Jesus was giving an analogy between his own suffering and the future destruction of Jerusalem. This is how Bishop J. C. Ryle stated what Jesus said, “If the Romans practice such cruelties on me, who am a green tree, and the very source of life, what will they do one day to your nation, which is like a barren, withered trunk, dead in trespasses and sins?”<sup>2</sup> But far more important was what God would do to people who reject his Son.

Jesus was saying that people should pray that God would have mercy on them, rather than feel sorry for him. “It is beautiful and good that they should manifest such tenderness and sympathy with him on his way to the cross,” said commentator Norval Geldenhuys. But, “It is far more urgent that they should weep for themselves and their children: even at this late hour such tears may lead to repentance and avert the approaching doom.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on Luke*, vol. 2 (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1879), 466.

<sup>3</sup> Norval Geldenhuys, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes*, The New International Commentary on the Old and New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1952), 603.

Even on his way to the cross, Jesus issued a gracious warning. Yes, he was going to die a horrible death. But his death would ultimately result in his victory. It is important for us to turn from our sins so that we might receive the mercy of God, for which Jesus died.

So, if you are not a Christian, be warned. Know that Jesus says that a dreadful destiny awaits you, unless you repent of your sins.

## II. Jesus' Statement to the Executioners (23:32-38)

Second, let's examine Jesus' statement to the executioners.

As Jesus was on his way to be crucified, **two others, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left** (23:32-33). None of the Gospel writers give details about the crucifixion itself. Luke simply notes that **"there they crucified him."** It is as if the horror of the crucifixion was too awful to describe in detail.

The two criminals crucified on either side of Jesus may have been part of Barabbas' band. Luke wanted to underscore the fulfillment of prophecy in Isaiah 53:12 that Jesus "was numbered with the transgressors."

Having crucified Jesus, the Roman soldiers **cast lots to divide his garments.** While they were seeing which one of them would get Jesus' garments, **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!"** The soldiers also **mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!"** There was also an **inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews"** (23:34b-38).

As Jesus was hanging on the cross, Kent Hughes writes, "The cosmic trauma had begun. There never had been such pain as physical and spiritual evil now came against Jesus in terrible conjunction. Body and soul recoiled. The initial shock of crucifixion had rendered

him paralyzed and quivering. Physical disbelief screamed from severed nerves. And even greater spiritual horror closed in – he would soon become sin.”<sup>4</sup> While all of this was going on, **Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do”** (23:34a). This is the first of Jesus’ seven statements from the cross. These words show us the astonishing willingness of Jesus to forgive sinners. Bishop Ryle put it this way, “His own racking agony of body did not make him forget others. The first of his seven sayings on the cross was a prayer for the souls of his murderers.”<sup>5</sup>

Jesus has an infinite love for sinners. And his prayer on the cross is one more proof of his love. Jesus came to seek and to save the lost, and no-one is too lost for Jesus to love and to ask his Father to forgive.

You have no sin that is too great for Jesus’ love and forgiveness. You may be ashamed of what you have done, but Jesus will forgive you. You may feel that what you have done can never be forgiven, but that is not true. Jesus prays that the Father will forgive you your sin.

But, in addition to knowing that Jesus loves us and asks the Father to forgive us our sin, know that the attitude of forgiveness should reign in us too. As Bishop Ryle said, “Finally, let us see in our Lord’s intercession a striking example of the spirit which should reign in the hearts of all his people. Like him, let us return good for evil, and blessing for cursing.”<sup>6</sup>

Philip Ryken tells the story of Jacob DeShazer who received forgiveness for himself and prayed it for his enemies. DeShazer was a crew member on one of the bombers that made the daring Doolittle raid on Japan after the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor in World War II. His plane was shot down over Japan, and he was imprisoned for more than three years. DeShazer was often tortured and spent most of his time in solitary confinement. He was not a believer, but towards the end of his captivity he was given a Bible and read it cover to cover. Somewhere between his first and his sixth reading, he came to faith

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<sup>4</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Luke: That You May Know the Truth*, 378.

<sup>5</sup> J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on Luke*, vol. 2, 463.

<sup>6</sup> J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on Luke*, vol. 2, 464.

in Christ. He repented of his sins and received his royal pardon through the cross.

Not long after the war ended and he was released from his captivity, DeShazer became convinced that he should return to Japan and preach the gospel. He wanted to love his former enemies by sharing with them the message of God's forgiveness. As part of his evangelistic ministry, DeShazer wrote a pamphlet called *I Was a Prisoner of Japan*. A million copies were printed, and as people all over Japan read the pamphlet, many heard the gospel for the very first time.

In the providence of God, one of the men who read DeShazer's pamphlet was Mitsuo Fuchida, who had been the lead pilot in the attack on Pearl Harbor – the very man who gave the infamous order to attack: “Tora! Tora! Tora!” Fuchida saw the pamphlet at a railway station, and at first he was inclined to discard it, but when he noticed that it was written by an American pilot, he decided to read it. Somewhere deep in his heart he was longing for forgiveness, hoping somehow to forgive and be forgiven. After he read DeShazer's pamphlet, Fuchida obtained a Bible and began to read it. The verse that changed his life came from the Gospel of Luke: **“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do”** (Luke 23:34). Fuchida knew that the Jesus he saw on the cross had mercy for his sins and would give him the grace to forgive his enemies.<sup>7</sup>

Jesus' second statement was a prayer of forgiveness. Know that Jesus will forgive you your sins, and he will enable you to forgive others too.

### III. Jesus' Statement to the Thief on the Cross (23:39-43)

And third, let's look at Jesus' statement to the thief on the cross. **One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, “Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!”** (23:39). Initially, however, both criminals railed at him, as Mark says in his Gospel,

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<sup>7</sup> Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke*, ed. Richard D. Phillips, Philip Graham Ryken, and Daniel M. Doriani, vol. 2, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2009), 591–592.



“Those who were crucified with him also reviled him” (Mark 15:32).

But something happened to the other criminal. His heart was changed. He rebuked the first criminal, **saying, “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.”** And he said, **“Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom”** (23:40-42).

There were two criminals hanging on the cross next to Jesus. Although initially they both reviled Jesus, eventually only one continued to rail against Jesus, while the other criminal repented. His repentance is clear, and it is also necessary for salvation. Bishop Ryle outlines the thief’s repentance as follows:

The first notable step in the thief’s repentance was his concern about his companion’s wickedness in reviling Christ. **“Do you not fear God,”** he said, **since you are under the same sentence of condemnation.”**

The second step was a full acknowledgment of his own sin. **“And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds.”**

The third step was an open confession of Christ’s innocence. **“But this man has done nothing wrong.”**

The fourth step was faith in Jesus Christ’s power and will to save him. He turned to a crucified sufferer, and called him **“Jesus,”** and declared his belief that he had a kingdom.

The fifth step was prayer. He cried to Jesus when he was hanging on the cross, and asked him even then to think upon his soul.

The sixth and last step was humility. He begged to be **“remembered”** by our Lord. He mentions no great thing. Enough for him if he is remembered by Christ.

These six points should always be remembered in connection with the penitent thief. His time was very short for giving proof of his conversion. But it was time well used. Few dying people have ever left behind them such good evidences as were left by this man.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on Luke*, vol. 2, 471–472.

Before he died, the dying thief repented of his sin and put his trust in Jesus to save him. In response, Jesus **said to him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise”** (23:43).

This statement of Jesus is a wonderful statement of salvation given to one who repented of his sin. It is never too late to cry out to God for salvation. If you have never done so, I urge you to do so today. As Bishop Ryle said, “One thief was saved that no sinner might despair, but only one, that no sinner might presume.”<sup>9</sup>

### Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed the crucifixion of Jesus in Luke 23:26-43, we should thank God for Jesus, our sin-bearer.

Kent Hughes tells the story about Dr. Donald Grey Barnhouse, who was pastor of Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia for many years. One Saturday morning Dr. Donald Grey Barnhouse was in his study working when the custodian came in and announced there was a man outside to see him, giving him the man’s card. Dr. Barnhouse read the card, which indicated that the visitor was the captain of the *Mauritania*, the largest passenger vessel afloat.

When Dr. Barnhouse went out to meet the man, the captain said, “You have a very beautiful church here.” Dr. Barnhouse replied, “We are grateful for all that was done by our faithful predecessors a hundred years ago.” The captain said, “It is very much like the Basilica at Ravenna in Italy.” Dr. Barnhouse responded, “Well, it is an architectural duplication. In fact, years ago they brought workmen from Italy, and the tessellated ceilings and the marble columns and the mosaics were all done by Italian workmen. But that’s not what you came to talk about. You didn’t come to talk about architecture, did you?”

The man said, “No. Twenty-three times a year I sail the Atlantic. When I come down the bank of Newfoundland, I hear your broadcast out of Boston. And as I came this week I thought to myself, ‘I’ve got

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<sup>9</sup> J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on Luke*, vol. 2, 471.

twenty-four hours in New York. I'm going to go down and see Dr. Barnhouse.' So I took a train, hoping perhaps I would be able to meet you, and here I am." Dr. Barnhouse was very straightforward as he said, "Sir, have you been born again?" The captain replied, "That is what I came to see you about."

By this time they had reached a chalkboard in the prayer room, and Dr. Barnhouse drew three crosses. Underneath the first one he wrote the word "in." Underneath the third he wrote the word "in." Underneath the middle cross he wrote the words, "not in." He said, "Do you understand what I mean when I say those men who died with Jesus had sin within them?" The captain thought and said, "Yes, I do. But Christ did not have sin within him." Then over the first cross and over the third cross Dr. Barnhouse wrote the word "on." He said, "Do you understand what that means?" The captain wrinkled his brow.

Dr. Barnhouse said, "Let me illustrate. Have you ever run through a red light?" "Yes." "Were you caught?" The man said, "No." "Well, in running that red light you had sin in you. If you would have been caught, you would have had sin on you. So here the thieves bear the penalty of God." Then he wrote another "on" over Jesus Christ and said, "The one thief's sins rested on Christ by virtue of his faith in Christ. The other man's sins remained upon him. Which one are you?"

The man was a very tall, distinguished man, and as he stood Dr. Barnhouse could see that he was fighting back tears. He said to Dr. Barnhouse, "By the grace of God, I am the first man." Dr. Barnhouse said, "You mean your sins are on Jesus?" He said, "Yes. God says my sins are on Jesus!" He shot out his hand and said, "That's what I came to find out!" Dr. Barnhouse invited him to lunch and shared with him further, and the man went back to New York a glowing Christian.<sup>10</sup>

Jesus died to bear sin for sinners like you and me. One response is to reject Jesus, like the hardened thief. But the right response is to turn to Jesus in faith and repentance, like the repentant thief.

I pray that you will do so today. Amen.

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<sup>10</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Luke: That You May Know the Truth*, 387–388.



# Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ  
and membership in his church family,  
develop them to Christlike maturity,  
equip them for their ministry in the church  
and life mission in the world,  
in order to magnify God's name.*

## Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

This sermon, and other sermons, by the Rev. Freddy Fritz can be found at:

1. [www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons](http://www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons)
2. [www.sermoncentral.com/contributors/freddy-fritz-sermons-11181.asp](http://www.sermoncentral.com/contributors/freddy-fritz-sermons-11181.asp)
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## Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church (PCA)

*Answers for Life!*

Address: 19911 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., Tampa, FL 33647

Telephone: (813) 973-2484

Fax: (813) 973-4673

Email: [Office@TampaBayPresbyterian.org](mailto:Office@TampaBayPresbyterian.org)

Web site: [www.TampaBayPresbyterian.org](http://www.TampaBayPresbyterian.org)

**PRAYER:**

Father, thank you for sending your Son, Jesus Christ, to seek and to save the lost. Thank you for his perfect, sinless life. Thank you that while on his way to be crucified and while on the cross he made three important statements that we examined today. One statement was a warning about not turning to you. The second was a prayer of forgiveness for sinners. And the third was an assurance of salvation to one who had repented.

O God, will you grant repentance to each one of us. May we turn from our sin and put our trust in the Lord Jesus Christ so that we may receive forgiveness from you.

And for this I pray in Jesus' name.

**BENEDICTION:**

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.

**CHARGE:**

Now, brothers and sisters, go and serve God wholeheartedly!