

Luke 23:13-43

The Cross, Our Only Hope (Part 3)

Intro: Love is never just word. Love is always backed up by action. Someone can say they love another a thousand times over, but it's only a reality with action.

A few years back we had a friend whose daughter contracted the E. coli virus. The girl was very young, 3 or 4. She was in the hospital for weeks and almost died. Though she survived, she had severe kidney damage and needed a transplant. Her dad was the perfect match so he became the donor.

Donating a kidney is more involved than donating your car to the Goodwill. Plan on being out of work for weeks, and a few months of recovery, and that's assuming that all goes well—no infection.

Our friend told his daughter 100's of times he loved her. But it was the *concrete action* of putting himself at risk, giving up his comfort, that *displayed* his love.

Jesus tells us that dying for another person is the greatest display of love (Jn 15:13). ¹³ Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.

—The crucifixion is the concrete display of God's love, specifically seen in his substitution, suffering, and saving work.

- 1) Jesus as substitute for the guilty
- 2) Jesus as sufferer in frail humility
- 3) Jesus as Savior for the unworthy

Substitute for the guilty (13-25)

- Pilate and Herod's verdict was pretty clear: Jesus has not done anything worthy of death (v15). But that was not the crowd's opinion.
- *In case you are using the ESV or NIV and wondering if they made a mistake—vs 17 has been intentionally left out. In the Greek manuscripts we have, the ones that date closest to the time of Luke do not include this.
*You can trust your Bible!

- As the drama of redemption unfolds, another minor character comes on the scene: Barabbas. Even though his role is minor, he is used to give us a major truth of salvation. All we know about Barabbas is that he was part of a rebellion and a murder. He is a *dangerous* guy. Think of a modern day terrorist. That would describe his crime.
- The crowd prevails: release of Barabbas and execute Jesus.

In order to understand the Cross and atonement, we need to know that *substitution* is at the heart.

Substitution

—First, there is a dark irony here. The one who promotes peace is sentenced to death; the one who is a proven murderer is set free!

—There is another conundrum in front of us. In the Bible, when you sin, you get handed over to death. This is true of Adam in the Garden and Israel’s history in exile. (Give Individual example.)

—But Jesus is innocent. So, it’s a pretty drastic picture of *how Jesus takes the place of the guilty*.

Apply: Substitution is at the heart of the cross. We get a clear picture that Jesus is a substitute for the guilty, “pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities” (Is 53:5). To understand the cross, we need to see ourselves like Barabbas—guilty, hanging under a death sentence...but Jesus the innocent goes in our place.

Sufferer in frail humility (26-31)

- There was a brutal scourging before the crucifixion that weakened Jesus to the point that he could not lift up the crossbeam—some would die in this process.
- A man, Simon of Cyrene (Northern Africa) (v26), was forced to carry the cross. It was too shameful for a Roman to carry the cross, so a Jewish country boy had to do the work.

What stands out about Jesus is his *frail humility*. As the God-man, he is indeed a man, and his body loses strength with lack of sleep, food, blood.

Note two things:

1. Simon walks behind Jesus (v26). Jesus is still leading. He’s still in control (v26). Even in dying moments he is *still in front*. Discipleship is about following Jesus and cross-bearing (Lk 9:23).

It's impossible for a true disciple to avoid cross-bearing.

Final picture of discipleship: following Jesus always involves humiliation, sacrifice and death to self.

2. Jesus's love for the lamenting (v28-31)

- He tells the women not to weep for him, but for themselves (v28).
- Note Jesus *turns* to them.

When we turn, we are giving our full attention. Concrete love is slowing down and stopping enough to pay attention. If I tell my wife and kids that I love them throughout the day, but when they talk to me I can't stop what I'm doing to listen...how am I doing with love?

- Verses 28-ff is a reference to the fall of Jerusalem, as Jesus spoke earlier of the tribulation. Here is a final prophetic voice that catastrophic judgment was coming upon Jerusalem. It's a pretty graphic picture, drawn from Lam 4:4, and a direct quote from Hosea 10:8. The women without children can focus on saving their own lives, instead of feeding themselves and their children.
- The proverb in v31 may come across a bit confusing. The "tree is green" is a reference to Christ's presence on earth. The dry dead tree is a reference to the unbelieving city. To paraphrase, Jesus is saying: if the innocent Son of God suffers, what will be the fate of Jerusalem?

Principle: When a people with God's truth hardens themselves to the point of rejecting God—catastrophic judgment is not far off.

- But notice how Jesus looks *beyond himself*. In his dying hours, Jesus is more concerned with the future of others than his own suffering.

Jesus suffers in frail humility.

- What does humility look like?

Humility is when we look beyond our circumstances and "needs" to the needs of others. (Phil 2:2) "in humility count others as more significant than yourselves.

CS Lewis helped me to see, *humility is not thinking less of yourself; humility is thinking of yourself less.* Lewis simply describes how Jesus lived every moment, even his dying moments. He suffers in frail humility...the humility that looks outside of self to the lives of others.

Savior to the undeserving (32-43)

- The scene is now the actual crucifixion. Jesus is hung on the cross.
- Crucifixion was reserved for foreigners and notorious rebels. The torture so severe and the sight so gross, it was meant to be a major deterrent.
- There are too many OT prophetic fulfillments to trace out—like Is 53:12 “he was numbered with the transgressors”

The Roman crucifixion appears to be the most painful torture invented by mankind. It was a slow, painful death.

Illus: A church I was once in had a guest speaker who was medical doctor. He gave a talk for about an hour of the physical torture that went into a crucifixion and described how painful it would have been. Even there are limitations. It's hard to feel pain that someone describes.

No doubt, the cross was immensely painful.

—Our English word excruciating comes from a Latin word *excruciare* which means, “like the pain of a crucifixion.” You can subtly hear the word crucify in it.

**Yes, the Gospels don't go into great detail on the agony and suffering.*

First, most of the original readers of Luke knew what a crucifixion was like.

Second, even though it was painful, *that does not seem to be what God wants us to dwell on.*

**The Gospel's concern is not to give information about the pain Jesus endured. Rather, the focus is on *what the cross accomplished.*

***Our response to Jesus is not sympathy for his suffering but believing he is a sufficient Savior!*

- The Cross accomplished salvation. Plain and simple.
- And we have a wonderful illustration of that with this moving story of the thief on the cross.
- (v32ff) Everyone was mocking Jesus as he hung dying. To pass the dying hours, the criminals crucified joined in; others gospel accounts indicate both criminals mocked.

- (v39) Dramatic change: One man has a change of heart. Luke is the only Gospel that has this. It's part of the beauty in redemption. A man in his dying hour finds eternal life by looking to Jesus.

It gives hope to all sinners. If this man could turn, be forgiven and promised eternal life. Then look at how immense God's grace truly is!

- In this account, we get a picture of salvation. What happens?

Common threads of salvation

1. The free grace of God is the ground of all of this (v34)—note Jesus's gracious heart toward really undeserving enemies. Free grace—it means no one is forcing Jesus's hand to extend forgiveness.

Parents with children know how hard it is to force forgiveness. Your children fight and you tell the offender to ask forgiveness and the victim to extend it.

*Jesus's grace is the starting point. The Bible does not portray fallen humanity initiating things in order to repair the Creator-creation fracture. God's initiative is through free grace.

2. Owning the reality of rebellion (40-41)—this involves fearing God, confessing wicked deeds.

In gospel conversation, sometimes we stress the love of God up front, but it's more helpful to get things in order: *Fear of God is necessary. If you don't fear God you are a fool, and there is no hope of salvation.*

3. Turning to Jesus with simple, saving faith (42)—His request is simple. "Remember me when you come into your kingdom." He trusts Jesus is the Messiah. He has power, rule, authority.

4. Resting securely in his promise (v43). Trust in Jesus has *immediate results*.

The two things Jesus promises:

—Paradise. A Persian word meaning Garden. Symbol of Eden—God's perfect place without pain, death, and suffering.

—You will be *with me*. That's the greatest part of this promise!

It's not the promise of a pain free life, but the pleasure of being *with Christ*.

Finally, I learned something valuable from John Murray in his book *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*.
“It’s not the possibility of salvation that is offered to lost men, but the *Savior himself*.”

The criminal does not just get the possibility of a place in the kingdom. He gets the Person of the Kingdom. He gets the King. He gets Jesus.

Apply: Friends, I’m not going to offer you the possibility of salvation. I’m going to ask you, “do you want Jesus?” The man personally calls on the name of Jesus. Do you want a sacrifice for you? Do you want a King to rule you? Redeemer to purchase you?

Do you want *him*?

Conclusion:

Some people wish to die doing what they love. For example, I’ve heard Preachers who wish to die in the pulpit; golfers dying on the golf course. It’s a strange thing, but it speaks the truth that *what we are most passionate about we want to carry to the very end*.

Here we see Jesus ending his earthly life doing what he is most passionate about: Saving lost sinners. Graciously granting them a place in paradise.