

## Encounters with Jesus

Week 9 — Jesus and the Two Dying Men (Luke 23:32-43)

### Context:

Our passage today includes many of the last moments of Jesus' life. Following his sham trial while in the hands of the Pharisees and Romans, Jesus was led to be crucified between two criminals. While one of these men would die in his sin, the other is transformed by the mercy Jesus displays.

### 1. The Angry Man

- a. Two criminals are not merely “thieves,” but were insurrectionists and revolutionaries who were disloyal to Rome
  - (1) A common thief wouldn't have been crucified because crucifixion was a method of execution so gruesome that it was reserved for those who were deemed enemies of the state and dangerous to the empire—it was a very effective way to demoralize and terrify
  - (2) Jesus was executed for these same reasons, as a result of the lying testimony of the religious leaders: he was accused of speaking against paying taxes to Rome (which he never did) and for declaring himself the king (which, of course, he is)(Luke 23:1-5)
  
- b. He did not understand what Jesus came to do
  - (1) He is angry and lashes out at Jesus on account of what is being done to him:
    - he hoped to free his people from Roman tyranny, but is not be executed as an enemy of the state
    - If Jesus is truly the messiah, then he expects that now would be the time to prove it by saving everyone
  - (2) Isaiah 53 — Jesus redeems and saves his people precisely because he allows himself to be killed; “by his wounds we are healed”!
  - (3) How often do we treat Jesus as being our piggy bank or genie who exists to give us what we want, when we want it!
  - (4) Jesus is not a means to an end—*He is the end itself*
  
- c. The danger of bitterness
  - (1) When we meditate on not getting our way, we easily become twisted in bitterness; when we recognize that God is working through our life and circumstances, we can find peace even when we experience terrible difficulty
  - (2) God is concerned with giving us something far better than what we want—he is giving us *himself*

### 2. The Converted Man

- a. Matthew and Mark tell us that both of the men mocked Jesus, but Luke shows us that before the end something changed
- b. Witnessing Christ's behavior, praying that God would forgive the very ones who were mocking him, brings him to his knees:
  - He acknowledges his own sin and guilt, even as he defends Christ's innocence

- He doesn't ask to be taken down from the cross, but that Jesus would remember him
- c. In trial and suffering, we are often very quick to find a way out — Have you considered asking to see more of Jesus? To have your affection and confidence in God increase?

### **3. The Third Man — Jesus**

- a. Jesus' response is one of immediate grace: "Today you will be with me in paradise"
- b. God helps those who cannot help themselves
  - (1) Contrary to popular belief that God will only help those who pull themselves up by their bootstraps, or who "help themselves," Jesus redeems the guilty who can do nothing whatsoever on their own
  - (2) One minute the converted man was screaming at Christ, as the other gospels describe, and now he is restored in an instant
- c. Because Christ goes to the Cross for us and in our place, intimacy with God is restored for all who call out to Jesus in faith
  - (1) This guilty man is the only time we witness anyone referring to Jesus by his name alone
  - (2) This is possible only because of Christ's work: he took our place upon the Cross, dying so that our sin and fallen natures would die with him, but he was raised to new life so that we might experience new life with God
  - (3) Though Christ was perfectly innocent and righteous, he becomes like a criminal, condemned in our place so that we might go free

**No matter how alone or condemned we may feel, in Christ Jesus we come to know true freedom and security. Jesus will never turn away anyone who calls upon his name, nor will he ever leave or forsake us! Do you know the third man who died that day?**

## Discussion Questions

1. What struck you about this passage (either hearing it for the first time, or in hearing again after a while)? Why do you think that resonated with you?
2. One thing easy to forget (or that we don't often talk about) is that crucifixion was reserved for those who were killed as enemies of the Roman Empire. The "thieves" were not just thieves, but revolutionaries (and Jesus was killed as a revolutionary leader as well).

How does that context shed light on this passage? How does that impact your understanding of this story?

3. What was a time in your life where you felt like the angry man, upset with what has happened to you or enraged at the sense of injustice, or simply bitter and lashing out?

What did God teach you from that experience? How did God help lead you to change your outlook?

4. Pastor Rob described that repentant thief did not seek a way out of his consequences, but instead asked for Jesus to remember him.

How have you experienced the temptation to be more concerned with consequences than you are with God? As you have come to know God better, how has this caused you to respond more often like the repentant thief?

5. What are some of the ways you still struggle to believe that God's love and forgiveness actually belong to you (not that God puts up with you, or tolerates you, but that God genuinely cherishes you)?

How does Jesus give you greater hope and confidence personally as a result of this passage?