



Our Savior and His Salvation

Luke 23:26-49

June 15, 2025

As we come to the text today, we, we are coming in, in anticipation of our celebration of the Lord's table a little later in the service. So what we're going to do today is kind of prepare our hearts for communion with a message that's a little more general and broad, dealing with Luke 23. We're going to slow down, kind of get the thirty-five thousand, forty thousand foot view of Luke's crucifixion narrative and reflect on the big picture. So you can open your Bibles to Luke 23.

We're going to read the account of the procession to the cross and of the crucifixion itself because what we want to do, here, is discern what Luke wants us to see and to reflect on, so that we can learn what the Holy Spirit wants us to know and to understand. Jesus is, as has been established, Jesus is a king. He's the King of the Jews and as the King of the Jews, as the

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Messiah of God, he is none other than the Son of God and so that makes him the King of all kings, the Lord of all lords.

And Pontius Pilate, discerning what was being said about him, that this King of the Jews, this Christ of God, this Messiah was in, was in fact claiming to be the Son of God. He came to Jesus in the Praetorium, as we've covered in weeks past, but he came to him and asked Jesus about this. And Jesus said, as you may remember, John 18:37, "'You correctly say that I am a king. And for this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice.'"

Very important statement. "'Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice.'" He said the same thing earlier in John's Gospel, "'My sheep hear my voice, and they follow me.'" If you are clear with people about the truth, and they walk away from you, it may be a good indication that they are not among Christ's sheep, that they are not those who are of the truth because everyone who is of the truth hears the voice of truth in the Good Shepherd, in Jesus Christ.

Well, Luke himself, the author of this Gospel, is of the truth. He himself heard the Savior's voice, and he followed Jesus as his Lord. As one of the evangelists, that's what Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are called, the evangelists. Luke authored one of the four Gospels, and he aims this Gospel to everyone else who is of the truth. And this account, too, this account of the procession to the cross, really puts on display the intercessory work of Jesus Christ for his people. And so when Luke is writing, he's writing to those, all those and only those who are likewise like him, of the truth.

What we're going to do today, then, is, on this communion Sunday, as I said, we're going to slow down. We're going to get a big picture of the wider narrative so we can prepare our hearts for the Lord's table. We want to see the themes that are here in this account. Can't go into great detail and depth on all of them that's here. There's so much, here, but we're going to do our best to hit the highlights, kind of skip across the wavetops. But I think that'll be enough to prepare our hearts.

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We want to reflect on the greatness of our Savior and reflect on the fullness of our salvation so that we can draw near to our Lord in full assurance of faith as we come to the communion table. We also hope to see that if we magnify the greatness of our Savior, if we explain the sinfulness of sin, we point to the great fullness of salvation that's proclaimed here, we also hope that God would be pleased to awaken some in our midst who do not yet know the Gospel, do not yet know Christ as Savior. We hope that by showing who he is and what he's like and what his nature is, his character is, we hope that that will win some of you who are not yet won. That's what we want to see.

We're going to start our reading in Luke 23 verse 26, and we'll read all the way to verse 49 and stop after we read verse 49. Verse 26 says, "And when they led him away, they took hold of a man, Simon of Cyrene, coming in from the country, and placed on him the cross to carry behind Jesus. And following him was a large multitude of the people and of women who were mourning and lamenting him. But Jesus, turning to them, said, 'Daughters of Jerusalem, stop crying for me, but cry for yourselves and for your children. 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."

"And then they will begin to say to the mountains, "Fall on us!" and to the hills, "Cover us!" For if they do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?' Now two others also, who were criminals, were being led away to be put to death with him. And when they came to the place called the Skull, there they crucified him and the criminals, one on the right and the other on the left. But Jesus was saying, 'Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.'" Casting lots, dividing up his garments among themselves, or "They cast lots, dividing up his garments among themselves. And the people stood by looking on. And even the rulers were scoffing at Him, saying, 'He saved others; let Him save Himself if this is the Christ of God, His Chosen One.' The soldiers also mocked Him, coming up to Him, offering him sour wine, and saying, 'If you're the king of the Jews, save yourself!' Now there was also an inscription above Him, 'This is the king of the Jews.'

"And one of the criminals hanging *there* was blaspheming Him, saying, 'Are you not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!' But the other answered, and rebuking him said, 'Do you not even fear God, since you're under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed are suffering justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for what we've done; but this man has done nothing wrong.' And he was saying, 'Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!' And He said to him, 'Truly, I say to you, today you shall be with me in paradise.'" And it was now about the sixth hour, and darkness fell over the whole land until the ninth hour, because the sun was obscured. And the veil of the sanctuary was torn in two. And Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, said, 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.' Having said this, He breathed His last.

"Then when the centurion saw what had happened, he began praising God, saying, 'Certainly, this man was righteous.' And all the crowds who came together for this spectacle, when they observed what had happened, were returning, beating their chests. And all his acquaintances and the women who accompanied Him from Galilee were standing at a distance watching these things."

We've got a lot to cover in the weeks to come, and I am eager to jump into it. But I think that we may be well-served by backing up just a little bit to notice a few themes that will be instructive and kind of carry us through the narrative in the weeks to come. But before we look at those few themes, let's make some general observations, here at the start, before I get into a little, short little outline, general observations just so we can get the lay of the land.

First, just a first observation, I've got three of them, first, notice how crowded it is in this narrative? Lots of people seemed to join the procession to the cross, to this place called the Skull. That's how the LSB translation translates it, as The Skull.

The Greek is *kranion*, which you get English, cranium. That's where the word comes from for cranium. So skull, Hebrew is *Golgotha*, Latin *Calvariae*, which, from which we get the word Calvary. But in any language, in every language, this place is a place of death. Probably because when you looked at that little

cliff, there's a perch on top, on top of the skull. But you look at the cliff, there's little cutouts, little impressions, indentions into the cliff, which makes it look like the eyes and the, the mouth of a skull, a gaping skull. They are crucified on top.

But in every language, this is a place of death. It's where Rome crucified the enemies of the state. It's a place of execution, known for that, outside the city walls. You go north of Pilate's Praetorium, where this, the previous scene was. This is a place west of the temple. They go to this place of death. And Luke shows us, here, this, this crowd, this cross section, really, of Jerusalem's urban population following along after this death march.

They're going out to witness a crucifixion and I find it interesting they're going out at 9:00 a.m. Friday morning. It's Passover weekend, on Sabbath's eve. Have you ever thought about taking your kids to go see an execution just before you come to church? May seem strange to you. It does to me. But then again,

judging by some of the movies that people watch, I guess the fascination with death is in every age.

Nonetheless, there's a large multitude of people, verse 27, and of women who were mourning and lamenting him. We see this large multitude of people, verse 27, and there's this also in verse 35, they're, they're mentioned again, a nondescript group of people standing by, and they're there as they're watching the rulers and the soldiers who are actively scoffing and mocking. Some of these rulers, these are important people, as Matthew 27:41 says, they're "the chief priests, the scribes and the elders of the people," dignified, otherwise dignified men coming out in their Sunday best and they're mocking and scoffing and taunting him. Passersby who are walking by to get a glimpse and get a look, they join in the mocking and the blasphemy and the taunting. So lots of people. Some are standing around, some are weeping and wailing, some are scoffing and laughing. Lots of people, lots of noise. It is crowded at the cross.

Luke provides a mental picture for us by kind of grouping all these people into kind of four vignettes, four little scenes

that portray the crucifixion narrative, here. You've got, first as we read through, Jesus and the mourning women, then Jesus and the mocking sinners, then Jesus and the repenting criminal, and finally, Jesus and the confessing centurion. So four little vignettes that kind of help organize and clarify the scene and organize the content for us. So we're going to get more details on those scenes and those characters in weeks to come.

But moving on, that's the first thing, is to notice how crowded it is at the cross. But second, notice how Luke brackets the account from verse 26 to verse 49. He brackets the account at the beginning and the end with true believers. At the start, in verse 26, we meet Simon of Cyrene, Cyrene being a place in, in North Africa, modern-day Libya. It's sometimes mistakenly thought it was, it was in Tripoli, but it's actually on the other side. It's in Benghazi. That side is where Cyrene was. We'll get into more of that later, but, and learn more about Simon next time. But according to Mark 15:21, we know that this Simon is the father of Alexander and Rufus. All the synoptic Gospel writers name this Simon, Simon of Cyrene. Mark names his boys, too.

Apart from Jesus, the Gospel writers name no one else in the crucifixion accounts. And even though, as Luke shows us, some become believers, such as the penitent criminal and the centurion, Simon is named because he's known to the early Christian community. Paul greets Rufus in Romans 16:13 that he is "a choice man in the Lord," and he even talks about his mom, Rufus' mom, Simon's wife. So we understand from Romans 16:13 that Simon himself has probably passed on, but his wife has left and he affectionately, Paul affectionately refers to her as his mother, "Rufus' mother and mine." "Greet Rufus, a choice man in the Lord, and his mother and mine" is what it says. This man is known to the early church.

We get to the end of the account, verse 49, Luke draws attention to the women who accompanied him from Galilee, and Mark and Matthew give us their names. Luke doesn't do that because he doesn't need to. He already named these women in Luke 8:2-3: Mary Magdalene; Joanna, the wife of Kuza, Herod's manager, Susanna, many others as well. The *many others* are actually named in Matthew and Mark. There's Mary, the mother of James the Less, and Joses, and Salome, the mother of the sons of Zebedee.

So these are, all these women who accompanied him from Galilee, they were, as verse 49 says, they were "standing at a distance watching these things." According to verse 55, if you skip down and look there, they positively identified the tomb where Jesus' body was laid. They saw how it was laid, no mistaking which tomb it was. They see it, they see how he's laid in the tomb before they return to prepare burial spices and perfumes to anoint the body and prepare the body for burial. These are believing women and they're the first to witness Jesus' resurrection.

So a very crowded scene. Many important political, religious figures are there, along with a number of anonymous people, passersby, onlookers, people standing there observing. But bracketing the account, separated from the larger crowd, drawn out and identified: true believers, and they're identified by name.

Third thing that we see here, an observation to make, is that Luke adds another level of bracketing within the wider

bracketing. So there's a bracket and then put another bracket, and this is what we see. Inside of the true believers, we see this nondescript group of people. Some are just portrayed here, as passive onlookers. Others are active and sympathetic observers, but it's not known what they are of: if they're of the truth or if they're not. That's left ambiguous in the text.

At the start of the account, after Luke names Simon of Cyrene in verse 26, he tells us in verse 27, following him was this "large multitude of people." Okay? They're nondescript. We don't get any, any more information than that. They're idle, just standing there, they're passive. We see them again in verse 35. "The people stood by, looking on." Again, nondescript, idle, passive, just standing there taking it in. There are also, as verse 27 says, there are active and sympathetic observers. These are the women who are mourning and lamenting him. And at the end of the account, notice before he cites the women who believe, in verse 49, Luke again shows this nondescript crowd in verse 48, "those who came together for the spectacle."

Maybe they came out that day because they're curiosity seekers. Maybe they intended to be nothing more than passive onlookers. In the end, though, they're moved. They cannot witness what happens here on this day without being deeply affected. Idle no longer, the passive become active. Notice, as it says there, "When they observed what had happened, they were returning, beating their chests." What is that? Expressions of guilt and shame. That's why people beat their chest and it's in groaning and grief and remorse. But repentance? Is that what we see? Only time will tell.

Luke is going to return to those people at the start of his second volume, the book of Acts. They are actually the audience of the Apostles in Acts 2 and 3 and 4. They're the crowd listening to the preaching of the Apostles, so we see that God is not through with them yet. For us, the readers of the first volume of Luke, Luke has crafted this narrative to provoke our thoughtful reflection, to draw all those who are of the truth out of the onlooking crowd, where we're nondescript, idle, and passive, to give us a name, so that we are active worshippers, we are repenters. We draw near because we're of the truth, no longer idle, but active, no longer passive. Luke wants all of us

as readers to see this, that no one, really, no one can remain passive and idle and unmoved. Everyone must decide. Everyone is drawn to a verdict: decide either for Jesus or against him.

So the question before every single one of us today is, what will you do with Jesus Christ? Are you going to stand with the onlookers? Are you going to stand at the fringes? Are you going to remain passive and idle and not active and not pursue and not run after and not seek and not bow, not worship, not be zealous for the truth? Or are you going to join Simon of Cyrene, who gave himself to the ministry of the Gospel? Are you going to join the women who identify with Christ in his humiliation and his shame, his burial? Are you going to be there to witness his resurrection and receive that power and transform?

So with those few observations out of the way, here's where we jump into our outline and explore some of the themes in the crucifixion narrative. I've got three points, three points: The sinfulness of sin, the greatness of the Savior, and the fullness of salvation. The sinfulness of sin, the greatness of the Savior, and the fullness of salvation. These are themes, as I

said, that are aimed at the onlookers, then and now, and they're meant to drive every single individual to make the right choice and to put their faith in Jesus Christ. For all of us who are of the truth, along with Simon of Cyrene, along with the penitent thief, along with the confessing centurion, along with these believing women, these themes are going to remind us of our great salvation, the fullness of our salvation, and they're going to prepare our hearts to worship at the Lord's table a little later.

But first, as we read in Isaiah 59, we've got to go down to the depths, the dregs, the bottom, and see the sinfulness of sin. That's the first point, the sinfulness of our sin. And we see, here, just again, thematically as we kind of, taking, taking a kind of a big-picture view, here, we see the sinfulness of sin from two perspectives: the human and the divine, from man's viewpoint, or from a perspective of mankind, and from God's viewpoint.

First, let's look at the sinfulness of sin from the human side, the, the evidence of sin that really illustrates the great

depth of our need for a Savior. And I'm just going to, just going to name these off, rattle them off and, and run through them pretty quickly. First of all, you see sin makes us callous. Sin makes us callous, and we're just going to move through the text. It makes us heartless, unfeeling, cold, indifferent. We see that at the end of verse 34 as the soldiers cast lots for Jesus' clothing. They're, they're dividing up his garments among themselves right in front of him. That's cold; taking a dying man's stuff before he's even dead.

We know this is a quotation from Psalm 22:18. Some of your Bibles may put that line in all caps to indicate that or have some way of designating that. It comes from Psalm 22:18, and something very profound is happening here, but we're going to save that for another time. Still, at a basic level, dividing a dying man's clothing up while he's dying at the foot of that cross in the midst of his, his torture, that's indifference to suffering. Sin does that. It makes people cold and indifferent to suffering.

Sin makes people so selfish that all they care about is themselves and their own little narrow view. They got blinders on. They only see what's in front of them and what they're after. They could care nothing for anybody else. In fact, other people just become impediments to getting what they want. That leads us to a second thing, that sin makes men cruel. Sin makes men callous, it makes, also makes men cruel.

Notice the consciences of these Jewish leaders, obviously are condemning them for their guilt. If Jesus, put it this way, the rulers are there and they're mocking and they're scoffing, right? So if Jesus were truly guilty, like clearly guilty, and everybody knew it, you could point to chapter and verse, law, crime and punishment, and know he's guilty, you know what they would do? They would sit there silently, witnessing the just execution of a guilty man and maintain their dignity before the people. They'd exercise the kind of decorum that really befits the status of a ruler. But since they know in their heart of hearts that they are wrong, that they have condemned an innocent man, they're watching his blood flow and his life ebb away, they can't sit there and remain silent.

Their defiled consciences, though defiled, they're howling at them, tormenting them, accusing them. They're trying to silence an accusing conscience by loudly and publicly justifying themselves. They cannot rest. They're driven to this cruel mockery and taunting because they're guilty. Sin does that.

Next, we see in the soldiers, sin makes men crass. They treat the death of Jesus, the Jewish king, as something like a game. Hey, someone bring the king his wine. Here's your goblet, my Lord. Show your power, O king, the wisdom and the strength of your reign, by getting yourself out of this little fix we've put you in. Quite a pickle you're in, isn't it? Sin makes men crass. It's because sin makes men condemned, like the two criminals who hang on the cross next to Jesus. One of the criminals is lucid enough, and here in this point anyway, humble enough to recognize, verse 40, he's under a just sentence of condemnation. His sin has condemned him. He is rightly suffering for what he's done. He's getting what he deserves, and he knows that he's condemned. Sin has done that.

And then we see also that sin makes men, I couldn't come up with a better word, a 'C' word than this one: Sin makes men crazy. It sounds a little too light and flippant. I don't mean it that way. I mean, sin makes people stupid, makes people insane, crazy. It's like the other criminal on the cross, who, he's enslaved to this blinding pride, and he's acting so foolishly and contrary to all sense. He's blaspheming against the only one who could give him hope of salvation beyond this cross. He's got one way out. It's the guy next to him. He cuts off the only avenue of his escape. He turns away from life itself, embraces death. I call that crazy. Sin has done that.

He knows he's wrong, but this criminal's pride won't let him repent and believe and embrace life. Instead, with pride deeply embedded in his heart, his soul refuses to soften. And so he takes up the taunts and the narrative of the, of the religious rulers, who look down on him in their self-righteousness. He takes up their taunt. He takes up the taunt of the soldiers who nailed him there. He agrees with them. What is this but fear of man, wanting to be respected, wanting to be part of the crowd. So foolish, so crazy. He barrels downward into an eternal death.

Let me just give you one more: that sin can make men contrite, at least apparently so, remorseful, not necessarily repentant, though. Judas Iscariot, you may remember, seemed contrite, remorseful, but then he went and hanged himself. That's not repentance. That's not a godly sorrow that leads to a repentance. That's a worldly sorrow, a worldly grief that leads to death and death only.

We see the evidence at the end, when the crowds went away, beating their chests. There's this dramatic expression of grief. They're agonizing, recognizing how wrong all this was. This is so deeply disturbing to their soul. It's defiling, degrading to their nation, that they'd crucified an innocent man, and frankly, it was suicidal. They were killing their own Messiah, the only hope of their nation. They've remanded themselves to slavery under the Romans, as Jesus says, destruction.

But that's what sin does to mankind. It makes us callous, cruel, and crass. We try to run away from or silence an accusing conscience that rightly and justly condemns us before God. In

the blinding pride of unbelief, we've become a bit crazy, stupid. We're kind of like tiny little vipers, serpents that strike the hand that offers salvation. It's insane. In any moment of softness that comes upon us, which it does, when we can't help but see our wrong, when our conscience accuses us and we recognize our guilt, we may be remorseful and feel contrite for a moment, but will it result in true, saving repentance? That's the question that Luke leaves for this crowd, and we see some of it answered as we get into the book of Acts. Not until then.

Same question is posed to us today. Will any softness of heart, will any remorse, any sense of contrition, any accusing conscience, will it actually lead to full repentance? Will it actually lead to a renewed mind and transformed life? Or will we harden once again and stay stuck and move nowhere, return to the gallery of onlookers, remain idle and unrepentant? The question for you and me is, will it result in true saving, repentance, and, and I can answer without any fear of contradiction that it will, but only if God grants the grace to believe.

This leads to a second perspective on the sinfulness of sin, and this time we see this from a divine point of view. If we see and agree with and embrace God's view of sin, because that's the real issue, it's not what sin does to us, it's not what sin does to people, it's not what sin does to society, it's not the havoc it creates, it's really a vertical issue, first and foremost. What does God think about my sin? God's view of sin, when we embrace that, it leads to a true confession grounded in genuine, repentant, saving faith.

We have a couple of hints in the text of God's view of the sinfulness of sin. It's evident in verse 29, where you read a rather strange beatitude, "Blessed are the barren. Blessed are the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed." Blessed, why would that be? Because Jesus is alluding to something he's spoken of time and time again. There is a terrible judgment coming, and it is a judgment that is so dreadful, so horrifying, that people will call for, as we see in the next verse, death by pulverization. Better to be crushed under mountains and hills than to live through God's judgment coming upon Jerusalem.

Jesus said, as I said, spoke of this judgment before, Luke 21:23, the Olivet discourse. He calls them "days of vengeance," and they're particularly, these days of vengeance are particularly tragic for the mothers. He says, "'Woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babes in those days.'" Hard times. So why does God's judgment on Jerusalem, why does it have to harm the, the tenderest, the most vulnerable members of the nation? There's a little theodicy problem for you, a little problem of evil chunked into the text. Why? Why the tender? Why the vulnerable?

Just to remind you, had they not said when standing before Pontius Pilate, calling for Jesus' crucifixion, convincing Pilate against his will when he wanted to set Jesus free, had they not said, "His blood be on us and on our children"? God heard that. He will require it from them. God takes very seriously the rejection of his son. This is his son, designated as the one and only Christ of God, verse 35, "his chosen one." Whether it's nations, tribes, families, individuals, the gravest sin, deserving the harshest punishment, is to reject the grace of God that's offered in Jesus Christ, whom God sent to be the propitiation for their sins.

So Jesus predicted, just as he predicted in Luke 19:43, "The day shall come upon you, O Jerusalem, when your enemies will throw up a barricade against you and surround you and hem you in on every side and will level you to the ground and your children with you." That happened literally, horrifyingly, in AD 70, the Roman siege and destruction of Jerusalem, the horrific scene. We've been through some of that before. But the sinfulness of sin in its highest height, in its deepest depths, in its longest length, its widest breadth, the sinfulness of our sin is seen in the rejection of God's grace in Christ. What God did to the nation of Israel, that is a warning to all. The judgment came, as Jesus told Israel in Luke 19:43, "It came because you did not recognize the time of your visitation."

God glorified his servant Jesus, as Acts 3:14-15 says, "He sent him to save his people from their sins. They did not receive him. Instead, they delivered him up. They disowned the holy and righteous One, and they asked for a murderer to be granted to them instead, and instead they put to death the Prince of life." That, folks, is the sinfulness of sin, pictured all throughout this account: callous, cruel, crass. Because of

our sins we're justly condemned. But all those who by God's grace see their wretched condition, all those who humble themselves and confess, God is pleased to introduce to them Jesus Christ, to bring them to their Savior, and their Savior to them, and to show them, as we'll see in point two, the greatness of our Savior, the greatness of our Savior.

Earlier we sang the hymn *Stricken, Smitten, and Afflicted*, written by Thomas Kelly in 1803, and we can thank Fernando Ortega for making this hymn better known to us. But we all sang together the third stanza, which says, "Ye who think of sin but lightly, nor suppose the evil great, here may view its nature rightly, here its guilt may estimate. Mark the sacrifice appointed, see who bears the awful load. 'Tis the Word, the Lord's Anointed, Son of Man and Son of God." What a remarkable thought, isn't it, worthy of deep reflection? So good to be put to music like that.

If there was any other way to address human sin, one that would avoid sacrificing Jesus, the Son of God, would not God the Father have found it? But to punish sin fully and justly and at

the same time to show mercy to sinners, there was only one way. It was by this perfect Savior. There are a number of good theological explanations of the cross of Christ in Scripture, but one of the pre-eminent ones is, was written 700 years before the cross, in Isaiah 53. We read in Isaiah 53:5 that "he was pierced through for our transgression, crushed for our iniquities." We find out in that great chapter that "God was pleased to crush him." Verse 10 says, "God put him to grief." Why? Why is he pleased? Pleased to pierce his own son? Pleased to crush his son? Pleased to put his own son to grief?

That's why some liberals of today refer to the whole substitutionary atonement thing as a, a form of cosmic child abuse. It's a blasphemous way to speak about what happened in the cross, but nonetheless, they see the point. God the Father does this to God the Son. Pierces him, crushes him, puts him to grief and why would the father be pleased at such a thing? Because in Christ and in his perfect redemption, the father is glorifying himself. He is making his own justice and mercy known to everyone, all creation, angelic and human alike. In Christ, God purchases a people for himself. In Christ, God redeems them from their sin, reconciles them to himself, glorifies his

beloved son for his perfections, his son in whom he is well pleased.

He says in Isaiah 42:1, "Behold my Servant, behold my Servant whom I uphold, my chosen one, in whom my soul delights." God sends forth his Son. He's perfect. He's beautiful in every way. He's magnificent. He's glorious, and he upholds him before all creation and says, "Look at him." God said to his Son in Isaiah 49:3, "You are my servant Israel, in whom I will show my glory. That's the point of the cross. That's the point of redemption, to show forth the glory of God. It's the point of all creation, to reveal the glory and the magnificence of God. "You're my servant Israel, in whom I will show my glory," and he's speaking to the Messiah, there.

He goes on in that 49th chapter of Isaiah to say this, starting in verse 5, "So now," says Yahweh, who formed me," this is the Messiah speaking, "So now," says Yahweh, who formed me from the womb to be his servant, to return Jacob back to him, so that Israel might be gathered to him. For I am glorified in the sight of Yahweh, and my God is my strength.

"But he says, 'Is it too small a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to cause the preserved ones of Israel to return? You know what I'm going to do?" he says. 'I will also give you as a light of the nations,' that's us, 'so that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.' Thus says Yahweh, the Redeemer of Israel, and its holy one, to the despised one,' to the, 'to the one abhorred by the nation, to the servant of rulers. Kings will see and arise. Princes will also bow down because of Yahweh who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you.'"

Now, we don't get the whole picture of the greatness of our Savior in Luke 23, but we get a pretty good idea. We get the historic facts that receive interpretation from other parts of Scripture, prophetic and reflective in the New Testament. Jesus, as we see in our own chapter, Luke 23:26, but the parallel over in John 19:17, tells us that Jesus started out carrying his own cross. It's due to physical weakness that Simon had to jump in to help. He'd been, Jesus had been awake for 24 hours or more. He's examined before hearings and trials. He endured great physical abuse over and over for hours, slapped, beaten, mocked

to entertain bored soldiers. He was flogged to mollify and pacify the, the leaders, and tried to release him, punishing him with a flogging. But then he was finally, when he was completely condemned, he was scourged in preparation for death.

So he's in this state of severe physical depletion, dehydration, blood loss. And I'm sure as he walked on the way, this Via Dolorosa, to the, to the, to the cross, to Golgotha, the Skull, he cast a pretty pitiful figure on the way to execution. He can't continue carrying his cross. And though he certainly does not look like a great Savior, oh, he most certainly is. The women who mourn and lament for him, whether out of maybe sincere religious belief, we'll get into that more next time, or perhaps professionally, perhaps they're professional mourners, but here they really are struck by Jesus' suffering. Pity of his condition is, evokes in them a, a mercy and compassion that is beautiful, beautifully portrayed in many women.

But what does the Savior say? What does the Savior say to them? "Weep not for me, but for yourselves, for your children."

In other words, he's saying, Look, there's a greater salvation need, here. Yours. Your children. Shed tears for that, for your condition. Mourn and weep. See to your salvation. Here, he's on the way to the cross, about to die, and he cares. He spares no thought for himself whatsoever. He only cares for those he came to save.

After he is crucified, his hands nailed to the patibulum, the crossbeam that was carried by Simon of Cyrene, and that crossbeam with his hands affixed to it by nails and lifted up to the vertical stake called the stipes, he's crucified there between two criminals. He is, as Isaiah 53:12 says, "numbered with the transgressors," quite literally one, two, and three. But Isaiah goes on to say, in Isaiah 53:12, "He was numbered with the transgressors. Yet he himself bore the sin of many, and interceded for the transgressors." Those whose sins he bore, they are the same ones for whom he prays. You could say it the other way, too. Those for whom he prays are those whose sins he bore.

We see him doing exactly that in verse 34, interceding for the transgressors, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." Who does that? Who does that? They nail him, put him up on the cross, and then they start taunting him and mocking him, scoffing at him, calling him to come down. They're drawing other people into it. They're maligning him, slandering him. None of what they say about him is true. Any truth about him that he's spoken, they've perverted and twisted to make him look absolutely villainous. None of it's true. And he looks down in love and he says, "Father, forgive them. They don't know what they're doing." They didn't recognize the day of their visitation.

He's seeing that they're sinning in ignorance, and there is a gradulation between sins of ignorance and sins done in full knowledge. Chief priests, scribes, Pharisees, rulers, they sin in full knowledge, not sinning in ignorance. There are some commentators think he's not actually praying for them. I say it's hard to know. The *them* is pretty broad. "Father, forgive them. They don't know what they're doing." Who does that? Do you? When someone is a persecutor of you, when they hurt people you love, when they go after you for no reason, when they return

your love not only unrequited, but they return it with hate,
with persecution, with maligning, you ready to forgive?

This is the heart of the Savior. This is what our Savior produces in us, his people. This is how we're known by this love of, that the Savior has. Everyone, passersby, while, the passersby, the soldiers, chief priests, scribes, rulers and elders, including two criminals crucified him, while everyone is ridiculing him, taunting, mocking, you know what Jesus did? Stayed silent, quiet. Want to know what he's doing during that time? Praying. He was praying. He's interceding for his people, several who he came to save.

Again, we can imagine this is not a quiet scene. It's loud. And yet here's our Lord, focused in prayer, quietly interceding for his own, asking the father for Simon of Cyrene, for one of those soldiers, a centurion, for one of these two criminals. Of all the people present that day witnessing his death on the cross, many are called, but few are chosen. Not many from the religious or political elite, not many of the rulers. They are not wholly without representation, you'll be happy to know. We

meet Joseph of Arimathea in verse 50. He's a council member. He's one of the rulers. So not many mighty, not many wise, not many noble, not many wealthy, but there are a few. He's one: wealthy, influential. He's got the clout to be able to obtain Jesus' body. He's got the wealth to bury him in his own carved-out tomb.

But from among these religious elites, the insiders, the self-righteous and proud, from among those who claim to see, but in actuality they are blind by their sin and their pride, hardly any of them repent. Some. Maybe a few. Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea, not many. To all the proud religious insiders, to all the self-righteous, to really the chosen people of Israel who are living in the land and take pride in the temple, God says in Isaiah 59:1, "The Lord's hand is not too short to save, his ear is not too deaf to hear." So what is the problem with them? We read earlier in the service in Isaiah 59, "Your iniquities have made the separation between you and your God. Your sins have hidden his face from you."

Isaiah makes, as we read earlier, an eloquent case indicting his own generation for their sins. So what did the Lord do about that? "Finding no Savior," Isaiah 59:16 says, "his own arm brought salvation to him. His righteousness upheld him." Verse 20, "He raises up a Redeemer who comes to Zion." This Jesus the Christ. And those who are willing to turn from their transgression to him in faith, it's a relatively small number. Again, many, many called, few chosen, and not the ones we might think, not the ones we'd put on our team.

He doesn't come to receive the majority of the religious insiders; he saves the outsider, Simon of Cyrene, an African. Jesus doesn't come to save the self-righteous; he saves the outcast, a condemned, crucified criminal. He didn't come to save the disobedient children of Abraham; he saves the oppressor of the children of Israel, a soldier of Rome, a centurion, no less, a guy who's leading the occupying force. He saves the outsiders, the outcasts, the oppressors. Listen, if that's you, if you are an outsider, an outcast, an oppressor, none of those are complimentary terms, by the way, nothing to put on a T-shirt. But if that's you, there's, there's hope for you. But I don't mean that in any worldly sense, fleshly sense, natural sense.



There's no pride in being in a fleshly sense an outsider, an outcast and an oppressor.

No, if you will see your spiritual alienation from God as an outsider to him, if you will see your guilt before his holy law as an outcast criminal before the bar of his justice, if you see the effect of your sin on others that you have oppressed and abused and hurt, and if you will confess your sin, God has a Savior chosen for you. He's a great Savior. He forgives great sinners. I can bear witness to that myself. And he wins for them a great and full salvation.

This brings us to our third and final point in really what's just a big-picture survey of this scene, number three, the fullness of our salvation, the fullness of our salvation. We can trace the fullness of our salvation, kind of represented in the penitent criminal, here, who puts his faith in Jesus. Luke's the only one to record this. It's a beautiful, beautiful picture. We know at first, if we read Matthew 27:44 and Mark 15:32, we know that at first both of the criminals really joined in with the scoffing and the mocking and the taunting. They were

casting insults at Jesus. They, they joined in the chorus of scoffers which included the self-righteous religious leaders and the soldiers who nailed them there.

But then suddenly and without any explanation overtly, but what we can discern, but suddenly without explanation, one of the criminals comes to his senses, verses 40-42. We know this to be an answer to Jesus' prayer. The Savior is here interceding for the transgressor. He asks the father for this man's soul. The father answers his son. He sends the Holy Spirit to regenerate that man on the spot, on the cross. The man is born again, right there on the cross in his dying hour.

What's the evidence of that? It's the complete reversal. The man sees Jesus for who he truly is. He sees himself for what he really is and he puts his faith in Jesus in humility. He casts himself wholly upon his mercy, saying, "Jesus, remember me when you come in your kingdom." What's the Savior say? Oh, he's on the cross, there, to pay for this man's sin. Even though his body is dying, his Savior's heart is exuberant with joy. Why? He's doing exactly what the father sent him to do. It's working.

He rejoices to tell this dear man, a moment ago a condemned criminal and nothing more, now he's a pardoned man, maybe not by the state, but by heavenly justice. He's now a child of God. He's a brother to the King. "Truly, I say to you," my friend, my brother, you shall be, "today, you shall be with me in paradise.'"

That statement points to the fullness of our salvation. But we have to be careful that we're not careless, here, because if we're careless and put the emphasis on the wrong syllable, we will miss out on the fullness of our salvation, focusing on the wrong word, not seeing the emphasis. If we make the mistake of thinking that the fullness of our salvation is found by emphasizing the words in Jesus' promise, in paradise, we may have missed it because the emphasis in the text is on the words, *with me, with me*. Here's how it translates, "Truly I say to you, today *with me* you shall be in paradise."

Let me tell you why that's so important. Look at Jesus' prayer in verse 46. He says, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." If his intercessory prayer for Simon the outsider or

for the penitent outcasts here, this criminal, for the Roman oppressor, if those prayers are answered, and we know that they are, will not the father answer this prayer, too? Indeed, he does. He prays, "Father into your hands I commit my spirit," and you know what the Father does? Gives him permission to take, to surrender his life. Next we read, "Having said this, he breathed his last." Not one of you is in charge of your own death. He is. The father answered his prayer. The father received him.

Okay, so where is the Spirit of Jesus? It's with the father. Where is the penitent thief? In paradise, you say. Yes, but what makes the paradise paradisaical? What makes heaven heavenly? It's to be with Jesus, to be with the father. I hear so many, and as a pastor, this always, you know, chafes me just a little bit. I try to ignore it, give grace in the moment. Whenever somebody loses a loved one, they say, Oh, they're going to be with Uncle Charlie. They're going up there to that great golf course in, in the sky. I'm like, Don't you get it? Who cares about golfing? Uncle Charlie doesn't care about you, if he sees you at all. He's going to be like, Hey, look, Christ! Don't let me hear that from one of you after this sermon, ever. But if you do, father, forgive them. They don't know what they're

doing. You're going to remember that. Just got to keep saying that.

Friends, the fullness of our salvation is to be with him, and the fullness of his own joy is to be with his father. And Jesus says, "Your fellowship is with us, is with the father, with the son." This is what Jesus rejoiced in, in the accomplishment of our redemption. He saw the cross not as we do, not as the weeping women did. He didn't see it as defeat, as the rulers, the Pharisees, all the religious people did, the onlookers, the passers by, the one of the two criminals. He didn't see it as defeat. He saw it as the greatest victory.

The cross is the greatest victory over man's greatest enemies: sin, Satan, and death. And here he is in the language of Isaiah 53, "pierced through for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities." Why? Because God intended in his great grace and mercy and wisdom and power, the chastening for our peace to fall upon him, so that by his wounds we're healed. God caused the iniquity of us all to fall on him.

So Jesus did this willingly, according to Isaiah 53:12. He poured out himself to death. He's numbered with the transgressors. Literally, he dies between two of them, numbered with them, and he himself bore the sin of many. He interceded for the transgressors, and God, as we can see in the text, in verse 44 and following, we see that God announced heaven's approval by a great sign that day. He announced it with darkness to focus all attention on what's happening there.

But then he tore the veil of the sanctuary in two, and he tore it, as the other Gospel writers say, from top to bottom. Invisible hand from heaven came and just tore that veil downward toward the earth. No more divide between God and man, because the man Christ Jesus, Son of man, Son of God, purchased a people and won for them the fullness of salvation. No veil, no barrier between God and man. Christ stands there, the mediator, the gate.

This is why our Savior, "the author and perfecter of faith," Hebrews 12:2, "endured the cross and despised the shame and sat down at the right hand of throne of God." Why did he do

this? "For the joy set before him," that's why. What joy? It's the joy of saving sinners, the joy of interceding for the transgressors, so that with him they will be in paradise with him at the father's right hand. David said, Psalm 16:11, "In your presence there is fullness of joy, and at your right hand are pleasures forevermore."

So these are some of the themes, beloved, that Luke the Evangelist emphasizes in this crucifixion narrative. Remember those observations we made way back at the beginning? We noted how crowded it is at the cross. Probably loud, distracting, lots of opinions thrown around, lots of slander going on, lots of taunting, lots of joking, lots of comments being made. Listen, there's always going to be the crowd. There's always going to be the clutter. There's always going to be the noise out there. But invisible to the crowd, hard to see with the naked eye, there are those few believers chosen out from among the many, and they are those who, by the grace of God and the work of the Spirit, are able to see Jesus for who he really is, and they're able to see themselves for what they really are. When they do that, they fall down in humble confession and repentant faith and grateful

worship. They're the ones that Jesus came to save. He died for them, and he rejoices to intercede for them.

But there's also in this section, as we pointed out earlier, there's an appeal in this section to all those onlookers, to all those bystanders, those who may be curious, but they really are uncommitted, those who even may be affected, remorseful, but they remain unrepentant. Friend, don't let another day pass without believing. Let your heart and conscience testify to it. Listen, listen to my appeal, to the Scripture's appeal. Listen to the voice of Christ and his truth and do what God commands you to do. Little good it will do if you go away beating your chest in grief and shame, but never committing your life to Jesus Christ, never entrusting your soul to him. The wise move is to repent of your sins now. Join with us believers in the worship of Jesus Christ in faith and holy obedience. Let's pray.

Our God and Father, there is so much that you have in store for us in this chapter, and we're just reading about the history of it, what happened there. There's some interpretation, here,



from Luke and other biblical authors. We have the explanations and interpretations that we've received from pastors and scholars throughout church history who've helped us so much with their writing, with their study, with their deep reflection. We thank you for it all.

But all that we can understand now is like a thimbleful of liquid out of a deep, vast, and really infinite ocean of knowledge and truth and glory and joy. And what you have in store for those who put their faith in Christ, it still remains to be beheld. We, we don't even, can't even scratch the surface of the surface. But here we are with what we know by your grace. We come in humble gratitude, committing ourselves to you once again, and we ask that you would make us faithful to the end, that we would work out our salvation with fear and trembling, recognizing that it's you who works within us both to do and to, to will and to do according to your good purpose. We pray for those here who do not yet know you, and ask that you would grant by, if it be your will, by your favor, grant them eyes to see, ears to hear, a heart that will believe and understand, and to turn to Christ in faith. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.