

The Thief On The Cross

Text : **Luke 23: 32-43**

A. The cross of Christ is the center-point of all human history.

S#1.

S#2.

1. Everything before it points toward it.

S#3.

- a. **Gen. 3: 15** – And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, And you shall bruise him on the heel.

- b. All the prophets foretold of His saving work.

S#4.

Acts 10: 43 – Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins.

2. After the cross everything points back to what happened on it.

S#5.

I Cor. 15: 3 – For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,

3. Since the cross we have been marking time by the cross ... b.c. & a.d.

B. The cross was the ultimate contrast between good and evil.

S#6.

1. It displayed human cruelty as opposed to God's love.

2. There were three crosses where many had been before and came after.

S#7.

- a. On one a man died **IN** sin.
b. On one a man died **TO** sin.
c. On one a man died **FOR** sins.

S#8.

C. Jesus Christ sacrificed Himself to rescue us from the consequences of our folly.

I Pet. 2: 24 – He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.

D. His sacrifice was not offered in a holy place but on the cross with evil men.

S#9.

1. They were “**criminals**” or as the KJV says “**malefactors**.”

- a. The original word is “*kakourgos*” which simple is a compound word which literally means "evil-working" (*kakos*, "evil," *ergon*, "work"),
b. It is a strong word indicating one who is considered a bad person.

2. They were guilty of the crimes for which they were being punished.

S#10.

Luke 23: 41 – And we indeed are suffering justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.

3. Two of the other gospels identify the merely as **robbers**. Mk 15: 27, Mt 27:38 (*plunderers, those who would not hesitate to use violence, like unto pirates*)

D. These two violent criminals each left the cross with very different futures.

1. One died as he has lived ... wicked, contemptuous, and scornful of good.
2. The other left the cross cleansed and made holy enough to enter Heaven.

With this lesson we will investigate how and why this happened. S#11.
We will see that it is a unique historical event which will never be repeated.

I. We start with some observations about the thief who was saved on the cross. S#12.**A. Not much personal information is given about the thief. (irrelevant) S#13.**

1. Even so, there is more recorded about him than some apostles. (e.g. Bartholomew?)
2. His name is not given in Scripture.
 - a. In the apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus and Catholic tradition he is called Dismas.
 - b. He was most likely a Jew because Romans didn't crucify Roman citizens.
3. His crimes are not elaborated.
 - a. Vs. 32 ... Luke simply refers to him as a “criminal” (KJV “malefactor”)
 Translates the word *kakourgōs* which means, 'criminal, evil-doer,'
 one who commits gross misdeeds and serious crimes.
 - b. Matt. 27: 38 , Mark 15: 27 call them “robbers” (pirates)
 Translates the word *lestes* which means, 'robber, highwayman, bandit, plunderer'
 - c. Both words indicate men who would not hesitate to use violence.
 - 1) Described similarly to the attackers of “The Good Samaritan.” S#14.
Luke 10: 30 – Jesus replied and said, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among robbers, and they stripped him and beat him, and went away leaving him half dead.
 - 2) This supports the tradition that these two were members of a band of raiders.

B. The thief had more than a passing knowledge of Jesus. S#15.

1. Vs. 40 ... He knew that Jesus claimed to be the Son of God.
2. Vs. 42 ... He knew that Jesus would have authority after the cross.

C. The thieves fulfilled one of the many prophecies about Jesus. S#16.

Isa. 53:12 – ... Because He poured out Himself to death, And was numbered with the transgressors; Yet He Himself bore the sin of many, And interceded for the transgressors.

II. He accepted his guilt and humbled himself before Jesus as the Christ.**S#17.****A. As Jesus hung on the cross many people were mocking Him.****S#18.**

1. He was crucified near the road so passersby were mocking Him.

Mark 15: 29–30 Those passing by were hurling abuse at Him, wagging their heads, and saying, “Ha! You who are going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, ³⁰ save Yourself, and come down from the cross!”

2. The religious leaders mocked Him.

S#19.

Mark 15: 31 – In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes, were mocking Him among themselves and saying, “He saved others; He cannot save Himself.

3. The soldiers who crucified Him mocked Him.

S#20.

Luke 23: 36–37 The soldiers also mocked Him, coming up to Him, offering Him sour wine ³⁷ and saying, “If You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself!”

4. Those being crucified with Him joined in the mocking.

S#21.

Matt. 27: 44 – The robbers who had been crucified with Him were also insulting Him with the same words.

B. One of the “criminals” repented and confessed Jesus as Lord.**S#22.**

1. He confessed that indeed he was a sinner deserving of punishment.

Luke 23: 40-41 But the other answered, and rebuking him said, “Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? ⁴¹ “And we indeed are suffering justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.”

2. This has always been a requirement for those who seek forgiveness.

S#23.

- a. **Psa. 32: 5** – I acknowledged my sin to You, And my iniquity I did not hide; I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the Lord”; And You forgave the guilt of my sin.

- b. **I John 1: 8-9** If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

S#24.

3. When visiting a prison, one seldom meets a guilty man, prisoners claim innocence.

4. When coming to God many do not feel the weight of sin. (*incl long time Christians*)

- a. Yes, I’ve sinned, but I’ve really never done anything “all that bad.”

- b. I was raised in a Christian home; I’ve always tried to lead a moral and upright life.

- c. Your sins helped put Jesus on the cross .. but for His sacrifice you’d be there.**#25**

C. The thief took a public stand in defense of Jesus.**S#26.**

1. **Luke 23: 41** – “**this man has done nothing wrong.**”
2. He risked the crowd turning on him.
3. He stood up against the action of their friends.
4. **Many Christians today will not take a public stand for Jesus.**

D. The thief made a confession of true faith.**S#27.**

1. He knew Jesus was going to be dead before the day was done.
2. He expressed confidence that Jesus would have the ability to save him after death.
Luke 23: 42 – **And he was saying, “Jesus, remember me when**
You come in Your kingdom!”

3. From this two things are obvious :
 - a. The thief knew that Jesus was preaching that the kingdom of God was at hand.
 - b. The thief believed in the resurrection.

4. **Jesus pronounced that the thief was saved eternally. (*No ambiguity*)** **S#28.**

III. No one today can be saved like the thief was saved.**S#29.****A. Today we frequently hear people say, “*I want to be saved like the thief on..*”** **S#30.**

1. Never hear anyone say, “*I want to be saved like Jesus told the rich young ruler.*”
2. What they are really saying is :
 - a. I want to receive salvation without responsibility.
 - b. I’ll live my life for myself, but allow Jesus to save me before I die.

B. Some erroneously assert that the salvation of the thief on the cross proves that baptism is not essential to man’s salvation. **S#31.**

1. Was the thief on the cross not baptized as some affirm ?
 - a. I don’t know and neither do they.
 - b. WHY ? The bible does not say.
2. We do not know anything about the thief except what is revealed.
 - a. Was he married ?
 - b. Did he have children ?
 - c. What did he steal ? Were there other charges ? **Did he ?????**

3. We have already seen that the thief had previous knowledge of Jesus.
 - a. Vs. 40 ... He knew Jesus was from God.
 - b. Vs. 42 ... He understood that Jesus would have power save him after the cross.
 - c. Vs. 42 ... He associated Jesus with a future kingdom.
4. Where did he get this knowledge ? Both Jesus and John were teaching multitudes and baptizing those who received their message.

- a. **Mark 1: 4-5** John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a **baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.** **5** And all the country of Judea was going out to him, and all the people of Jerusalem; and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins. **S#32.**
- b. **John 4: 1, 3** Therefore when the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that **Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John** ... **3** He left Judea and went away again into Galilee. **S#33.**
- c. THEREFORE, it is impossible to affirm that the thief was not baptized prior to his arrest, conviction and crucifixion.

C. However, it is actually irrelevant whether or not the thief was baptized. **S#34.**

1. He lived and died under the Law of Moses.
 - a. The Law of Moses governed the Jews until the death of Jesus on the cross.
 - b. **Col. 2: 14** – having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having **nailed it to the cross.**
2. The gospel was not in effect until after the resurrection of Jesus.
 - a. The resurrection is an integral part of the gospel of Christ. **S#35.**
I Cor. 15: 1-4 Now I make known to you, brethren, **the gospel** which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, **2** by which also **you are saved**, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. **3** For I delivered **S#36.**
to you as of **first importance** what I also received, that Christ **died for our sins** according to the Scriptures, **4** and that He was buried, and that **He was raised on the third day** according to the Scriptures,
 - b. For one to be saved by the gospel of Christ he must believe in the resurrection.
Rom. 10: 8b-9 ... "—that is, the word of faith which we are preaching, **9** that **S#37.**
if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that **God raised Him from the dead**, you will be saved;
 - c. Neither the death nor the resurrection had occurred when the thief was saved.
3. Therefore,...the thief could not have heard the gospel or believed it or obeyed it.

4. Today, all who do not obey the gospel will be separated from God eternally. **S#38.**

II Thes. 1: 7b-8 ... when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, ⁸ dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

D. While on earth Jesus had the authority to forgive sins and did it. **S#39.**

1. Jesus forgave sins during his ministry.

Luke 5: 20-24 Seeing their faith, He said, “Friend, your sins are forgiven you.” ²¹ The scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, “Who is this *man* who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins, but God alone?” ²² But Jesus, aware of their reasonings, answered and said to them, “Why are you reasoning in your hearts? ²³ “Which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins have been forgiven you,’ or to say, ‘Get up and walk’? ²⁴ “But, so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins,”—He said to the paralytic—“I say to you, get up, and pick up your stretcher and go home.” **S#40.**

a. Jesus knew they objected to His pronouncing sins forgiven.

b. He did it to affirm His authority to do so.

2. By saving the thief on the cross, Jesus did a comparable thing. **S#41.**

Luke 23: 43 – And He said to him, “Truly I say to you, *In other words,*
today you shall be with Me in Paradise.” *Your sins are forgiven.*

a. One of the charges made against Jesus was that He claimed to be God.

b. By forgiving the thief and pronouncing him saved Jesus affirmed His authority.

E. After the resurrection, forgiveness is only in obedience to the gospel. **S#42.**

1. **Acts 9: 1-19** ... Jesus referred Saul to the preacher to be told how to be forgiven.

2. That preacher told Saul (the Apostle Paul) : **S#43.**

Acts 22: 16 – Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name.’

CONCLUSION :

A. Therefore, today everyone can be saved in the same way Saul was. **S#44.**

1. God is just ... He treats everyone the same under His law.
2. Everyone after the resurrection is saved in exactly the same way. **Rom. 6**

B. Like Paul Jesus is eager to forgive you if you will be baptized calling on His name

INVITATION :

S#45.

Lesson Text :**Luke 23: 32-43**

32 Two others also, who were criminals, were being led away to be put to death with Him.

33 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. **34** But Jesus was saying, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." And they cast lots, dividing up His garments among themselves. **35** And the people stood by, looking on. And even the rulers were sneering at Him, saying, "He saved others; let Him save Himself if this is the Christ of God, His Chosen One." **36** The soldiers also mocked Him, coming up to Him, offering Him sour wine, **37** and saying, "If You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself!" **38** Now there was also an inscription above Him, "This is the King of the Jews."

39 One of the criminals who were hanged *there* was hurling abuse at Him, saying, "Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!" **40** But the other answered, and rebuking him said, "Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? **41** "And we indeed *are suffering* justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong."
42 And he was saying, "Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!" **43** And He said to him, "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise."