

Luke 23B

- When we left Chapter 23 last week, the trial of the Jesus had concluded, and the necessary though unjust verdict had been reached
 - Even though Pilate knew Jesus to be innocent, nevertheless he pronounced a verdict of death against him
 - And as Luke records it in verse 25, Pilate handed Jesus over to their will
 - “Their will” of course meant the will of the people, of the crowd
 - But even more specifically, it meant the will of the religious leaders who had instigated the whole affair, leading the people to cry out for Jesus’ crucifixion
- And in those days, they wasted no time in carrying out the punishment
 - There were no appeals...who would you appeal to?
 - There was no reason to delay
 - You would just end up feeding and housing a condemned man
 - And today was the day of preparation before the Sabbath on the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread
 - The Jews didn’t want the execution to take place on a Sabbath
 - And in fact, as we’ll see in a short while, the Jews were even anxious to get Jesus’ body down from the cross so that it might be buried prior to the Sabbath
 - But before we get ahead of ourselves, we join Jesus now as He is taken from Pilate and led to somewhere in the street to take Pick up His cross

[Luke 23:26](#) ¶ When they led Him away, they seized a man, Simon of Cyrene, coming in from the country, and placed on him the cross to carry behind Jesus.

[Luke 23:27](#) ¶ And following Him was a large crowd of the people, and of women who were mourning and lamenting Him.

[Luke 23:28](#) But Jesus turning to them said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, stop weeping for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.

[Luke 23:29](#) “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.’

[Luke 23:30](#) “Then they will begin TO SAY TO THE MOUNTAINS, ‘FALL ON US,’ AND TO THE HILLS, ‘COVER US.’

[Luke 23:31](#) “For if they do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?”

- Jesus, we’re told, is taken away after the verdict
 - Matt and Mark tells us that before Jesus begins His walk to Golgotha, the Romans removed his purple gown given to Him by Herod
 - And placed his own clothes back on his bleeding body
 - Matt and Mark also mention that the soldiers whip Jesus more for good measure
 - And this background helps explain why we hear about Simon the Cyrene
 - Normally, a criminal condemned to execution is forced to carry his own cross beam to the place of his execution
 - He didn’t carry the entire cross
 - He usually carried only the cross beam
 - It was heavy but generally it could be carried by an adult male
 - Here we see Jesus unable to carry the beam himself
 - This is clearly the result of the extreme trauma He experienced as the hands of the Romans
 - His body is so weakened that if the Romans want to complete this execution, they will have to make a concession to allow someone else to carry the beam on Jesus’ behalf
- So at this moment, a man named Simon of Cyrene has come in from the country
 - Cyrene was a land in North Africa, so he’s a gentile
 - Which makes sense, because no Jew would have allowed himself to involved in an execution on the Passover
 - And he suddenly finds himself caught up in procession to Golgotha

- So he's pressed into service
- I wonder did Simon know who Jesus was?
- Had he even heard of Him? I suspect so
- The imagery here is quite remarkable
 - With Jesus leading the way, Simon picks up His cross and follows Jesus
 - Does that ring any bell with you?

[Mark 8:34](#) ¶ And He summoned the crowd with His disciples, and said to them, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and **take up** his cross and follow Me.

- If the disciples wanted to be like their teacher, they only needed to learn from the example set by the unsuspecting Simon of Cyrene
 - In fact, I wonder where are the disciples at this point
 - Do you notice that they are noticeably absent from Luke's description of the crowd
 - They aren't anywhere to be found
 - Within this large crowd of followers, Luke only makes special mention of the women who follow along mourning and wailing loudly.
 - The disciples seem to have vanished – not a one there to offer even tears
 - I wonder if the significance of this man's name hit home for the disciples later
 - Simon the Cyrene walks behind Jesus to His crucifixion obediently carrying His cross
 - Simon the Rock, who vowed to never leave Christ's side even to the death, is missing in action
 - While it's east to sit in judgment of Peter here today, 6 thousand miles and 2000 years away from the event

- So instead of picking on Peter, perhaps we should ask ourselves which Simon we would have been had we been there
- And I especially wonder which Simon we are today?
 - Are we prone to walk away from following Jesus when times get tough?
- Even the laziest preacher could preach a month of Sundays on the topic of staying close to Jesus in desperate times
 - And so I don't intend to cover that well worn ground tonight, except to remind us of one thing
 - Even when we are faithless, He is faithful, because He cannot deny Himself
 - And since the Holy Spirit resides in each of us, never to depart, the Lord can never forsake us
 - Therefore, even if we run from the trials brought upon us for our faith, can we ever fully escape them?
 - Since we never cease to be a child of God, can we ever gain anything by hiding our faith from others?
 - In the end, did the disciples escape persecution simply because they ran away during Jesus' trial or crucifixion?
 - So isn't better to stand firm in our days now, and let what come may,
 - so that at least when we one day stand before our Lord we might be received as one who was faithful?
- Luke then goes on to record Jesus' comments to the crowd that followed
 - And more specifically, Jesus addresses the women in the crowd
 - By the way, it was customary in that day for professional mourners to follow a condemned man
 - It was a curious tradition, but women would often take up the duty of wailing and mourning for the condemned regardless of whether they even knew Him

- In Jesus case, I have no doubt the mourning is largely authentic, even if there were a few professional mourners mixed in
- And then Jesus turns to them and says don't mourn for me, mourn for yourselves
 - And then Jesus quotes from Hosea 10:8
- The verse Jesus quotes includes the phrase, "They will say to the mountains, 'Cover us!' And to the hills, fall on us"
 - But to fully appreciate why those words appear there and what they mean, we need to look at the context of that chapter of Hosea

[Hos. 10:1](#) ¶ Israel is a luxuriant vine;
 He produces fruit for himself.
 The more his fruit,
 The more altars he made;
 The richer his land,
 The better he made the *sacred* pillars.

[Hos. 10:2](#) Their heart is faithless;
 Now they must bear their guilt.
 The LORD will break down their altars
 And destroy their *sacred* pillars.

[Hos. 10:3](#) ¶ Surely now they will say, "We have no king,
 For we do not revere the LORD.
 As for the king, what can he do for us?"

[Hos. 10:4](#) They speak *mere* words,
 With worthless oaths they make covenants;
 And judgment sprouts like poisonous weeds in the furrows of the field.

[Hos. 10:8](#) Also the high places of Aven, the sin of Israel, will be destroyed;
 Thorn and thistle will grow on their altars;
 Then they will say to the mountains,
 "Cover us!" And to the hills, "Fall on us!"

[Hos. 10:10](#) When it is My desire, I will chastise them;
 And the peoples will be gathered against them
 When they are bound for their double guilt.

[Hos. 10:12](#) Sow with a view to righteousness,
 Reap in accordance with kindness;
 Break up your fallow ground,
 For it is time to seek the LORD
 Until He comes to rain righteousness on you.

[Hos. 10:13](#) You have plowed wickedness, you have reaped injustice,

You have eaten the fruit of lies.

Because you have trusted in your way, in your numerous warriors,

[Hos. 10:14](#) Therefore a tumult will arise among your people,

And all your fortresses will be destroyed,

As Shalman destroyed Beth-arbel on the day of battle,

When mothers were dashed in pieces with *their* children.

[Hos. 10:15](#) Thus it will be done to you at Bethel because of your great wickedness.

At dawn the king of Israel will be completely cut off.

- Even from just the parts of the chapter that I read, it's easy to see that the theme is judgment for Israel's unfaithfulness and sin
 - And in a day the Lord appoints, they will be chastened
 - They will suffer His wrath for their national sins
 - They will wish that mountains would fall on them to put an end to the misery
 - Now, Hosea's prophecy is referring to the coming judgment of the nation of Israel which takes place during the time of Tribulation
 - You can even see Jesus speaking similar words spoken by the men of the Tribulation at the end of Chapter 6 of Revelation after the sixth seal is opened
 - So when Jesus turns to the women on the way to His death and quotes these words from Hosea
 - We know these words are associated with God's judgment poured out on Israel for unfaithfulness
 - So we can understand them here to be a prediction of coming judgment for a similar offense
 - On the one hand, they can simply refer to the same event as Hosea
 - The judgment that will come upon the nation of Israel in the days of Tribulation
 - Days God has specifically set aside as payment for their violation of His covenant and for their rejection of the Messiah

- So, clearly included in the meaning of this statement is a reference to the coming tribulation upon Israel in the last days
- But it's also fair to say that a more timely event is also on Jesus mind
 - The same one that was on His mind as He enter Jerusalem a week earlier
 - The coming destruction of the city at the hands of the Romans
- And in that day of judgment, it will be a horrible day
 - Somewhere between 1-2 million Jews lost their lives in that siege
 - But the destruction of the city was preceded by a nearly 2 year long siege that almost starved the entire city
 - The situation in the city became so desperate that at the end, women were willing to eat their own afterbirth as they miscarried their children
 - And obviously, the children alive at that time suffered greatly as the entire city lived under a fear of impending doom
 - Severe judgment indeed
 - And it will be circumstances like those that lead mothers to actually be jealous of women who have no children
- And then Jesus adds a proverbial saying of that day
 - A proverbial saying is a colorful turn of a phrase that succinctly communicates an accepted truth or wisdom
 - Like you can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink
 - Or a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush
 - Give Steve 30 minutes to talk, he'll take 60
 - So Jesus uses a proverbial saying – a saying that would have been well known and understood in that day – to emphasize the point
 - He says for if they do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?

- There is no literal tree here
 - Just like there is no horse or bird in the earlier proverbs I used
 - They merely stand for something else
- The picture here is of how hot a fire burns
 - If fire burns hot on green wood, how hot will it burn on dry wood?
 - And the fire is a picture of wrath and anger
- By using this proverb, Jesus is reinforcing His warning about their future
 - The “they” here are the Romans and probably God as well
 - If the Roman’s viciousness is this bad for someone like Jesus, when things are relatively good for the Jews
 - when the Romans are sympathetic to the Jews
 - How bad do you think things will get when they are mad at the entire nation?
 - And if the Father in Heaven is willing to pour out this kind of treatment against His son as a measure of God’s wrath,
 - Then how terrible with the day of judgment be for the entire nation when God judges them for refusing to accept His Son’s sacrifice?
 - Terrible indeed
 - The Romans were mighty upset when they finally took siege of Jerusalem for the final time in AD 68
 - They had been forced to march down with a he contingent of their army a few years earlier to put down the rebellion
 - Only to have to leave Jerusalem when their supply lines were attacked
 - And in the process, their commanding general dies
 - Then they return even more angry and take hold of the city again

- They then have to wait nearly 2 years before they breach the city walls
 - So how angry do you think they were once they broke through?
 - No one survived, families brutally murdered
 - The gorgeous temple systematically dismantled and destroyed
- Dry wood indeed

[Luke 23:32](#) ¶ Two others also, who were criminals, were being led away to be put to death with Him.

[Luke 23:33](#) ¶ 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.

[Luke 23:34](#) 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.

[Luke 23:35](#) 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.”

[Luke 23:36](#) The soldiers also mocked Him, coming up to Him, offering Him sour wine,

[Luke 23:37](#) and saying, “If You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself!”

[Luke 23:38](#) Now there was also an inscription above Him, “THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.”

- The scene at the cross was a strange mixture of humanity
 - Jesus reaches the place called the Skull
 - The word in Aramaic is Golgotha
 - In Greek it's kranion
 - The Latin word is calvaria, from where we get Calvary
 - He name is often reported to have come from the shape of the hill and its appearance like that of a skull
 - While that might be true, it's just as likely that it came simply by association with it's use as place of execution
 - This hill was outside the city walls, north of the Jerusalem
 - This fact is significant in its connection to Leviticus 16

- That chapter of the Law provides for the rituals surrounding the Day of Atonement
- A day marking when the national sins of Israel are covered by two goats specially prepared by the High priest on that day
- The priest chooses lots to determine which of the two goats lives and which one dies
 - The goat that must die is sacrificed in the temple as a sin-offering the Lord
 - Then the blood of that goat is brought behind the veil and sprinkled on the mercy seat
 - This was only day of the year when a man may walk behind the veil and live
 - And then the body of that goat is taken outside the city and burned
 - After the first goat has been sacrificed, the second goat is taken to the outside of the city
 - Leviticus calls this goat the scapegoat
 - And the priest presents the second goat to the people and then lays hands on the goat and confess the iniquities of the nation and all their transgressions
 - And the priest symbolically places those sins upon the head of the goat and releases the goat outside the city to carry the nations sins away
 - By Jesus day, the religious leaders had added a tradition of pushing the goat off a cliff so that it would die, to ensure the sins never returned to the city
- Jesus' death outside the city is significant in how it carries with it the fulfillment of the scapegoat
- Ultimately, for those in the nation who place their sins upon Jesus will see them carried away never to return

- And even in the unbiblical tradition of the religious leaders ensuring the death of the goat by killing it violently, there was a parallel
- There was another interesting tradition that grew up around this day, based on Isaiah 1:18

[Is. 1:18](#) ¶ “Come now, and let us reason together,”

Says the LORD,
 “Though your sins are as scarlet,
 They will be as white as snow;
 Though they are red like crimson,
 They will be like wool.

- The rabbis would tie a scarlet ribbon around the horn of the scapegoat before it was sent out into the wilderness
 - Every year, the priests would report a miracle had taken place as the goat left the city
 - The red ribbon had turned white, which became a symbol for the nation’s sins having been forgiven
 - The legend goes on to say that 40 years before the Temple was destroyed in AD 70, the ribbon stopped turning white
 - 40 year before AD 70 was AD 30, the approximate year the Messiah died
 - If the legend is true, or even if not, the fact that it is repeated even to this day reinforces the imagery of what Christ’s death means
 - The scapegoat no longer removed Israel’s sin since Jesus did it once for all when He died
- Then Jesus is placed on the cross
 - Before He was actually nailed to the cross, He would have been removed His outer garments
 - Meaning that He was crucified in virtually nothing
 - Probably loose hanging undergarments that left little or no modesty

- Further humiliation
- Remembering Jesus carried only the cross beam, there was a couple of ways the cross could be constructed
 - One way was to nail the cross beam to the vertical post while on the ground, and nail the condemned to the cross
 - Then the whole cross was lifted into place
- The second way was to nail Jesus to the cross beam, and then hoist the beam up with ropes until it rested atop the vertical beam already placed in the ground
 - Finally, the condemn man's feet were nailed to the post
 - We can't be sure how it was done here
- At the top of the cross, the Romans would usually place a plaque announcing the crime for which the person was condemned
 - The point was to discourage similar behavior in the future
 - Pilate wrote Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews
 - The religious leaders protest that it should read He said He was King of the Jews
 - But Pilate says I have written what I have written
 - In John's gospel, we hear the religious leaders protesting that Pilate
- As they placed Jesus on the cross, they placed him between two criminals who happened to be condemned on the same day
 - We'll hear more about them later
- And we're told that the Roman soldiers are so callous over the death of the prisoners, that they take a moment of pleasure casting lots to gain Jesus' discarded clothing
- Luke gives a few other brief details
 - First, Jesus was compassionate to the end, remaining sinless even under circumstances when no other man could remain so composed

- Luke records the statement Father forgive them
 - Only Luke captures this famous line
- Who is this prayer for?
 - It seems that if Jesus asks for the Father's forgiveness on behalf of someone, then it would happen
 - Perhaps it was for the Roman soldiers at the cross
 - We know that the centurion comes to know who Jesus was in that moment, perhaps others as well
 - The crowd at the cross seem to have a change of heart at the end
- But in the midst of this compassion, the sneering and hatred continue
 - The crowd demands that if he was the messiah, he should be able to save himself
 - That is true, but it's a ridiculous statement
 - If the test of messiahship is whether he can save himself by leaving the cross, then he's a pretty pathetic messiah to even allow himself up on the cross in the first place
 - If the true measure of his claim to be the messiah is to be found in his ability to overcome the will of men, then wouldn't it stand to reason that he should have shown that power long before he reached this point?
 - If that were the test, then wouldn't he have stopped the false trial?
 - Wouldn't he have stopped the beatings and scouraging?
 - Wouldn't he have stopped them nails before they entered his hands?
 - Wouldn't he have avoided this whole scene by now?
 - It's not a true or even logical test of whether Jesus was truly the Messiah
 - It completely misses the point

- The real test of Messiahship is to either avoid the entire debacle and rule in power from the start
 - And this is something we know Jesus was indeed capable and prepared to do, but for the sin of Israel and all men prevent Him from doing so
- In which case the only other test of Messiahship was to remain on the cross until death, and then do something that no mere man could ever do
 - Return from the dead
 - To leave that cross, though it might have impressed someone, was not a true test of power
 - The real test was to let death take its course and then conquer it for all time
- And in winning that victory, He proves something much more important to you and me
 - For a man who can save himself from the cross can impress me
 - But a man who can raise himself from the dead can save me
 - For if he can save himself from death, then I can certainly trust him to do the same for me
- Which is the promise to anyone who would place his sins upon the head of our scapegoat
 - And allow him to carry our sins away forever
 - And upon our bodily death, we can be sure that as He raised Himself from dead, He will likewise do the same for all those who believe in His name