

Luke 23C

- Tonight, we study the death of our Lord Jesus
 - So much of the gospel account we've studied over the past weeks has been leading to this point
 - Jesus Himself has predicted His own death no less than three times, and alluded to it more times than that
 - What's more, the entire Old Testament record exists ultimately to point to three moments in human history
 - First, it records the moment of man's fall, resulting in his spiritual debt to God
 - Second, it points over and over again to our God appointed need for a savior to rescue us from that debt
 - Finally, it describes the glory and joy awaiting those who place their trust in the Lord for that rescue one day to come
 - So here we see that entire plan consummated in the death of a perfect God-Man, a death undeserved
 - And a death which satisfied the wrath of a holy and just God who's anger burns against sin
 - But Who was satisfied to set that anger against His own Son rather than against you and I
 - But we are still about three hours away from that death, at noon on a Thursday in April, the day of Passover
 - Given the terrible suffering that accompanied crucifixion, they must have been the three longest hours of Jesus' life

[Luke 23:39](#) ¶ One of the criminals who were hanged *there* was hurling abuse at Him, saying, "Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!"

[Luke 23:40](#) But the other answered, and rebuking him said, "Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?"

[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."

[Luke 23:42](#) And he was saying, “Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!”
[Luke 23:43](#) And He said to him, “Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise.”

- Here again Luke presents us with a unique perspective, one that has become an iconic image for the church over the ages
 - Matt and Mark mention the thieves in passing, but only Luke gives us the story of their conversation
 - And yet I believe it’s fair to say that this conversation is as important to establishing sound Christian doctrine as perhaps any other single conversation recording in all the Gospels
 - We should all be thankful to Luke and to God Himself that this story was recorded – even more so that it even took place
- We have Jesus and these men hanging next to one another suffering together
 - Jesus was crucified because He was King of the Jews, which was no crime at all, as even Pilate himself admitted
 - But the thieves were crucified for a legitimate offense – stealing
 - Stealing was a capital offense in Rome
 - So these men are not victims – they are justly condemned
 - And since they now hang on a cross, their death is only a matter of time
 - It’s a disturbing thought to consider that these men knew they would not be rescued
 - Their lives were essentially over
 - It was only a matter of time before they died
 - This is different perhaps than someone who sits on death row and awaits their day of reckoning
 - They hold out some hope of a rescue
 - Not these men
 - They are experiencing a slow death, but it will be a death nonetheless

- So what thoughts would enter your mind in those last excruciating hours?
- I can't pretend to know what we would be thinking, but I find it interesting that for at least one of these men, his thoughts turn to taunting Jesus
 - And what's even more interesting is that his taunting takes the form of requesting a rescue
 - The irony here is piled high upon itself
 - First, consider that the thief that mocked Jesus is asking Jesus to do the very thing that Jesus is capable of doing
 - More than capable, Jesus is willing to do it
 - At least in the sense that Jesus is willing to rescue the man spiritually
 - But of course, the man doesn't really believe that he can be rescued
 - His comments are clearly spoken in a mocking tone
 - And in case we had any question about the man's intent, Luke removes any doubt when he causes these comments abuse (blasphemeo)
 - So here is a man who is in the process of dying
 - So he knows that he is essentially a walking dead man
 - Yet he has no idea just how dead he truly is, spiritually dead in other words
 - Nor do all men, of course
 - All men are equally dead in their trespasses, Paul says
 - All men are simply waiting for a day to come when they breathe their last
 - This thief just happens to know that his last breathe is a little closer than for those standing by watching him

- He calls out to Jesus the Christ and says save us
 - But he doesn't really believe Jesus is the Christ nor that He can save them
- He says the words, but the meaning escapes him
- Before we look at the second thief, we should ask what can we learn about our own relationship with Christ from the experience of this man?
 - First, we learn that words alone don't save us
 - We can't say the right words and be saved
 - If you stand back for just a moment and look simply at what the man said, here's what you find:
 - You're the Christ
 - Save yourself and save us
 - Looking just at the words, we might be tempted to see a confession of faith
 - He called Jesus the Christ, which is a specific term meaning Messiah
 - He addressed Jesus as the Messiah, the one sent to save the Jews
 - Secondly, he specifically asked the Messiah to save Him
 - Isn't this the formula for salvation?
 - How many times have you seen or heard people coaching others that they need only repeat after me
 - Say this prayer with me and you will be saved
 - Can the words alone save someone?

[John 6:37](#) "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out.

[John 6:38](#) "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.

[John 6:39](#) “This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day.

[John 6:40](#) “For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day.”

- The experience of this man proves that the answer is no
 - The words alone are meaningless unless that are accompanied in the heart by faith

[Rom. 10:9](#) that 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;

[Rom. 10:10](#) for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.

- Belief is a state of being that differs from the physical act of speaking or confessing
 - One act cannot take the place of another
 - My words are not equal to belief
 - They stand apart from belief yet both are expected from a believer
 - To those who, like this first thief, say the right words when prompted
 - When desperate and near death or in some other crisis
 - But yet do not carry a belief in their heart are not saved
 - Likewise, the scripture says that the confession of the mouth results in salvation
 - There is an expectation that the one who believes will demonstrate that belief in a confession
- So our first lesson is that we need to beware the first thief
 - Have we spoken meaningless words yet expected somehow that it will save us in the end?

- Or perhaps we have never spoken any words, never a public confession of our faith and trust in Jesus
 - We assume that our kind and generous thoughts toward Jesus will carry the day?
 - Perhaps we've thought that association with Christians and our attendance at church should be enough to prove our intentions
 - Then again, maybe the requirement to confess with our mouth was intended to expose exactly that kind of ambivalence
 - To shine light on a true heart
 - So if a confession of Christ is a expected part of a changed life
- Finally, this first thief reminds us never to be so determined to see someone come to faith in Christ that we inadvertently try to lower the bar for admission into the family of God
 - If we lead someone to think that they are saved because they repeat a prayer without also taking time to gain their agreement with the belief behind those words
 - Or if we allow someone to assume that salvation can come because they merely think and act like a Christian without ever asking them to declare their faith in Christ,
 - Then we are giving them false comfort
 - A person who speaks a confession without holding to the faith is merely fooling others
 - And a person who assumes they have the faith but never speaks the confession is merely fooling themselves
- But God in His infinite wisdom places a second thief on another cross on the other side of Jesus
 - And when this other thief hears the words of the first thief, he quickly joins the conversation
 - The man rebukes the first thief

- He says that this man should fear God, since he is under the same sentence of condemnation
 - Here's this man joining in the crowd's mocking of Jesus
 - But unlike the crowd, this man is hanging on a cross just like Jesus
 - He's not dead yet but he's as good as dead
 - So you would think he would fear God, because he's under the same sentence of condemnation
 - Meaning, he's about to see God, he should be thinking about that right about now
- This statement suggests that the second thief sees this man's comments as being offensive to God
 - You should fear God rather than invite His anger against you
 - What does it suggest to us to learn that this second thief feels mocking Jesus will anger God?
 - The answer comes in the rest of the second thief's statements
 - He says we are guilty and suffering rightly
 - But Jesus is innocent
 - So therefore, while we are suffering for our mistakes
 - Jesus is suffering for other's mistakes
 - In this one statement, the second thief acknowledges his own sin and Christ's sinlessness
 - Finally, the man makes a request of Jesus
 - Remember me when you enter your kingdom
 - Now he isn't asking Jesus to simply make note of him so that one day in the future when Jesus is walking through the kingdom He might say, "Gee, I wonder what happened to that thief?"

- By remember me, he means specifically please include me among those you invite into your kingdom
 - It's a specific request to be with Jesus in the future kingdom of those saved
- By contrast to what the first thief said, the second thief gives a Biblically correct confession of faith sufficient to be saved
 - He recognizes that how one respond to Jesus is of utmost importance to God
 - And fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom
 - Secondly, he acknowledges his own sin and recognizes the punishment that is justly awaiting him for that sin
 - Third, he recognizes Jesus' sinlessness and therefore Jesus death on the cross was a penalty paid for sins of others
 - Finally, he makes a specific appeal to Jesus to be rescued on the basis of mercy, not on the basis of merit
- To which Jesus responds, surely you will be with Me in Paradise
 - The term paradise occurs here and in Paul's description of heaven in 2Cor 12
 - And Jesus uses it again as a description of Heaven in his letter to Ephesus in the Revelation He gave John
 - But in simple terms, Paradise simply means be exist in a glorified state in Jesus' presence
- God gives us a perfect picture of salvation in a remarkably concise picture
 - It's no wonder that the story of this second thief has a unique place in the Biblical record as a testimony against countless number of false doctrines and wrong teaching
 - Would you teach me that I must keep the Law to be saved?
 - To you, I will point to the salvation of this law breaker
 - Would you teach me that I must be baptized to be saved?

- To you, I will point to the thief on the cross who never went down into the water
- Would you teach me that I must perform a certain work to be saved?
 - To you, I will point to the thief, who's only work was the labored breathing on the cross.
- Would you teach me that I must speak in tongues to be saved?
 - To you, I will point to the thief who never spoke beyond his confession.
- Would you teach me that I must belong to a certain denomination, participate in a special ritual, attend a certain class, acquire a secret knowledge, meet a certain test, or strive in any way...
 - To you I say, witness the thief on the cross
 - A sinner who did nothing more than believe in his heart and confess with his mouth that Jesus was Lord.

[Luke 23:44](#) ¶ It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour,

[Luke 23:45](#) for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two.

[Luke 23:46](#) Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When he had said this, he breathed his last.

- Luke records that the day reaches the sixth hour
 - Luke is using the Jewish manner of recording the hours with a day
 - Meaning that the it was noon
 - At noon, the world went dark
 - The word for dark in Matt is a word that means a heavy darkness, spiritual darkness
 - Without additional explanation, we can immediately draw the appropriate conclusion regarding the meaning of this event

- The world grows dark as God's judgment and displeasure is made manifest to the creation
- There are many examples in scripture where God's judgment is displayed through a darkening of the Sun
 - But the significance here is even more significant
 - In Genesis 1, we learn that light and darkness was created even before the sun and moon
 - And in Revelation 21 we learn that the new heaven and earth will not have need of a sun or moon either because all light comes from the Lord
 - Leaving us to conclude that the existence of light is independent of the objects God has created to produce light
 - God has given us the physical light produced by the sun to as a representation of His light when we are in His presence
 - All of this suggests to me that when the light leaves the earth at this moment, it is a physical representation of the Father separating Himself from His Son
 - Forsaking His Son
- For three hours, hours that must have felt like an eternity to Jesus, He was separated from the Father
 - From the Father's love, fellowship
 - For three hours, Jesus experienced a kind of separation that every one born into sin experiences
 - A spiritual separation that begins at birth and lasts for an eternity for those who fail to believe in Jesus
 - But Jesus, sinless and having been with the Father since the beginning, is now experiencing that separation for the first time
 - And how dreadful it must have been

- In Matt gospel we get a sense of Jesus' dread, when Jesus exclaims :

[Matt. 27:46](#) About the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "ELI, ELI, LAMA SABACHTHANI?" that is, "MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?"

- Near the end of that darkness, that time when the Father had forsaken His own Son
 - Jesus cried out in desperation over the separation
 - It even makes me wonder if this part of the ordeal was something that Jesus didn't – or couldn't – anticipate
 - That somehow it even took Him by surprise
 - How could Jesus anticipate separation from the Father when He had never yet experienced it?
- Crucifixion was such a painful death because of the way it left the condemned struggling to combat the physical effects of the punishment
 - As the body is raised up, the weight of the body pulls on the arms, and almost immediately the shoulders are out of socket
 - Not only is the pain unbearable, but the person can't breath in that position
 - So as the person suffers is tremendous pain in the hands feet and shoulders, then the person feels like he's being held under water
 - So eventually, he will push himself up by pushing against the nails in his feet just enough to relieve the pressure on his diaphragm long enough to take in a breath
 - Of course, at that point, the pain in his feet causes him to relax the legs, only to bring back more pain in the shoulders and begin the cycle all over again
- Writings of the day say that the sour vinegar wine was often given to these men because it also acted as an astringent, which shrinks and dries membranes
 - The point was to constrict the throat to make it harder to cry out in pain
 - Because the cries of pain from the men were so persistent and disturbing

- And this process went on for hours and even days
 - Some men took several days to die
 - Usually from dehydration, which brought it's own kind of torture
 - But if people wanted to hasten death, they might break the legs of the prisoner, which quickly resulted in asphyxiation, since the prisoner could not longer lift himself to breathe
- When Jesus cried out, He gave us a clear reference to an OT prophecy concerning the Messiah
 - Many centuries before this event, God gave us a description of how He would accomplish redemption by His Anointed One
 - And God gave us this picture hundreds of years before crucifixion had even been invented...

[Psa. 22:1](#) ¶ My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?
Far from my deliverance are the words of my groaning.

[Psa. 22:2](#) O my God, I cry by day, but You do not answer;
And by night, but I have no rest.

[Psa. 22:3](#) Yet You are holy,
O You who are enthroned upon the praises of Israel.

[Psa. 22:4](#) In You our fathers trusted;
They trusted and You delivered them.

[Psa. 22:5](#) To You they cried out and were delivered;
In You they trusted and were not disappointed.

[Psa. 22:6](#) ¶ But I am a worm and not a man,
A reproach of men and despised by the people.

[Psa. 22:7](#) All who see me sneer at me;
They separate with the lip, they wag the head, *saying*,

[Psa. 22:8](#) "Commit *yourself* to the LORD; let Him deliver him;
Let Him rescue him, because He delights in him."

[Psa. 22:9](#) ¶ Yet You are He who brought me forth from the womb;
You made me trust *when* upon my mother's breasts.

[Psa. 22:10](#) Upon You I was cast from birth;
You have been my God from my mother's womb.

[Psa. 22:11](#) ¶ Be not far from me, for trouble is near;
For there is none to help.

[Psa. 22:12](#) Many bulls have surrounded me;
Strong *bulls* of Bashan have encircled me.

[Psa. 22:13](#) They open wide their mouth at me,
As a ravening and a roaring lion.

[Psa. 22:14](#) I am poured out like water,
And all my bones are out of joint;
My heart is like wax;
It is melted within me.

[Psa. 22:15](#) My strength is dried up like a potsherd,
And my tongue cleaves to my jaws;
And You lay me in the dust of death.

[Psa. 22:16](#) For dogs have surrounded me;
A band of evildoers has encompassed me;
They pierced my hands and my feet.

[Psa. 22:17](#) I can count all my bones.
They look, they stare at me;

[Psa. 22:18](#) They divide my garments among them,
And for my clothing they cast lots.

- Luke also mentions that at this moment of Jesus' death, the veil was torn in two
 - Matt adds that the tear began at the top and proceeded to the ground
 - Josephus described the veil as 82.5 feet in height, 24 feet in width, and three inches thick
 - It hung from a 30 ton beam above huge wooden doors to the temple
 - When it was ripped, it sent an unmistakable message of what Jesus' death meant
 - Where once before men depended on priests to intercede on our behalf before God,
 - Now all men have the opportunity for direct access to the throne room if they accept the Messiah's sacrifice on their behalf
 - God removed the veil through the death of His Son
- Then Jesus dies at the ninth hour
 - Jesus cries out in loud voice commending his Spirit to the Father
 - Again, Jesus fulfills a prophecy from the OT

[Psa. 31:1](#) ¶ In You, O LORD, I have taken refuge;
Let me never be ashamed;

In Your righteousness deliver me.

[Psa. 31:2](#) Incline Your ear to me, rescue me quickly;

Be to me a rock of strength,

A stronghold to save me.

[Psa. 31:3](#) For You are my rock and my fortress;

For Your name's sake You will lead me and guide me.

[Psa. 31:4](#) You will pull me out of the net which they have secretly laid for me,

For You are my strength.

[Psa. 31:5](#) Into Your hand I commit my spirit;

You have ransomed me, O LORD, God of truth.

- The Greek word here is megas, great
 - His throat is already going to be incredibly dry, and he was given some of the vinegar, making it harder to speak
 - Now we hear he cries out, entrusting his soul to the Father
- On Yom Kippor, the high priest of Israel was required to call out the holy name of God (YHWH) when he performed the sacrifice for the nations sins
 - Jewish writing records that when the high priest spoke this name, his voice was supernaturally empowered to be so loud that all the multitude of Israel could hear it.
 - So it was here again, our high priest's voice echoed supernaturally through the valley and in the city, heard by the entire city
 - Which leads to the natural reaction...

[Luke 23:47](#) ¶ The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, "Surely this was a righteous man."

[Luke 23:48](#) When all the people who had gathered to witness this sight saw what took place, they beat their breasts and went away.

[Luke 23:49](#) But all those who knew him, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.

- A Roman centurion and the crowd see the events at Jesus' death
 - The darkened sky
 - The supernaturally loud cry to the Father

- The earthquakes, mentioned by Matt and Mark
- And they praise God and declare Jesus to be righteous
 - It seems that Jesus' prayer that God forgive them, for they know not what they do has been answered
- But those closest to Jesus watch from a distance
 - This fleeting reference to the women is important because it will be the women who remain the most diligent to attend to Jesus after death
 - They are intent on remaining nearby to see this through
 - As Luke describes the scene, he retreats from the centurion, to the crowd to the women at a distance
 - Like a camera lens pulling back from the cross
- And that's where we leave Jesus tonight, hanging lifeless on the cross, having declared it is finished, our debt paid in full.