
CELEBRATE EASTER 2017
THE CRUCIFIXION OF JESUS
Luke 23:13-43

Let's begin in Luke 23:13 and I'll explain what is happening.

Pilate then called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people, and said to them, "You brought me this man as one who was misleading the people. And after examining him before you, behold, I did not find this man guilty of any of your charges against him. Neither did Herod, for he sent him back to us. Look, nothing deserving death has been done by him. I will therefore punish and release him.

So, what's going on here? If you've read the account of the events leading up to Jesus' crucifixion, he was praying in the Garden of Gethsemane. Judas has betrayed him – sold him out for a kiss and some silver coins. He was falsely accused by the religious leaders. They were saying, "This guy is teaching all kinds of things against Rome and he needs to die." So he stands before the Jewish leaders. They pass him over to Pilate, who is one of the Roman leaders. But Pilate realizes, "Hey, this guy is not from my area. He is from Herod's area. He is outside of my jurisdiction." He sends him over to Herod, Herod sends him back to Pilate, and Pilate goes back to the religious leaders and the Jews and says, "Listen, he's not guilty. You're wrong. I'm just going to punish him and let him go." That's what's going on here.

Now, listen to what happens in verse 18: "But they all cried out together, "Away with this man, and release to us Barabbas"— a man who had been thrown into prison for an insurrection started in the city and for murder. Pilate addressed them once more, desiring to release Jesus..." There was a tradition every year that the Romans would release one prisoner over the Passover feast. So, he is saying, "Listen, I am going to do you guys a favor. He's not guilty. I'm going to release Jesus to you. I'm going to set him free." But they said, "No. We don't want Jesus released. We want Barabbas."

Now, Barabbas was guilty. He started an insurrection against Rome. He was starting riots. He was murdering people. And they say, "If you want to give us somebody, if you want to release anybody, if we want to use up that free pass, we want it used on Barabbas, not Jesus." They

pushed back and they said, “Away with Jesus. Give us Barabbas.” Look again at what follows, starting in verse 21:

...but they kept shouting, “Crucify, crucify him!” A third time he said to them, “Why? What evil has he done? I have found in him no guilt deserving death. I will therefore punish and release him.” But they were urgent, demanding with loud cries that he should be crucified. And their voices prevailed. So Pilate decided that their demand should be granted. He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, for whom they asked, but he delivered Jesus over to their will.

Let’s pray. Father, we come to you this morning. We pray that you would open your word to every heart here. Give each person here, Lord, ears to hear, eyes to see, and a heart to believe what you want to show them today. And as we stare at Calvary and we look to the cross today, as we see the horror of the cross, I pray that we also see the hope of the cross and the One that was crucified on the cross for us. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Have you ever been in a situation where you were really tempted? Maybe it was a situation where somebody attacked you or hurt you or threatened you or sinned against you, and you got really angry or really scared, and some really unexpected things came out of your mouth? Or maybe your kids are disobeying you and they are pushing and pushing and pushing and all of a sudden you blow up and scream at them! Then you wish you could take it back. “Ahh! I didn’t mean that. That’s not who I am. I wish I could take it back.”

But the sad thing or the scary thing of that moment, Jesus tells us, is that out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks. It’s really in those moments when we are pressed to extremes and things are squished and come out that we start to see what’s really inside of our hearts. Sometimes it’s pretty ugly and unexpected, but it’s there and we need to deal with it.

Well, today as we look at the crucifixion of Jesus, I want to look at it from a different perspective, because things come out of Jesus’ mouth that reveal what’s in his heart. As we look to Calvary and we look at the scene, we are going to discover four things about Jesus that will change your life forever, if you let it. So, let’s read verses 26-31. It’s the longest of the things that comes out of the mouth of Christ.

- I. The first thing we’re going to learn about Jesus is the great compassion of Jesus.

Verses 26-31:

And as they led him (Jesus) away, they seized one Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, and laid on him the cross, to carry it behind Jesus. And there followed him a great multitude of the people and of women who were mourning and lamenting for him. But turning to them Jesus said (here it is), “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep 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!’ 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 wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?”

When I was preparing for this sermon and I read this, I was shocked. Honestly, I don’t know if you’re like me, but I kind of forgot that Jesus ever even said this. I had to double check: Is that in my bible? I meditated and reflected upon it and studied it, and what I see here is incredible.

Think about this. Jesus has already been flogged. He was falsely accused and flogged, which is where they whip you. They put nails and rocks and bone and stone into the whip, so not only does it whip your skin, it actually grabs into it, and when they pull it off it rips shreds of skin off of you. He is bleeding and bruised. They put a crown of thorns on him. They hit him. They mocked him. They spit on him. They put a purple robe on him and beat him with reeds. We already know he is so weak from all the abuse he has experienced that he can’t even carry his own cross. They have to find this guy Simon and have him carry it, because Jesus is literally limping his way to his death.

And there are women. The women of Jerusalem are looking at this scene. They see the bloodied Savior. They looked at Jesus and understandably, they are horrified. They are crying and they are weeping for him. They are weeping for his suffering. And what does Jesus say to them? What does Jesus say to us? He says, “Don’t cry for me. Cry for yourselves.”

Really? We look at Jesus and we tend to sentimentalize it and say, “Man, that’s really hard.” But you know what Jesus does? It’s incredible. As he is suffering for them and for you and for me, he looks through the corridors of time, and he sees their suffering, and he sees our suffering, and he weeps for us instead.

I have a hard time thinking about other people if I have a cold. Seriously, I do. If I hurt my back, it's all about me. I'm just laid out in bed. Jesus is thinking about you. I don't want to go too deep into the prophecy here, but in 70 A.D. Jerusalem was sieged and it was terrible. The temple was torn down. People were starving. It got so bad that some of the women ate their own children because they were so hungry. Actually, it's recorded in history. "Blessed are the women who never bore, never nursed. It would have been better if you were never born. Don't weep for me right now. Weep for yourselves."

The book of Revelation picks up on this where they say, "fall on us" to the mountains at the final judgment. It says that the people facing the wrath of God are hiding and just wishing the mountains would bury them. It would be better if an avalanche hit them than if they suffered under the wrath to come. He looks at that and he sees all the suffering of humanity and says this. He says: "If this is what they do when the wood is green, what are they going to do when it's dry?"

I have a fire pit in my backyard. I like to make fires. Sometimes I run out of wood, so you go to the tree and cut down a branch. You lop it off and cut it up. Have you ever tried to light green wood before? It's really hard. You get to a spot and you're like, "Paper is not doing it. Cardboard is not doing it." Eventually you're pulling out the lighter fluid and throwing it on there.

The bible says basically a righteous person is like this -- a tree planted by streams of water -- and Jesus is the most righteous person ever. He has never sinned. Even Pilate said, "There is no guilt in this man. There's nothing he's ever done wrong." He's the greenest tree there ever was. In this scene they are basically throwing lighter fluid on him to set him ablaze and to extinguish him and to destroy him. He says, "If this is what they do when the wood is green, what will happen to you?"

Because we are like dry wood in our sin. We are like the twigs and the dry leaves on the ground, and when judgment hits and fire hits dry leaves, an inferno is started. Jesus sees the fires of hell itself and he weeps for you. Jesus suffered, and he is experiencing this suffering so that you would not have to suffer. When he looked over at Jerusalem and they rejected him, he wept over them and said, "How often I would have gathered you under my wings, but you would not."

The compassion of Jesus is so incredible in this moment, for you and for me and for all those who are suffering. If you are suffering today and you say God can't understand, he understands. He wants to release you from it. The suffering servant, Jesus, suffered so that you wouldn't have to suffer eternally. The first great thing we see is the compassion of Jesus for you.

- II. The second thing we see coming out of the heart of Jesus is this: The forgiveness of Jesus.

Verse 32: “Two others, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left.” Listen. This is what comes out of the mouth of Jesus. “And Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.’” While Jesus was falsely accused, falsely crucified, suffering for our sins, not for his own sins -- while he is suffering, bleeding, and dying for you and for me -- he cries out for our forgiveness.

I don't know if you know how a person dies in crucifixion. When I was younger I used to think they bled to death. But it's not through bleeding to death that a person dies. It's actually through suffocation, because they nail your hands to a cross. They nail your feet to the beam on the bottom and all of your weight is hanging on those two nails in your hands. It is stretching everything in here and you can't breathe unless you push up on the nails in your feet.

So, he is hanging here, gasping. To exhale you have to let go and hang on the nails in your hands with every push and drop. It's excruciating. To speak at that moment would be almost unthinkable. And what does Jesus want to eke out of his mouth in that moment as he is hanging? “Father, forgive them. They know not what they do.” That is incredible forgiveness, grace, and love.

Now, I'm a Christian and I know God has called me to forgive everybody, because I have been forgiven. But I think if we're all honest here, everybody – Christians and non-Christians, wherever you are spiritually – it's hard to forgive people, isn't it? If I'm going to forgive them I usually need two things. You are probably like me. Are you ready for them? The first thing I need is for them to feel really bad. They have to feel bad about what they did to me, right? If they don't feel bad, it's really hard to forgive. The second thing I usually need is some time. I need them to feel bad and I just need some space for a little bit, for grace to soften up my heart and go back and say, “I forgive you.”

But consider this: While Jesus is hanging on the cross, being spit upon, mocked, reviled, abused – while they've done this, no time has passed and none of them feel bad about it. In that moment, Jesus is pronouncing forgiveness over them, and over you, and over me. Incredible forgiveness! The great forgiveness of Jesus Christ is available to you.

You may say, “Listen, Stefan, I have sinned really bad, and I did it because I liked it and I wanted it.” There is forgiveness for you. “Well, I just did it yesterday, or this week, or this month. Give me some time to clean up my life.” Jesus doesn’t wait for that. He is pronouncing forgiveness over you even before you’re ready for it. Even before you see your need for forgiveness, Jesus is saying, “Father, forgive her.” “Father, forgive him. He doesn’t know what he is doing, Lord.” He is interceding and calling you to come and claim the forgiveness that he offers to you through the cross of Jesus Christ. Great forgiveness is revealed on the cross of Jesus Christ to all who come to Jesus. That is the second glorious truth. That is the second thing revealed in the heart of Jesus.

III. The third thing we discover is this: We discover the great identity of Jesus.

This begins in verse 34. Jesus doesn’t say a thing, but listen to what is recorded.

And they cast lots to divide his garments. And the people stood by, watching, but the rulers scoffed at him, saying, “He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!” The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine and saying, “If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!” There was also an inscription over him, “This is the King of the Jews.”

Sometimes it’s what we say that reveals what’s in our heart. Other times it’s what we don’t say. In this scene right here, we see the incredible identity of Jesus, especially because he doesn’t speak. The prophet said that he wouldn’t open his mouth when he suffered for us. He would be like a lamb led to the slaughter who was silent before those who killed the sheep. That’s how the suffering servant would do it. Pregnant in this entire section is prophecy after prophecy after prophecy that fulfills exactly who the Christ of God would be.

The sour wine that they offered him was prophesied hundreds and hundreds of years ago, that the suffering servant, that the Messiah would be offered sour wine. The fact that they’re gambling and rolling dice for his clothing was all part of the prophecy that said that they would gamble and cast lots for his clothing. There are so many things recorded, both in Luke, and not recorded here that showed that this is the Christ. For example, they did not break the knees of Jesus. They broke the knees of the other two guys so that they would suffocate, but Jesus was already dead, and the prophecy said that they wouldn’t break one of his limbs. The prophecies also said that they would pierce his hands and his feet. And on and on and on.

If you're a skeptic here this morning, I would say this: Jesus could fake some of it. He could know his Old Testament bible and fake a number of things, but he could never fake this. You have no control over your birth, where you are born -- all of that was predicted -- and you have no control over your death. There were many times they raised stones to kill Jesus, and they didn't. Why? Because it was predicted that he would be crucified, pierced for our transgressions, suffer, and die. All of these things prove that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, that he is your Savior. You have no reason to doubt that this applies to you. You don't need to look any further for a Messiah or a Savior. He is hanging here 2000 years ago on the cross, fulfilling dozens of prophecies at his very death for you and for me.

The sadness or the irony is that they scream out: "If you're the Christ, save yourself! Why don't you save yourself?" The reason he doesn't save himself is because he wants to save you. If he saved himself we would be doomed, so he hangs. It's not the nails that held Christ, it's his love for you that held him to the cross. Jesus said in Matthew's gospel that at the garden Peter pulls out a sword. He says, "I'll defend you." Jesus says, "Listen, Peter, if I wanted to, I could call thousands of angels right now to stop this whole thing." But he didn't. He didn't because he wanted to die. "For the joy set before him," he suffered for you. The Christ – the great identity of Jesus is proven through the cross of Christ.

IV. And fourth and finally, the great promise of Jesus is revealed.

Verse 39:

One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!" But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong." And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." And he said to him, (here is the promise) "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise."

The great promise of Jesus still stands – that everybody that cries out to him in faith will be saved. Do you see in this scene there are two choices? There are two criminals. Both of them are guilty. Both of them are receiving what they deserve. One of them doesn't believe in Jesus and joins in the mockery. The other one says this: "Don't you fear God? I do. I fear God." And he believes in Jesus. We know this because he believes that Jesus is going to paradise. He knows that Jesus

belongs in the Kingdom of Heaven. That's his rightful home. And when Jesus dies, that's where Jesus is going, but he has no clue where he is going.

It's really an incredible scene, because you know what? He doesn't say, "Jesus, save me." He doesn't say, "Jesus, take me to paradise with you." He just asks for Jesus to remember him. "Don't forget about me. Don't forget about me, Jesus, please." He believes upon Jesus. He has no time to reform his life. He has no time to go and prove his repentance. He just cries out to the Savior and says, "Jesus, please remember me!" And Jesus says, "I tell you the truth. Today when you close your eyes, you are going to be with me. You are going to be with me in paradise."

And that promise holds true to everybody and anybody who calls out to Jesus, because Jesus is not dead. As we will learn on Easter Sunday, he's alive. He went back to heaven. He is at the right hand of God, praying for you, calling out for forgiveness for you. His compassion is still for you. He is still the Christ, the Son of the Living God. He is still not only the King of Israel, he's the King of the World, and he will give you the gift of eternal life. He will give you paradise if you cry out to him like that thief.

There is an allegory; there is a metaphor in here. Do you remember Barabbas? Barabbas was guilty, but he got to go free. Why? Because Jesus suffered. The innocent suffered, the guilty goes free. And that, church, is the good news of Jesus Christ. The innocent has suffered so we, the guilty, could go free.

Do you know what makes paradise so great? If you're considering claiming that today, I want you to. I'm going to give you a moment soon to cry out to Jesus. I'll tell you what makes paradise awesome. It's not simply the streets of gold, but that's going to be really cool. It's not simply the pearly gates, though I'm sure they're going to be splendid. It's not simply the mansion that Jesus is preparing for all those who call upon his name, and I'm sure those rooms are going to be the best. The thing that makes paradise paradise is this: We get to be with him. You get to be with Jesus. "Today you will be with me." If you want that, I want that for you, and Jesus wants that for you. I want to give you a chance to call upon his name right now.