

The Crucifixion of Jesus: History's Darkest Day

Prayer

Introduction: Jesus active at his death

We have come tonight to meditate on the crucifixion of Jesus, which I am calling history's darkest day. We are so familiar with the symbol of the cross. See the cross on wall, jewelry, etc. This familiarity often keeps us from seeing the cross for what it is.

- A. The horrors of crucifixion
 - i. Physical aspect: flogging, carrying cross beam, tied or nailed to cross beam, cross beam fastened to an upright stake, hang for days until death suffocation.
 - ii. Public aspect: took place on roadsides, deterrents.
 - iii. Social aspect: a slave or violent criminal's death, Roman citizens not crucified.
 - iv. Spiritual aspect: In early Judaism, a person who died by crucifixion was considered cursed by God, based on Deut 21:23 ("cursed is anyone who is hanged on a tree").
 - v. Crucifixion is nothing short of the cruelest, basest form of torture/execution that existed in the ancient world.
 - vi. This is the darkest day in history. However, this is not because of the practice of crucifixion but because of the person who is being crucified.
- B. The privileged position of the reader
 - i. Thought experiment: Memory erasure + time travel to the day of Jesus's crucifixion. What you could tell and what you couldn't.
 - ii. You could see the crucifixion but it's meaning/significance for you would not be self-evident.
 - iii. As readers of the Bible, we have a more privileged position than that of passerbys in Jerusalem on that dark day.
 - iv. We see the event and also get its meaning.
- C. Surprise!

- i. Jesus, an innocent man, being crucified brings two things to my mind: (a) passive, (b) victim.
 - ii. These things are true, but this is not where Luke places the accent.
 - iii. We see Jesus as active and in control...in surprising ways.
- D. Framing question: Whom do we see at the epicenter of history's darkest day?

Forecast structure: (1) walk through the text, (2) meditate on the presentation of Jesus in this passage.

1. Text Walkthrough

Background: Jesus has been falsely accused and sentenced to death. The people have chosen to have a notorious murderer freed and Jesus, an innocent man, condemned to execution by crucifixion.

A. Act 1: On the way to the cross: vv. 26–31.

- i. 26: Jesus is too weakened to carry his own crossbeam.
- ii. 27: Women are beating their chests and wailing.
- iii. 28–31:
 - a. Jesus's compassion (recall that earlier in Luke's gospel, Jesus himself wept over the city of Jerusalem and the disaster coming).
 - b. What is that fate?

Luke 19:41–44

As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it 42 and said, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes. 43 The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. 44 They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you."

This refers to the brutal destruction of Jerusalem at the hands of the Romans in 70 AD.

- c. v. 29: Childlessness better than children.

Typical: What do you say to someone who has just had a new baby born?

What do you say to someone you find out is struggling with infertility? or has had a miscarriage? The disaster Jesus is describing is so horrifying, that the situation is flipped on its head.

d. Death better than life.

Quote from Hosea 10:8.

The coming judgment will be so terrifying that it would be better for a mountain to fall and kill you than to endure it.

-Even in the face of tremendous suffering, we have a general agreement that death is preferable to life. Not so here.

e. The fire will burn hotter than that of Jesus's own crucifixion.

B. Act 2: Setting the scene at the cross: vv. 32–34.

i. OT imagery

a. Luke is taking pains to make sure that you know that Jesus is literally surrounded by criminals at his crucifixion. I believe that this is due to the prophecy about suffering servant of the Lord in Isa 53:12
Therefore I will give him a portion among the great,
and he will divide the spoils with the strong,
because he poured out his life unto death,
and was numbered with the transgressors.
For he bore the sin of many,
and made intercession for the transgressors.

b. Note also that the soldiers are dividing up and gambling for his clothes. This also is OT imagery, here from a psalm about King David that is understood to refer to the Messianic king from David's line.

Psalm 22:18

They divide my clothes among them
and cast lots for my garment.

- c. This is very, very important bc it shows that Jesus's death was not an accident on God's part; this is the plan from the beginning and had been promised and foreshadowed for centuries beforehand.
- iii. Excursus: textual variation in v. 34.
 - a. Pause and move to different subject.
 - b. Would someone read aloud the footnote on v. 34? "Some early manuscripts do not have this sentence."
 - c. What this means: Many manuscripts lack Jesus's prayer here.
 - d. Presenting P75. Composition, Content, Discovery, Institution, Images. One of the earliest manuscripts of the Gospels we have. Lacks Jesus's prayer in v. 34.
 - e. How do we process something like this? TC: How we compare ancient manuscripts of the biblical text and evaluate the differences between them in order to establish the earliest version of the text. Caveat: I am not a NT text critic; I do dabble in OT TC.
 - f. Thoughts:
 - i. TC is consistent with our statement of faith. *Motivated by love for God and his word.*
 - ii. Multiplicity of manuscripts and variants gives us a more accurate understanding of the earliest version of the text. *Larger data set yields more accurate results.*
 - iii. Some exaggerate the extent and theological impact of textual variants for sensational effect. *No version of Luke in which Jesus is not God's son, death, resurrection, etc. These kinds of textual variants are rare; most are mundane; translations give important variants in your footnote. I love a good conspiracy theory, but textual variants in biblical manuscripts just aren't one.*
 - iv. Conclusion: The text of the Bible is secure; you can have confidence in the Bible you're

holding—I'd love to talk more about this if you're interested.

- C. Act 3: 4 commentaries on Jesus's crucifixion:
- i. Scene 1: The Jewish leaders (v. 35)
Explain what "Christ," "Messiah" means. Crucifixion is the proof the Jesus's claim to be the Messiah is false.
 - ii. Scene 2: The Roman soldiers (vv. 36–38)
Double meaning of "wine vinegar": (1) Ps 69:21 [compared with poison]; (2) mean, base drink given to one mocked as a king.
Crucifixion as proof that Jesus is not king.
 - iii. Interlude: Jesus is King of the Jews.
 - iv. Scene 3: Thief #1 (v. 39)
Save yourself *and us!*
Crucifixion as proof that Jesus is not the Messiah/Christ/King.
 - v. Scene 4: Inversion: Thief #2 (vv. 40–42)
Contrasts their guilt with Jesus's innocence.
Profound profession of faith: contrast to the three preceding scenes: Jesus is King.
Remembrance is the language of salvation. Not mental awareness but remembrance unto saving action.
Ex.: Ps 25:7
Do not remember the sins of my youth
and my rebellious ways;
according to your love remember me,
for you, LORD, are good.
- D. Jesus's reply to Thief #2 (v. 43)
- i. "Surely"
 - ii. "Paradise"
Zoom out—Act I – Quotation includes context – thorns + thistles = Genesis 3.
Paradise = the Garden of Eden!
Paradise lost and paradise restored!
What is the key difference? How one responds to Jesus!
With all of these references to Genesis 1–3, I think that it is no accident that Luke wants you to know that Jesus was

crucified at the place of the skull—Recall Genesis 3, after this terrible sin that God promised one would come who would crush the skull of the serpent.

At the crucifixion, we do not encounter a helpless victim. In the most surprising way, we see in the suffering Jesus the hope of all humanity. One who by means of his suffering crushes the serpent's head. One whose kingdom undoes the effects of sin and replaces the thorn and thistle-filled realm of our kingdoms with paradise God originally intended for us. At the crucifixion we encounter a victorious savior and a reigning king.

iii. "With me"

If you find it difficult to imagine what paradise might be—it's where Jesus is. This is our hope—we will be with him! Greatest loss → Greatest gain. Home is where your loved ones are—childhome home is no longer my home. Brandi Carlile: "Wherever is your heart I call home." In Christ's kingdom, we find home—because it's where God is.

iv. "Today"

What do we see at the epicenter of history's darkest day? The beautiful brightness of Jesus, our savior and our king.

Meditations: How do we encounter Jesus at his crucifixion?

2. At his crucifixion, we encounter Jesus as:

A. Prophet.

i. Scope of judgment

While Jesus's warning to the people of Jerusalem has specific reference to the destruction of the city and temple in 70 AD, I believe it has continuing significance for us as well.

Just as he understood Hosea's words to extend beyond that of Israel in the 8th century BC, so also I believe that we should understand his words to refer to an even greater day of judgment beyond 70 AD.

Revelation 6:15–17

Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and everyone else, both slave and free, hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. 16 They called to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide

us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! 17 For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can withstand it?”

A day of wrath is coming—when all will have to account to God of their sins.

Tonight Jesus turns to you and says “Do not weep for me—weep for yourselves. This is the burning of the green wood—how terrible must be the day of the burning of the dry wood!”

Jesus describes nothing less than the judgment of God and an eternal hell and says — take heed!

- ii. What is the purpose of announcements of judgment in the Bible?

Implies that disaster can still be averted. You only warn someone if there is hope that they may heed your warning. Jesus’s warning is meant to sober us up and to bring us to repent of our rebellion against God.

- iii. Heed Jesus’s prophetic warning!
- iv. If you do not have a relationship with Jesus: You will have to give account to God for your life—you are in rebellion against him. Jesus warns you—Repent! Lay down your arms! Do not go to war with God! Turn to him! Find salvation!
- v. If you do have a relationship with Jesus: We never outgrow our need to hear Jesus’s prophetic voice. We cannot claim to be in Christ and to live in open rebellion against him. Consider judgment day. Ask God to search your heart and uncover pockets of remaining resistance in your heart. Martin Luther, in his first of 95 theses, said that the whole of the Christian life is repentance.

B. Savior.

- i. Endured the cross
Not helpless; It is precisely because Jesus does not save himself that he saves others.
Hebrews 12:2

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who, for the joy set before him, endured the cross and despised its shame!

Irony: The one mocked as lacking the ability to save himself is, in fact, working the world's salvation.

- ii. The Great Exchange
As Jonathan described last week, Jesus's crucifixion is a picture of the great exchange that he accomplished for us. He is innocent yet suffers as a criminal. We know that, in fact, Jesus is dying as a sacrifice for our sins. He is taking our penalty. We receive forgiveness through his sacrifice. We are credited with the righteous life of Christ. "Because the sinless savior died, my sinful soul is counted free, for God the just is satisfied to look on him and pardon me."
 - iii. Faith: God is not looking for us to provide a sacrifice of our own—he himself has provided the sacrifice. He asks only that we trust in Jesus's provision, that we believe.
 - iv. Outside of Christ: The message of Christianity is not that you need to live right – you haven't – but that Jesus lived right and then turned around and took your penalty so that you could be forgiven and could know God and be with him. A relationship with God is not a paycheck we earn; it is a gift we receive. It is free, but not cheap. It was purchased with precious blood of Jesus. Offer of response.
 - v. Those in Christ: We never move beyond this. ABC – A—Z. Rejoice in your salvation!
- C. King.
- i. Irony: the one mocked as king really is king (D.A. Carson)
 - ii. Jesus demands our allegiance, our submission. Is he *your* king?
 - iii. Hope in his kingdom — paradise restored, restored to his presence.

How do we encounter Jesus? Prophet—repent; Savior—trust; King—bow. How will you respond to Jesus? No neutral. Moment of silence: reflect. Ask God, which aspect of who Jesus is do you need to respond to tonight. I will close this time of silent reflection with prayer.

Benediction: Hebrews 13:20–21

Now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, ²¹ equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.