

Mark 15:21-32 — The Crucifixion

November 1, 2020

Turn to Mark 15:21. While you are turning, you need to know that today, and the next three weeks, are special at CrossWinds. We are studying the most important events in the history of the world. Today, we are studying the crucifixion of Jesus. Next week is the death of Jesus. The following week is the burial of Jesus. Finally, we will look at the resurrection of Jesus. Nothing is more important than Jesus' death and resurrection. Everything in the Gospel of Mark leads up to these events. That is what makes today, and the next few weeks, so special.

Let's read our passage before we study it.

And they compelled a passerby, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to carry his cross. And they brought him to the place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull). And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it. And they crucified him and divided his garments among them, casting lots for them, to decide what each should take. And it was the third hour when they crucified him. And the inscription of the charge against him read, "The King of the Jews." And with him they crucified two robbers, one on his right and one on his left. And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!" So also the chief priests with the scribes mocked him to one another, saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe." Those who were crucified with him also reviled him. Mark 15:21–32 (ESV)

One of the consistent themes about Jesus' death in the Gospel of Mark is how he was mocked. The religious leaders of Jerusalem considered Jesus a joke, a loser. Jesus claimed to be a king. He claimed to be the Son of God. He claimed to sit at God's right hand and be the one that will return to judge the living and the dead. As far as the Jews were concerned, that was a joke; Jesus was a joke and not a king.

This morning, while we will look at the physical aspects of Jesus' crucifixion and suffering on the cross, the Gospel of Mark doesn't spend much time detailing the physical aspects of Jesus' suffering. Mark simply says that Jesus was scourged and crucified.

While Mark glossed over the physical aspects of Jesus' suffering, he went into great depth describing the ridicule and mocking Jesus endured. The abuse started in Jesus' trial before the Sanhedrin at Caiaphas' house. They slapped Jesus in the face. They punched Jesus in the mouth. They put a bag over Jesus' head and beat him in the face. The Roman soldiers continued the mocking as 600 of them spit on him. They pressed a crown of thorns into his skull. They put an old robe on him and whacked him in the head with what was likely a piece of bamboo. They pretended to bow down and worship Jesus as king while they insulted him and called him a loser. Mark portrayed Jesus as the king that was greatly mocked.

Last week, we learned that those who bore the primary guilt for Jesus' death were not the Romans. Pilate and Herod saw Jesus as innocent. Pilate repeatedly tried to set Jesus free. It was the Jewish leaders that manipulated Pilate. They played political games as they deceived the crowds about Jesus. They began a riot in the city demanding the death of Jesus. They knew Pilate was politically vulnerable. Pilate was already in trouble with Rome for handling riots poorly. If they started another riot, he could lose his job. He would do whatever it took to keep the peace, even if that meant killing Jesus, an innocent man. In the end, it was the Jewish leaders who were most responsible for Jesus'

death. Jesus even said that in John 19:11 when he said to Pilate, “Those who delivered me over to you are guilty of a greater sin.”

So it was the members of the Jewish Sanhedrin, the Jewish Supreme Court of Israel, who wanted Jesus dead. They schemed, manipulated, and lied to get Jesus put to death. They mocked him incessantly.

Do you ever wonder how God the Father held back? How could God the Father restrain himself and not strike every one of those crooked people dead as they abused his son? They weren't mocking and planning the death of just anybody. They were planning to kill God's own beloved son. Why didn't God the Father step in and send all of them on a one-way trip to hell? You and I know how we would respond if we saw someone hurt our children, the children we love. Why did God the Father not respond with similar vengeance when he saw those men mocking, torturing, and hurting the Son of God that God the Father so deeply loves? We will answer that question in this morning's study. Let's dive into the text.

Jesus was crucified.

And they compelled a passerby, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to carry his cross. Mark 15:21 (ESV)

You will remember that Jesus was scourged. In the ancient world, scourging was called the half-death. In the scourging, the flesh and muscle was torn off Jesus' back using a device called a cat-o-nine tails. It was a wooden handle with several leather straps that had hooks at the end of them. The hooks would fasten in the flesh then tear the flesh off the back down to the bone. What wasn't torn off the bone was shredded. After Jesus' scourging, he was forced to

carry his cross to his place of execution. He probably did not carry the full cross. Traditionally, he would have only carried the cross beam. The main post was usually left at the site of execution. It was often too large for even a healthy man to carry. The cross beam wasn't light. It was heavy. It typically weighed in around 100 pounds of rough cut wood bearing down on someone's shoulders, supported by a back that was scourged of the flesh and muscle torn down to the bone.

The route taken to the site of execution was usually not direct. It typically involved a long, circuitous route through the city so the maximum number of people could see the person about to be executed. It was similar to a parade. That long winding walk through the city as someone traveled to the site of his execution while carrying the very wood upon which he would be nailed served as a deterrent to others so nobody would ever think of rebelling against Rome lest he also end up crucified. Typically, the person to be crucified also had a placard hung around his neck detailing the crime that brought about his execution. This served to further i the criminal and deter everyone against the criminal activity he engaged in which led to his execution.

John 19:17 says that Jesus carried his own cross. It may have been because the route chosen by the executioners was especially long. It may have been that after Jesus' back was shredded in his scourging, he was especially weak. Maybe Jesus simply wasn't walking fast enough. Whatever the reason, we know Jesus was not making fast enough progress for the Romans soldiers in charge of his execution.

They grabbed someone from the crowd, who was walking by them, and forced him to carry Jesus' cross beam. His name was Simon. He came from Cyrene. Cyrene is in North Africa in the modern area of Libya. He may have been a black man. We don't know for sure.

Conscription — taking people off the street and making them do menial tasks — was a common Roman practice. It is one of the reasons Roman soldiers were hated. If there was a task to be done, they could grab someone off the street and force them to do it for them. In this case, Simon was tasked with carrying Jesus' cross beam. That was a sudden and unexpected change to his plans that morning.

It says he was coming in from the country. Most likely, he was a Jew coming to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover. For Simon, being grabbed out of a crowd and forced to carrying the crossbeam of a man condemned to death was a strange and unexpected way to meet Jesus. Amazingly, Simon was never the same after meeting him. While we don't know how it happened to him, we do know what happened to him. Simon didn't just help Jesus carry his cross, but somehow he became a Christian after Jesus' resurrection. He raised his children to know Jesus. His son's names were Alexander and Rufus. Mark, who was writing this Gospel to the church in Rome felt it was important to insert Simon, Alexander, and Rufus' names into this part of the story. He gave no explanation about them. Apparently everyone in Roman knew them. When we get to the end of the book of Romans and Paul finished that letter by writing a special greeting

to the leaders of the church of Rome, guess who he identified as a leader in that church? Simon's son Rufus!

Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord; also his mother, who has been a mother to me as well. Romans 16:13 (ESV)

Imagine having Rufus in church and his father was the one who helped Jesus carry his cross beam to his execution. Your father and your family came to Christ by a very strange twist of events that day.

While this looks like something that happened by chance, and being forced to carry Jesus' cross-beam was a great inconvenience in Simon's life, it was actually God's grace at work in his life. If Simon hadn't suddenly found himself forced into carrying Jesus' cross, he may never have paid any attention to Jesus. If he had never paid attention to Jesus, he may have never trusted in Jesus as his savior after the resurrection of Jesus. If he had never become a Christian, he would have never shared the gospel with his children. His children wouldn't have become leaders in the early church. In reality, that sudden change of Simon's plans that led to him carrying Jesus' cross was an act of God's grace in his life. The sudden inconvenience and change of his plans that morning was not what it seemed.

Isn't this the way God often works? The unexpected inconveniences and sudden changes in our plans are the ways God works in our lives? Some of us grew up in Christian homes. For others us of, we met Christ later in life. If you met Christ later in life, what was it that introduced you to Jesus? I suspect it was a strange set of painful circumstances that introduced you to Jesus, just like Simon faced that morning. God grows his kingdom and introduces people to the

good news of Jesus often in the most unexpected ways and through sudden and sometimes pain changes in our plans. Later we look back and see those inconveniences not as God forgetting about us but God's grace at work in our lives, just like with Simon and his family.

This week, if you face a sudden or painful change in your plans, rather than grumbling about that change, start looking to see how God is at work in that change. Just like he was at work in Simon's life, he is at work in yours.

And they brought him to the place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull). Mark 15:22 (ESV)

The English word Golgotha is simply a transliteration of the Aramaic word for skull, which is Golgotha. In Latin, the word for skull is calvary. The word calvary was first used in this passage in the Latin Vulgate translation of the Bible written in the fourth century. Calvary in English is simply bringing over the Latin word for skull into English. Golgotha in English is simply bringing the Aramaic word for skull into English. They all mean the same thing.

We often picture Golgotha as a hill. There is nothing in the New Testament that tells us this was a hill. The Romans usually crucified people along main highways so the maximum number of people would see the dying victims. That served as a deterrent to crime. The rough equivalent would be crucifying Jesus outside of a Wal-Mart so the most people would see him.

Why was this location called the place of a skull? Some people think it had that name because it was a rock that looked like a skull. That is unlikely. It may have that name because of the human bones and skulls that remained in the area from previous executions. That is also unlikely because the Jews would not

have tolerated that that close to Jerusalem. If human bones were not at the location, it was given that name because so many people were crucified at that location.

Quintillian, an ancient Roman writer, tells us this about the way Romans practiced of crucifixion.

“Whenever we crucify the guilty, the most crowded roads are chosen where the most people can see and be moved by this fear. For penalties relate not so much to retribution as to their exemplary effect.” — Quintillian

The point is that everyone saw Jesus die. This did not take place behind closed doors.

And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it. Mark 15:23 (ESV)

This is an interesting verse. There is a lot of writing that talks about this being an act of mercy --- give Jesus an alcoholic beverage so he will feel less pain during his crucifixion. Many writers say the reason Jesus refused this wine was because he wanted to feel all the pain of the cross. While this may be true, I don't think that is the right interpretation. I am going to step out a bit on this one and give you my thoughts on this verse. Others agree with me but it is the minority opinion. However, I think it is the better opinion.

Everything Mark told us about Jesus' crucifixion up to this point highlights the mockery of Jesus and the insulting of Jesus. Everything done to Jesus was meant to demean and destroy him. It would be completely out of the character for a sudden act of mercy and kindness by the soldiers if they offered Jesus an alcoholic beverage to deaden the pain of the cross. There was no mercy toward Jesus in his crucifixion at any time. What was happening?

I think the key is understanding what happened is to remember this was not regular wine. It was wine mixed with myrrh. Myrrh is a resin herb, but myrrh is also means bitter in Aramaic. This was not good wine. It was wine mixed with something that made it bitter and disgusting. Look what Matthew says:

They offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall, but when he tasted it, he would not drink it. Matthew 27:34 (ESV)

Gall can also mean a variety of things but generally it also means bitter. This wine was mixed with a bitter substance or a bitter herb. Let's see what Luke says.

The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine... Luke 23:36 (ESV)

The wine was mixed with something that made it bitter, that made it sour, that made it rotten. Put yourself in Jesus' situation. Jesus was sweating profusely the night before in the Garden of Gethsemane. He was sweating blood. He was now also scourged and had lost a large amount of blood. Jesus was tired and was majorly dehydrated. Jesus had nothing to drink. The soldiers, pretending to be compassionate, offered Jesus wine. Most prisoners that were dehydrated would guzzle it down only to find they were drinking something that was disgusting. I think this was intended as a trick to get Jesus nauseated while he hung dying on the cross. It was a way they tried to make Jesus' agony even worse. I may be wrong but there is no evidence this was an act of compassion. Everything in this paragraph is about how everyone mocked and insulted Jesus.

None of this was happened by accident. Even that offer of disgusting, rotten wine was spoken about prophetically in Scripture long before it happened.

They gave me poison for food, and for my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink.
Psalm 69:21 (ESV)

Next, Mark wrote about Jesus' crucifixion. The details he gave are sparse.

And they crucified him and divided his garments among them, casting lots for them, to decide what each should take. Mark 15:24 (ESV)

Mark just wrote that they crucified Jesus. He didn't say any more because in that day, you didn't need to say any more. Scholars tell us crucifixions were common. It is estimated that in this period of time and in that part of the world, 32,000 people were crucified. Crucifixion marches leading people to their deaths were as common as funeral processions are today.

While everyone understood crucifixion in the ancient world, 2,000 years and modern culture have made us lose sight of the barbaric nature of crucifixion. Today, we wear crosses as jewelry around our necks. In the ancient world, that would have been unthinkable. It would have been like wearing a model electric chair or a guillotine around your neck. There is a great article detailing the medical aspects of crucifixion and what it did to the body in the Journal of the American Medical Association. It is the March 21, 1986, issue.¹ You can reference it if you would like to learn more details. Without going into much depth, let me give you an overview.

There were three types of crosses the Romans used. Some resembled an upper case "T." Others resembled a lower case "t." That is the style Jesus was killed on because he had a placard detailing his crime as being king of the Jews written above his head. Other crosses were in the form of an "X." Hands were stretched out on the cross beam and spikes that were 1/2-inch wide and

¹ <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/article-abstract/403315>

5-7 inches long --- that is the size of railroad spikes --- were driven through the wrists. The palms were not usually used because the flesh of the hand could tear, allowing someone off the cross, whereas the wrist couldn't tear. The feet were usually crossed on top of one another and a single spike driven through both of them. The pain was unthinkable as you either pushed your weight up on your feet, experiencing the agony of putting all of your weight on a nail or you hung all your weight on your arms, collapsing your lungs so you couldn't breathe. As you went back and forth, your shredded back scraped up and down on the rough wooden beam, driving splinters into your torn-open back. Death took a matter of hours or days, sometimes lasting as long as a week. While this wasn't done to Jesus because they intended him to die in one day, ropes were sometimes wrapped around the elbows to better support the dying victim so he lived longer and prolonged his agony. The ropes were also another form of torture because they cut off blood flow to the forearms so gangrene set into the arms which began spreading through the suffering victim. It was horrific.

Crucifixion was so bad, no Roman citizen was allowed to be crucified except by direct order from Caesar himself. Josephus called crucifixion the most miserable of deaths. The Roman author Cicero said this about crucifixion.

“The very word ‘cross’ should be far removed not only from the person of a Roman citizen but from his thoughts, his eyes, and his ears . . . the mere mention of them, that is unworthy of a Roman citizen and a free man.” (Cicero, Defense, 5, 16)

There was even a new Greek word invented to describe the level of pain and horror only achievable by death on a cross. It was called ex-crusis pain. That word comes over into English as excruciating pain.

It is mind blowing to know this is the way God the Father planned for his beloved son to die for our sins. None of this was happening by chance. This is what God the Father planned for his son. The reason Jesus chose to die this way was to endure what we deserve. He chose to die this way to die as our substitute because he loves us.

Let me tell you a little history on crucifixion. Crucifixion was invented by Darius the Mede in 519 B.C. He stuck 3,000 Babylonians on sticks after he conquered them as a way of killing them. That was primitive crucifixion. Crucifixion began to be more frequent from that time forward. Death by crucifixion was perfected by the Romans and considered the most gruesome form of death known to man. It was eventually outlawed as a form of death for anyone in Rome in 300 A.D. While crucifixion wasn't invented until 519 B.C., God inspired his prophets to write about Jesus dying by crucifixion hundreds of years before it was invented. Look what David said about the way Jesus would die 1,000 years before Jesus was born. David described Jesus dying by crucifixion long before it was invented.

For dogs encompass me; a company of evildoers encircles me; they have pierced my hands and feet— I can count all my bones— they stare and gloat over me; they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots. Psalm 22:16–18 (ESV)

Look what God inspired the prophet Isaiah to write about Jesus' death in 700 A.D. This was 200 years before the invention of crucifixion.

But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. Isaiah 53:5 (ESV)

Look how Zechariah wrote about Jesus' crucifixion 100 years before that form of death was invented.

...so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn. Zechariah 12:10 (ESV)

Jesus' death on the cross was what God the Father had always planned. He inspired prophets to write about Jesus' death by crucifixion before the invention of crucifixion.

The book of Philippians tells us the cross reveals the incredible depth of God's love for us.

And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Philippians 2:8 (ESV)

The cross is the worst form of death possible, yet that is the way Jesus chose to die for us. When he died, he used none of his divinity to insulate himself from the pain of that death. If you think Jesus' death on the cross was incredibly painful, even more painful was his experience of God the Father turning his back on him and the unbroken relationship between the Father and Son being broken for the first time. It was even more painful when God the Father poured out all the wrath we deserve for our sin upon his own son while he hung on the cross. That was worse than any of the physical suffering.

When we read that they crucified Jesus, and we know Jesus died this way out of love for us to save us, the only proper response is to be overwhelmed by God's love for us. The only proper response is to live our lives in gratitude to Jesus.

Mark also tells us they divided up Jesus' clothing and cast lots for it. This means Jesus either died naked or wearing nothing more than a loin cloth. John 19 gives us a few more details.

When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his garments and divided them into four parts, one part for each soldier; also his tunic. But the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom, so they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be." This was to fulfill the Scripture which says, "They divided my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots." So the soldiers did these things... John 19:23–24 (ESV)

John wrote there were four soldiers in Jesus' execution squad but he also reminded us that nothing that was happening to Jesus that was out of control. Everything was happening just as God the Father had planned and how he had spoken about it prophetically through his prophets in the past. John said this is exactly what God said would happen to Jesus in Psalm 22:18.

And it was the third hour when they crucified him. Mark 15:25 (ESV)

That is 9 a.m. Remember how fast this happened. Thursday night Jesus left the upper room with his disciples around midnight. He was praying in the Garden of Gethsemane from midnight-1 a.m. Judas then came with priests, elders, temple guards and Romans soldiers, possibly as many as a 1,000 of them, around 1 o'clock in the morning. After the arrest, from 1-3 a.m., Jesus was first put on trial before Annas, then before Caiaphas. At 5 a.m., Jesus was put on another trial before the Jews to make sure their decision officially took place in daylight hours. Next, Jesus went through three Roman trials. First by Pilate, who found him innocent but shipped him off to Herod. Herod found Jesus innocent so he shipped him back to Pilate. Pilate was then manipulated by the Jews and forced to crucify Jesus even though he found Jesus innocent. Why were the

Jews in such a hurry? I am sure they wanted Jesus on the cross before most people got up the next morning so there was not time to rebel. In addition, God needed Jesus on the cross at 9 a.m. so he could die by 3 p.m. as the Passover lamb.

And the inscription of the charge against him read, "The King of the Jews." Mark 15:26 (ESV)

There was no actual crime against Jesus. The only crime he was convicted on was before the Jews and that was his claim to be the Son of God, the king of the Jews. That is why Pilate used that as the charge against him. Matthew 27:37 tells us this charge was hung above his head. If we look at the other Gospels, we see Mark gave us a shortened version of the plaque. The full version read, "This is Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." It was written in three languages. The Jews hated this being above Jesus. They tried to get Pilate to change it to "He claimed to be king of the Jews." Pilate refused.

And with him they crucified two robbers, one on his right and one on his left. Mark 15:27 (ESV)

Who were these robbers? They were likely Barabbas' partners in rebellion and murder. Barabbas was released but Jesus was killed in Barabbas' place. The Bible tells us one criminal hung on each side of Jesus. Even though they were being crucified, they joined in the mocking of Jesus.

This was spoken about prophetically hundreds of years before.

...because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors. Isaiah 53:12 (ESV)

While what was happening to God's Son was horrific, it was all happening the way God the Father planned. It was spoken about in the past by the prophets.

Jesus was mocked.

Earlier I said that while Jesus was crucified, Mark spent most of his words focusing on the amount of mocking, ridicule, and abuse Jesus endured. Once Jesus was on the cross, Mark showed us three groups of people that started mocking Jesus.

Jesus was mocked by the public.

And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!" Mark 15:29–30 (ESV)

This amazes me. Jesus had taught in the temple courts for the last week. People were hanging on every word he spoke. For the last three years Jesus healed these people, raised their children from the dead, and fed them with food created out of thin air. He made the lame among them walk and the blind see. He calmed storms. The same people that Jesus cared for were now the ones who mocked him. How could they be so heartless?

The claim that Jesus would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days was circulated through the crowds from the religious leaders. The crowds told Jesus to come down from the cross and save himself and prove his identity.

There is great irony in those statements. By staying on the cross, he was destroying the temple. By dying as the one true sacrifice for sin, he was rendering the temple obsolete. By staying on the cross, he was choosing to not save himself. He was choosing to save them!

Jesus was mocked by the priests.

So also the chief priests with the scribes mocked him to one another, saying, “He saved others; he cannot save himself. Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe.” Mark 15:31–32 (ESV)

Unlike the crowds who spoke directly to Jesus with their mocking, the priests spoke to one another and congratulated one another on achieving their long-standing goal of killing Jesus.

Here again is great irony. The religious leaders saw Jesus as a failure because he couldn't save himself from Roman crucifixion. The irony was that Jesus could have saved himself from the cross at any time. By staying on the cross he was not saving himself but saving the very ones who were mocking him by offering his life as a ransom for their sin.

Jesus was mocked by the criminals next to him.

...Those who were crucified with him also reviled him. Mark 15:32 (ESV)

If anybody should have kept their mouths shut, it would have been these guys. They were murderers and robbers. They deserved to die. Jesus did not deserve to die.

The picture we are given, as Jesus died on the cross, was that the entire world had turned against him. The Sanhedrin beat him. The Romans scourged him. The soldiers mocked him. The people laughed at him. The religious leaders made fun of him. Even the criminals next to him laughed at him.

At the beginning of this message, I asked you why God the Father put up with such atrocious treatment of his beloved Son. We know how protective we are of our children. I cannot imagine how protective God the Father felt of his only son. Why didn't God drop the hammer and send all of them to hell?

The reason God didn't destroy these people is because he deeply loved these people. Jesus stayed on the cross to save them even as they mocked him. This is the incredible love of God to people like us who have mocked God, insulted God, and deserve none of his kindness and love.

I don't know how far you have run from God. I don't know how many times you have mocked God, laughed at God or insulted God with your words or your actions. While I don't know how evil you have been toward God, I do know how God feels about you. He loves you. Jesus loved the people that were mocking him and insulting him so much that he stayed on that cross to die for them when he could have come off at any time.

How does this apply to us?

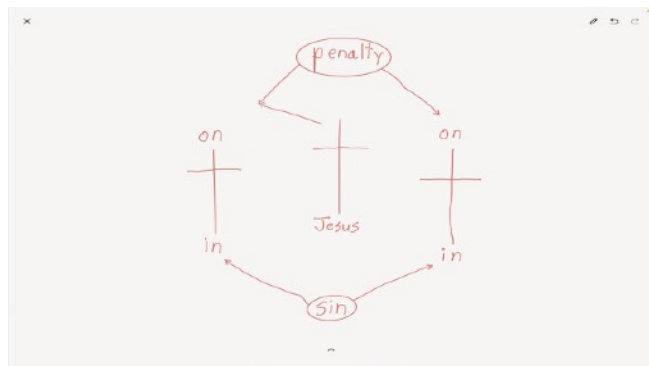
- 1. No matter how much I have mocked God and rebelled against him, he loves me. He died for me. He offers to save me.** No matter what we have done, if we turn to him, he will save our lives. Next week, we will meet one of the four soldiers that crucified Jesus who turned and trusted in Jesus. Today, if we turn to the Gospel of Luke, we find that one of the two thieves that mocked Jesus had a change of heart. He turned and trusted in Jesus before he died. As a result, Jesus welcomed him home to heaven. Luke told us his story.

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, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise." Luke 23:39–43 (ESV)

This criminal started the day mocking Jesus but ended the day turning to Jesus and being saved by Jesus. No matter what you have done, Jesus can save you too if you will only turn to him and trust him.

2. **The thieves on the cross show us a good way to share the gospel.** This past Monday, at the annual meeting, we talked about CrossWind's vision for the next year. One of the things we are focusing on is helping people share their faith comfortably and effectively with other people. As I was studying this passage, I ran across a way we can use the story of the two thieves and a napkin to share the gospel story.

Draw three crosses on a piece of paper and tell the story of these thieves. Under the crosses write the word "sin." Of the three people who hung on the crosses that day, there were



only two struggling with the problem of sin. It was the two thieves. Write "in" under their names and draw an arrow from sin to their lives. Above the crosses write the word "penalty". Because of sin in them, the two thieves had the penalty of sin on them? Write "on" above their crosses and draw an arrow from the word "penalty" to their lives.

Jesus had no sin in him so he had no penalty for sin on him. He died and took the penalty of sin on himself when he didn't deserve it. The one thief on the cross trusted in Jesus, and Jesus took his penalty of his sin on him so when he

died that day, he went directly to be with God. Draw an arrow up pointing toward heaven. The other thief died with the God's penalty for his sin still on him and when he died, he was separated from God forever. Draw an arrow pointing down. We are all thieves and sinners with the problem of sin in us and God's penalty for sin still on us. Which thief are you? Are you still mocking Jesus or have you turned and trusted in Jesus, asking his death to pay for the penalty of your sin?

The two thieves started out the day mocking Jesus. The one thief ended the day by turning and trusting in Jesus, and it saved him forever. Which thief are you? Which thief do you want to be?



Dr. Kurt Trucksess is ordained in the Evangelical Free Church of America. He enjoys reading, writing, and time with his family. Feel free to contact him at www.Christ2RCulture.com (www.c2rc.com)

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