

## On the Cross – First Three Hours Matthew 27:35-44; Mark 15:24-32; Luke 23:34-43; John 19:18-27

### *Thoughts on the Crucifixion:*

“What happened is important: Why it happened is also important, if you hope to go to heaven.”  
Warren Wiersbe

“Today we think of the cross as a symbol of glory and victory, but in Pilate’s day, the cross stood for the basest kind of rejection, shame, and suffering. It was Jesus who made the difference.” Warren Wiersbe

“We speak so often of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ that it becomes almost trite for the average believer. The crucifixion of Jesus Christ is one of the most dastardly, infamous points in history. Yet, this is our redemption. We need to pause here and look at it from various points of view.

From the standpoint of God, the cross is a propitiation. It is the mercy seat where God can extend mercy to you and to me. It is the place where full satisfaction was made so that a holy, righteous God can reach down and save sinners. The very throne of God, the place of judgment, is transformed into the place of mercy where you and I can find mercy instead of the judgment we deserve. Jesus Christ bore our guilt, and God is satisfied.

From the standpoint of the Lord Jesus, it is a sacrifice. He is the Savior, and He makes Himself an offering for sin. He is a sweet-smelling savor to God. It is also an act of obedience for Him. Paul tells us in Philippians 2:8 that he because obedient to death even the death of the cross.

From the standpoint of you and me, believers in Christ Jesus, it was a substitution. He took my place and He took your place. He was the sinless One suffering for the sinner. He was the just One suffering for the unjust. “Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.” I Peter 2:24

From the standpoint of Satan, it was a triumph and also a defeat. It was a triumph for Satan to bruise the heel of the woman’s seed as had been foretold way back in Genesis 3. It was a defeat because the head of Satan is yet to be crushed: “...that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.” Hebrews 2:14” J Vernon McGee p. 491-492

*Christ spent six hours on the cross, 9 am-3 pm. Over the centuries theologians have divided that time in half; the first and second three hours. We will look at eight different details within the first three hours on the cross. The details given show the fulfilled prophecy, the individuals involved, and the words of Christ.*

- 1. Jesus is Crucified** This detail is mentioned in all four gospels! It is the climax of the life of Christ – His hour had come!

“And it was the third hour, and they crucified him.” Mark 15:25

The hour was 9 am. This is one of the few details given concerning the crucifixion. The time the crucifixion began. The simplicity of which the gospel writers deal with the actual act of the crucifixion is amazing. There is no “nailing to the cross”, “reared the cross”, “balanced between heaven and earth”. None of the details of the act of the crucifixion itself is given. The writers are silent. The early readers knew and understood the horrors of a crucifixion; as we don’t dwell on methods of execution, neither did they. Especially the death of their Christ! We only know of the nails through information given later, after Jesus’ resurrection! (John 20:25)

**2. Jesus' Prayer of Forgiveness** This prayer is only found in the book of Luke.

**“Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.” Luke 23:34**

These first recorded words of Jesus from Calvary seem to be at the point He is nailed to the cross. The final agonies of Jesus begin. At this point the soldiers would expect from their prisoners cries and begging for mercy, shrieks of pain, along with struggling, cursing, and spitting. Instead, from Jesus they hear Him pray to His Father for their forgiveness! He prayed for the professional executioners, doing their job, he prayed for the Religious Leaders, the by-standers, none of them truly knew what they were doing! Peter's message after Pentecost in Acts 3:17 support this fact, they crucified Jesus in their ignorance. I Cor. 2:8 states the same.

Don't miss this example of the heart of Jesus, He wants us to have this same attitude. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus taught this principle, Luke 6:27-28, “But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you, Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you.” Jesus' heart is to pray for your enemies and those who hurt you and this is something we must reflect as His followers! Matthew 5:45 tell us why, “that ye may be (*prove to be*) the children of your Father which is in heaven:” The martyr Stephen had this same attitude of love and forgiveness in Acts 7:60.

This prayer is also an amazing fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy! Isaiah 53:12

“Jesus asked God to forgive the people who were putting him to death---Jewish leaders, Roman politicians and soldiers, bystanders---and God answered that prayer by opening up the way of salvation even to Jesus' murderers. The Roman officer and soldiers who witnessed the crucifixion said, “Truly this was the Son of God” (Matthew 27:54) Soon many priests were converted to the Christian faith (Acts 6:7). Since we are all sinners, we all played a part in putting Jesus to death. The Gospel---the Good News---is that God is gracious. He will forgive us and give us new life through his Son.” Life Application Bible p. 1784

**3. Two Thieves Crucified with Jesus** Every gospel book records this fact.

**“And with him they crucify two thieves (Gk – highwaymen, terrorist) (“malefactors” Luke 23:33); the one on his right hand, and the other on his left (“and Jesus in the midst.” John 19:18). And the scripture was fulfilled, which saith, And he was numbered with the transgressors.” Mark 15:27-28**

The Scriptures made it clear that there were two other criminals taken with Jesus to the execution sight. (Luke 23:32) But now as the procession has arrived at Calvary, every Gospel record tells us that Jesus was crucified with two thieves. Every book also has another fact, Jesus was in the middle, between the two guilty men. John simply says, “and Jesus in the midst.” This is very strong evidence that Jesus was taking Barabbas place. He was the most notorious criminal, the “ring-leader”, the principle malefactor, and he would have been placed in the middle position. It is Mark that points out the significance, prophecy is fulfilled again. Isaiah 53:9, 12  
Modern Example – In the Olympics the Gold Medal winner stands in the middle.

**4. Soldiers Cast Lots for Jesus' Clothing** The detail of the casting of lots for Jesus' garments is found in all four gospel books. Again, the significance is the specific fulfillment of prophecy!

**“Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took his garments, and made four parts, to every soldier a part; and also his coat: now the coat was without seam, woven from the top throughout. They said therefore among themselves, Let us not rend it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be: that the**

scripture might be fulfilled, which saith, They parted my raiment among them, and for my vesture they did cast lots. These things therefore the soldiers did.” John 19:23-24 “And sitting down they watched (guarded) him there;” Matthew 27:36

“garments” – It was Roman practice that the executioners got the merger possessions of the accused. I can’t imagine this was ever too much to get excited about! Understanding the culture of the time, theologians believe Jesus would have had head gear, outer cloak, girdle (belt), sandals, and His “coat” or tunic. Whatever the specifics, it seems from the texts that there were five pieces.

“made four parts” – History records four guards would be part to each prisoner’s execution. Jesus’ belongings were divided evenly between the soldiers, leaving His coat. Matthew, Mark, and Luke say, “they parted his garments” while John gives us more detail.

“his coat” – Jesus “inner garment” was the largest piece and caught the eye of the executioners. John gives us a special detail on this part of the crucifixion. “without seam, woven from top throughout.” His coat would have been worth a lot of money. Why did He have this? It is obvious Jesus would not have purchased it! This is a man that said, He had no place to lay His head! Probably, someone gave it to Him! Someone who understood His ministry! I read several times, perhaps His mother! This was a special robe, signifying Jesus’ rabbinical work. Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy all mention priestly garments and the High Priest’s robe was unique, without seam. As Jesus went about preaching and teaching, He was wearing the foundational robe of a High Priest. How that must have angered the Religious Leaders! Of course, the wealthy would also wear such a coat, but this detail would not have been missed by most religious Jews. And the soldiers didn’t want to tear it and in doing so having it lose its value. So they “cast lots”; an act similar to throwing dice, gambling to see who would win it.

“scripture might be fulfilled” – Again, Scripture is fulfilled in this random act of casing lots! Matthew and John both mention this as recorded in Psalm 22:18.

“watched him there” – Simply put, the guards had finished the dirty work of putting Jesus on the cross and they sat down to guard Jesus. Their job was to make sure no one would come and try to rescue those put on the cross! In doing so, these men became creditable eyewitnesses to Jesus’ words, actions, attitudes, in death!

**Was Jesus naked on the cross?** This is a point mentioned often in writings of the crucifixion of Jesus. The Romans would crucify naked! This added to the shame and humiliation of the public execution. But remember nakedness was not a big deal in the cultures of the Greeks and Romans---ever see a Greek or Roman statue?! But in the Jewish culture it was always forbidden. Review some of the laws and stories of nakedness found in the Old Testament! So was Jesus crucified in the Roman tradition or did Rome bow to the culture of the Jews (tradition says a loin cloth was used)---something Pilate certainly learned to do. Now add this to the debate---the character of God and Scripture. Much is said about the shame of the cross and how Jesus was made sin for us. WOW, naked or not?! We do not know. I hate to think so! Did Jesus, my Savior, the Son of God, the Creator of the world, have any dignity left while on the cross?

5. **Pilate's Superscription – Placard** This detail is told in all four gospels. There are actually 2 parts to this point – the placard's words and the final debate between Pilate and the Religious Leaders.

“And Pilate wrote a title (“the superscription” Mark 15:26), and put it on the cross (“up over his head his accusation written,” Matt. 27:37). And the writing was (“THIS IS” Matt. 27:37; Luke 23:38) **JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS**. This title then read many of the Jews: for the place where Jesus was crucified was nigh to the city: and it was written in (“letters of” Luke 23:38) Hebrew, and Greek, and Latin. Then said the chief priests of the Jews to Pilate, Write not, The King of the Jews; but that he said, I am King of the Jews. Pilate answered, What I have written I have written.” John 19:19-22

This event could be placed earlier in the chronological order of Christ's passion. We are told Pilate had this superscription put on the cross, but then John doubles back filling in details before the cross, namely, the Religious Leaders returning to Pilate to have the placard rewritten. This could have happened as early as the beginning of the procession to Golgotha.

“his accusation written” – This is the placard carried to the execution site with Christ. All prisoners would have their crimes written out for all to see the reason they were being crucified. Remember, Pilate found no fault worthy of death in Jesus; there was no accusation! He actually had to get creative when writing this. Jesus was not guilty! Jesus was “made sin for us”! (2 Cor. 5:21) **This superscription was truth!**

“THIS IS JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS” – One must go to all four gospels to know the complete statement on the superscription. This is not unusual as we study the life of Christ, melting the four Gospels together will always give us a fuller, broader understanding of the incidents.

Pilate will use the Jewish accusation of Jesus not the claims brought to him by the Religious Leaders, those accusations were not true. Eventually, they told Pilate the real reason they sought crucifixion for Christ, He said He was the King of the Jews, the Son of God. (John 19:6-8; 12-13) **Pilate wrote truth!**

The Messiah was to be a reigning King – Ps. 2:6; Jer. 23:5  
And the same was told Mary of Jesus – Luke 1:31-33

“Hebrew, and Greek, and Latin.” – Why these particular languages? **Hebrew** – sacred language of the Jews and Jewish religion; **Greek** – current language of the educated, cultured, philosophy, and literature; **Latin** – the official language of government, law and military Basically, anyone who could read written word could read this placard! This shows the diversity in the city at that time.

The three languages used in the superscription may be to blame for the variations of the superscription from Gospel to Gospel. Truth went out to all the people that day! God's intent is always for His word to be given to the world! **Pilate had written truth!**

Final Debate – Religious Leaders & Pilate – This detail is given only in the book of John. Causal reading of this incident may bring one to the conclusion this superscription was directed as a reproach on Jesus. But it was not! The Religious Leaders saw it as an insult and embarrassment to them and that is what Pilate intended! The last words of the Religious Leaders to Pilate was, “We have no king but Caesar.” Now the placard mocks them! The one they brought to Pilate for the Roman death of crucifixion is being called their “King of the Jews”!

This was Pilate's revenge on the Jewish Leadership who pressured him into killing their enemy. Pilate was getting the last word in the whole matter of Jesus! When they came before Pilate after he had written it and told him to change the inscription, he would not. It was then he would not back down. In the Greek, “What I have

written I have written.” has the idea of permanent ink was symbolically used! It could not or in truth he would not change it! Pilate was at last, unyielding to their pressure! AND **He had written truth!**

In all this Pilate declared **the truth** to those who read that superscription that day! When people looked at the center cross at Golgotha that day, they really did see JESUS OF NAZARETH KING OF THE JEWS.

Let us be committed to keep this placard before our hearts and minds! This Jesus of Nazareth should be the King of our lives! Yes, He is our Friend and Brother, but also our Master and King! Let us be faithful followers of the One who gave Himself for us! “Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savor.” Eph. 2:5

6. **Cruel Mockery from Every Direction** Jesus had already endured three separate periods of mockery. (Sanhedrin’s trial, Herod’s trial, and Pilate’s second trial) Now at the cross He will undergo three hours of ridicule coming from every direction. Matthew, Mark, and Luke will relay the variations of insults from all four mocking groups. These talking points all originated from the scribes, chief priests and elders there at the cross.

- **“they that passed by”** This is found in the books of Matthew & Mark.

**“And they that passed by reviled (“railed on” Mark 15:29) him, wagging their heads, And saying, (“Ah,” Mark 15:29) Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross.” Matthew 27:39-40**

The Mockers – One of the stark characteristics of execution by crucifixion was the public setting. Hundreds, if not thousands of people, went by Golgotha those six hours. This mockery came from those “that passed by” on their way into the city, many inevitably on their way to the Temple for worship!

The Insult – “reviled”/“railed on” – literally means to speak evil of; blasphemed, hurled insults at; sneering; mocking, the verb form is one of continuous action “wagging their heads,” – means a mocking shaking jester; scornful disapproval which is prophesied in Psalm 22:7-8; 109:25

This group of passersby was reusing one of the false witness testimonies from the Jewish trials. Wonder how they knew this accusation!? These false talking points will not go away. It is obvious the Religious Leaders kept this false testimony alive before the people. The early believers in Acts were still hearing this lie concerning Jesus! (Acts 6:7-15). Interestingly, they also said the very phrase from the wilderness temptations used by the Devil, “If thou be the Son of God,”. (Matt. 4:3-6) Just as the devil did, they too were raising doubt in who Jesus was. And the world still is!

The Reality – When Jesus made the statement about destroying the temple He was speaking of His body. The passersby were misquoting Him just as the false witnesses were in the trials of Christ. (John 2:19) The reality was, the temple of His body **was being** destroyed and He **would raise** it up again in three days! Jesus was staying on the cross in obedience to His Father. Warren Wiersbe said, “It was the fact that He stayed on the cross that proved His divine sonship.” p. 83

- **Religious Leaders** Matthew, Mark, and Luke give information on the Religious Leaders at Calvary.

**“And the people stood beholding (kept actively gazing). And the rulers also with them derided (turned up their noses at; sneered) him,” Luke 23:35 “Likewise also the chief priests mocking him, (“among themselves” Mark 15:31) with the scribes and elders, said, He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he**

**be the (“Christ ( Messiah ), the chosen of God.” Luke 23:35) King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him. He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God.” Matthew 27:41-43**

The Mockers – The Religious Leaders followed Jesus to Calvary, whether they had intended to be there or not. These Religious Leaders should have been at the temple for the special time of prayer. Common sense would have had them wanting to keep a low profile that morning, but it is believed Pilate’s placard forced them to be at the cross to make sure the focus of conversation was against Jesus. They could not afford the superscription to stir-up any kind of positive public opinion toward Jesus and His ministry after they had worked so hard to squash it NOR could they afford the placard to stir-up negative public opinion against themselves!

The Insult – Look carefully, who are the Religious Leaders talking to? First, they were talking to the crowds who had gathered to watch the gruesome crucifixion. The Religious Leaders were still inciting the crowd with mockery and cruelty! The Greek makes it very clear to whom they spoke. These men acted as if they were revealing the real truth to the crowd that Jesus was a false Messiah and in doing so protecting them. Secondly, notice they were gloating among themselves (Mark 15:31) Such gloating! These men had no sense of honor or decency! They were completely controlled by the Devil!

“Christ”/ “chosen of God”/ “King of Israel,”/ “Son of God.” – The Religious Leaders completely understood the message of Jesus. They knew Jesus taught that He was the Christ, the chosen of God, the King of Israel, the very Son of God! He did trust in God His Father, a wonderful undisputed fact unique to Matthew! The main point of their mockery is Jesus’ declared power and now apparent lack of it. He had already proved His power over and over again. Don’t forget, Jesus had raised several from the dead including Lazarus only weeks before.

“He saved others;” - The Religionist were using the fact of Jesus’ miracles as a talking point! The works of Jesus were never in doubt with the Religious Elite. He had healed the sick, restored sight, raised the dead, calmed storms, feed thousands from almost nothing; they could not refute the works!

The Reality – The converted Rabbi, Edershiem, believed the Religious Leaders did not intend to be at the cross seeking to divert blame for Christ’s crucifixion on the Romans. But with the placard written in such a way, they felt they needed to draw the narrative of the on-lookers to their position. They needed to keep the people from feeling sympathy toward Jesus, His movement needed to die with Him!

God intended the miracles of Jesus to be a sign to Israel of who He was, the Messiah, yet they would not believe. We can be confident that if Jesus had come off the cross that day, they still would not have believed! In three days, when all evidence and testimony pointed to the resurrection of Christ, they did not believe! Instead, they began another carefully constructed conspiracy against the truth!

That day, Jesus did not choose to come off the cross! He had saved others, but he could not save himself lest the world die in its sin! William Mounce, modern day New Testament Greek scholar says, “It was the power of love, not nails, that kept him there.”

- **Soldiers** Luke is the only Gospel writer who records the mocking of the soldiers.

**“And the soldiers also mocked him, coming to him, and offering him vinegar, And saying, If thou be the king of the Jews, save thyself.” Luke 23:36-37**

The Mockers – The harden, professional executioners were done with the physical part of their job. Now they were just sitting and guarding Jesus. (Matt. 27:36) Luke tells us that they got up and “coming to him,” also joined into the jeering and taunting!

The Insult – The mocking point of the soldiers was a combination of the words from the superscription they nailed to the top of the cross (“king of the Jews”) and what they were hearing around them (“save thyself”)! They must have had a wicked laugh in their voice when they said, “save thyself”, because the Greek tense here unlike that of the words of the Religious Leaders or passersby has an urgency/need to be quick within the thought! As professional executioners they knew death would come soon! How ruthless!

The phrase, “offering him vinegar” is interesting. The Greek word for “vinegar” here is a sour wine, in other words a cheap alcohol. It is not the gall or myrrh offered to Jesus earlier and then again later in the crucifixion. Do you understand what happened here? It seems the soldiers were drinking this cheap alcoholic while sitting and watching and coming to Jesus to taunt him, raised a glass and offered Jesus to drink with them! What debauchery within the heart of man! What humiliation Jesus took while dying for me!

The Reality – Jesus prayed for them! That’s how Jesus reacted to the attitude and actions of these men making fun as His very life slipping away! So, what happened to these soldiers assigned to crucify the Son of God? Matthew 27:54 is an amazing addition concerning these men! We could say the rest of the story, “Now when the centurion, and *they what were with him, watching Jesus*, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, “Truly this was the Son of God.” Perhaps we will walk heaven with these men! I hope so!

- **Two Thieves Matthew, Mark, and Luke all mention the mockery of the thieves toward Jesus.**

**“The thieves also, which were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth (“reviled him” Mark 15:32).” Matthew 27:44 “And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us.” Luke 23:39**

The Mockers – These are not people passing by on the road with a busy day planned and agendas to fulfill who threw a few insults Jesus’ way! These were not the Religious Leaders who had worked so hard to scheme the crucifixion of Jesus and needed to make sure public opinion stayed focused on the falsehoods they produced. These were not the professional executioners who, with the main object of their job complete, sat down and joined the mockery of the dying. These were the dying! In their own personal agony, bitterness, and fears, the two other thieves joined the crowd to ridiculing Jesus.

The Insult – “cast the same in his teeth” – this phrase simply means they repeated the insults and mockery they had heard others say. “save thyself and us.” – as they heard the crowds around the cross call out to Jesus, “save thyself”, they added “and us”! These words were not in faith, but in ridicule and hatred. But thankfully over the hours the heart of one of those softened to consider truth!

The Reality – The reality is that truly the mocking came from every direction, all aimed at person of Christ Jesus and His position as the Son of God. Below Him as the soldiers offered Him a drink and laughed at His dying fate. In front of Him as the Religious Leaders and passersby stood and taunted the fact that He stayed on the cross, not knowing that the very act of being on the cross was setting up the opportunity for themselves and the generations to come to find a home in heaven! And now on Jesus’ left and right the two thieves, dying with Him, mustered their dying strength only to cast insults and hate at Jesus. And soon, Jesus will also have

His Heavenly Father forsake Him. When you realize all this, the words to Ray Overholt's song takes on new meaning, "He could have called ten thousand angels but he **died alone** for you and me."

**Testimony of Ray Overholt/Hymn story of "Ten Thousand Angels"** Taken from online articles by Pam Griffin at The Destin Log and Diana Leigh Matthews at dianaleighmatthews.com

It is rare when a man is lead to Christ by his own composition. But Ray Overholt, author of "Ten Thousand Angels" was indeed led to accept Christ as his Savior and has surely led countless others to the cross—and still continues to today.

As a young man, Ray Overholt hosted a TV program "Ray's Round Up" and became very successful, even meeting some of his cowboy heroes such as Gene Autry, Stuart Hamblen and Hank Williams, among others.

When he left his show, he entered the nightclub circuit.

He recalled, "I had left my television show 'Ray's roundup' and entered the nightclub scene. I was drinking pretty heavily. I began thinking there must be a better life than the nightclub, show-business whirlwind. I was so intent on changing my lifestyle that I went home and told my wife that I was quitting all of the smoking, drinking and cursing. I wanted to cleanup my own life."

Overholt was at the height of his show-business career, when he wrote his famous song in 1958.

"One day I thought to myself: I've written secular songs; I'd like to write a song about Christ. I opened the Bible and began to read the portion of Scripture that describes Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, telling Peter to put away his sword," Overholt said. "I read where Jesus told Peter that he could ask his Father and he would send twelve legions of angels. I didn't know at the time that that would have been more than 72,000 angels." {Matthew 26:53}

After reading the passage, Overholt says he thought "He Could Have Called Ten Thousand Angels" would be a good title for the song.

"I was playing in a country band at a tavern, a dance hall, in Battle Creek, when I wrote the song," Overholt said. "Why God selected me to write the song, I don't know. I drank a lot, was a profane individual and I needed a Savior. I wrote the first verse and put it in my guitar case," Overholt said. "I then gave the club my notice that I was quitting."

Overholt went on to describe how the song brought him to the Savior.

"Sometime later I found myself singing at a small church. I sang He Could Have Called Ten Thousand Angels. Following my singing, a preacher spoke a message that gripped my heart. I knew I needed Christ. So, I knelt there and accepted, as my Savior, the One whom I had been singing and writing about."

He sent "Ten Thousand Angels" to a publishing house "which reluctantly agreed to publish it." He sold the rights to Lillenas Publishing House for \$25 in 1958.

But according to a 1972 article, when the sales began to climb, "the company gave Overholt full songwriter's rights, allowing the composer to receive royalties and work full-time in gospel ministry."

Overholt became a traveling singer and preacher and wrote over 200 other songs. He performed for Christ until the very end, accompanied by his wife, Millie, and other family members.

“People need to remember the power Jesus had, as the Son of God,” Overholt said. “He was so powerful, He could have cried out for 10,000 angels, but He stayed on the cross—alone.”

Ray Overholt died in 2008 at age 84 on his way to give a church concert. We now remember him as a man God saved –when He sent him “Ten Thousand Angels.”

**Final thoughts on the Mockery Jesus endured on the Cross:** Psalm 22 speaks plainly of the mockery of the cross! (v. 7-8) In it, those that ridicule are described as brute beasts. Isn’t that a great description of one who will taunt and cast such verbal hate at God! (v. 12 – bulls; v. 13, 21 – lion; v. 16, 20 – dogs)

“Jesus could have saved himself, but he endured this suffering because of his love for us. He could have chosen not to take the pain and humiliation; he could have killed those who mocked him---but he suffered through it all because he loved even his enemies. We had a significant part in the drama that afternoon because our sin was on the cross too. Jesus died on that cross for us, and the penalty for our sin was paid by his death. The only adequate response we can make is to confess our sin and freely accept the fact that Jesus paid for it so we wouldn’t have to. Don’t insult God with indifference toward the greatest act of genuine love in history.” Life Application Bible p. 1696

Hebrews 12:2-3 Let’s look to Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our Faith!

- 7. Repentant Thief** Matthew Henry, an English theologian of the 1600’s said, “This malefactor, when just ready to fall into the hands of Satan, was snatched as a brand out of the burning and made a monument of divine mercy and grace.” (MH p. 1655) The story of the conversion of the thief is found only in the book of Luke. Let’s look closely at the conversation between the repetitive thief and his fellow criminal and then at the conversation he had with Jesus!

**“But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss. And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise.” Luke 23:40-43**

“rebuked him,” – It seems the thieves started out railing on Jesus together. Matthew and Mark make that very plain. But here one thief rebukes the other! They were the same in crime and sentence, yet one has the conviction of God on his heart! What brought this man to think differently about Jesus? Where did he get his information about Jesus? What changed his heart concerning Jesus?

- 1. Jesus’ Demeanor** – These men knew what criminals looked like and Jesus didn’t fit the profile! He was different! Pilate saw it and was curious; the Religious Leaders had seen it and hated Christ for it; the disciples and followers of Jesus saw it and drew them to Him. Jesus was different!
- 2. Jesus prayed to His Father for the forgiveness of His executioners** - Jesus had an active, real relationship with God the Father! His first thought was forgiveness not revenge. This would have been so foreign to the unnamed thief, yet such an evidence of Jesus’ real connection to God.
- 3. Jesus’ Superscription** (the accusation above the head of Christ) – We are not told what hung above the two thieves, but we can only imagine it relayed the crimes they had committed there in Jerusalem! But Jesus’ placard simply said, “THIS IS JESUS OF NAZARETH KING OF THE JEWS”.
- 4. The words of mockery against Jesus** – Over and over again the thief heard and even participated in the insults – “if thou be the Son of God”; “you trusted in God”; “if thou be the Christ,”; “He saved others,”; “If he

be the King of Israel,”; “let Christ the King of Israel descend”; “he said, I am the Son of God,” Wow---and even as Jesus hung there on the cross amidst such hatred He acted as the Son of God, the Christ!

We cannot know if this man was ever exposed to Jesus or had heard of Him before this day, but it is very possible. But it does seem God used these words and the attitude of Jesus to reach and change the attitude of this needy man. How gracious that God put Jesus between the two thieves giving both equal access to watch and know the Savior before their death and it then would be too late!

- “Doest not thou fear God,” – This man’s heart was changed those hours as he hung on his cross; he honestly looked at the need of his soul! It took courage to go against the crowd and his peer, even in death. The first need for a soul in coming to Christ is an understanding of their position before God. There better be a fear of God! Who God is? What is God’s expectation for holiness? And God’s wrath toward sin! And this man knew he fell very short! He obviously feared God.
- “we receive the due reward of our deeds:” – Many times known, proven criminals will go to their death unwilling to admit their crimes. They will live in denial, or desire doubt in other people’s minds, or at least justify their actions within their minds. But here we read a confession of guilt! “we indeed justly” – in the Greek the thief is declaring they emphatically deserved this fate! The death they have been condemned to was their “due reward”. In the same breath the thief then testified of Jesus’ innocence when he said, “but this man hath done nothing amiss.”

“And he said unto Jesus” –

- “Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.” – When calling Jesus “Lord”, the thief was admitting his understanding of Jesus’ Kingdom and Kingship – He saw Jesus as Messiah King of Israel! Do you really see the **depth of this faith**? The disciples will live in despair in the days after the cross (Luke 24:21), but this thief believed in Jesus as Messiah and His coming Kingdom. He **had the faith** that Christ would give him a part in it! **More faith** and understanding than those disciples that had lived with Christ for three years. This unnamed criminal saw Christ past the shame of the cross to His coming glory! **What faith!** J Vernon McGee said, “Obviously, this thief had come a long way theologically while hanging on that cross”. p. 354 Shepherd, in his book on the life of Christ, said of the thief, “It took a **great faith** to believe in one who was crucified with him, and a great leap of the imagination from a cross to a crown, from a felon’s death to eternal life.” p. 600 When we came to Christ, we put our faith in a living Savior, in our resurrected Lord! This man put **his trust** in a dying King and saw the glory of His kingdom in the future! Even in this setting he saw Christ as the Messiah! **What faith!** He saw Christ as the future King in might and power! Matthew Henry’s words on this thief were, “This is a prayer of a dying sinner to a dying Savior.” p. 1655 **What faith!** What a wonderful promise found in Romans 10:12-13 “For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek (*good man or bad; red, yellow or black man; educated or not; poor or rich; intelligent or impaired; man or woman; privileged or underprivileged; whatever the background, or need*): for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” John MacArthur says, “His request to be remembered was a plea for mercy, which also reveals that the thief understood he had no hope but divine grace and that the dispensing of that grace lay in Jesus’ power. All of this demonstrates true faith on the part of the dying thief, and Christ graciously affirmed the man’s salvation.” p. 461

“And Jesus said unto him,” – This cry of faith brought about Jesus’ second words while on the cross!

- “Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise.” – My study Bible says about this man, “He seeks eternal life in the hereafter, but receives the assurance of everlasting blessing, starting that

very day.” p. 1597 Jesus knew the faith in this man’s heart and accepted his call! Notice the spiritual teaching being done from the cross! The thief viewed the Kingdom of Christ and asked to be remembered! Well, that still hasn’t happened some 2,000 years later, but Jesus gently and graciously tells the dying thief he doesn’t have to wait, instead **today**, begins the blessings of his faith!

One thief remained bitter and angry to the end and died in his sin. The other thief feared God, looked at the truth that he was a sinner, deserving death, and turned to King of the Jews, Jesus the Messiah, putting his faith in Him for an eternal home!

**8. Jesus Speaks to His Mother and John** This small group came to minister to Jesus in His dying hour. Yet, in all His misery and the work of His Father, He did not neglect His responsibility to His earthly mother. She was beyond grief! Life Application Bible reminds us, “Neither Christian work nor responsibilities in any job excuse us from caring for our families.” p. 1851 Jesus is a wonderful example of this here on the cross.

**“Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son! Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home.” John 19:25-27**

**Who are these woman?** 1. “his mother” – Since Mary had met the angel over 30 years before, her life was defined by Jesus. He was her amazing son, but actually the Son of God. And now this piercing of her soul. 2. “his mother’s sister” or Mary’s sister Salome (Mark 15:40), John and James’ mother (Matt. 27:56-57). This would make James and John the sons of Zebedee, Christ’s cousins. 3. “Mary the wife of Chleophas”- the mother of James the younger and Joses. (Matt. 27:56-57) In my study, some believed that this Mary was Mary’s sister-in-law, Joseph’s sister. 4. Mary Magdalene – Magdalene signifies Magdala a village along the west shore of Galilee, north of Tiberias. Jesus had healed her from demon possession (Luke 8:2-3) and she will play a big role as a witness to the resurrection.

“Woman, behold thy son!”/” Behold thy mother!” – This is Jesus’ third time to speak while on the cross. I love the exclamation signs! Here when Jesus saw His mother and John (“whom he loved,” is the self-identification John uses for himself) and with energy and passion gathered the strength to declared to them His desire for John to care for Mary. Perhaps knowing her heart, this was a concern to Mary. Why John? We know Jesus had other brothers. 1. They were not present. We would suppose good Jews would be in Jerusalem, but they would not identify with Jesus here at the cross. 2. They did not believe on Him as Messiah while John did! Jesus put the loving care of His mother into the hands of a believer. What an honor for John, such confidence and personal love placed on John by Christ. Placing Mary in the trust of a believer is a wonderful example and pattern for us to follow. Pentecost said of this incident in his book on the life of Christ, “A more delicate, tender, loving service could not have been rendered than this.” p. 484

“And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home.” - This passage indicates that John took Mary from the crucifixion scene directly to his home in Jerusalem. The goodbyes were said, the transfer of responsibility for Mary had been accomplished. Later, when these same women are named while watching the latter half of the crucifixion “afar off” Mary, Jesus’ mother, is not mentioned. She was gone. Only three women are named. (Matt. 27:55-56; Mark 15:40-41) Evidently, these ladies moved from Calvary to a safer location but still in sight of the cross

**Did John come and go throughout the time of the endings of the trials to Jesus' death?** Many theologians believe that John left after the trials of Jesus to inform the disciples to the fate of Jesus and then returned to Calvary with the four women. There are certain details that are unique only to John but also, he is missing some key details found in the other Gospels. (Missing – no Simon of Cyrene, no prayer of forgiveness, no mocking, no repentant thief; Unique to John – Jesus carrying His own cross from Jerusalem, Religious Leaders and Pilate debate over superscription, Jesus' words to Mary and John) Is it possible, he did not eyewitness these missing events, or when he wrote his book 60 years after the other Gospels, did he leave out details already well known? We do not know, but common sense tells us that it took time to get the woman to the cross and then again take Mary “that hour...unto his own home.” v. 27.

**What of Mary, Jesus' mother?** When Jesus rises again, He will rise as Mary's glorified Savior and not her earthly son. That relationship was severed here on the cross. We will lastly see Mary again, gathered with the faithful followers of Jesus after the ascension of Jesus (Acts 1:14). After this reference we will not hear of Mary, the mother of Jesus again.

### **Believer's Application:**

The salvation of the thief on the cross is an amazing lesson on the mercy and grace of God. Let's look carefully at four principles of this man's faith and apply it to our life.

1. **Salvation is by Faith in the person of Christ and His work!** With such limited knowledge this man casts himself on Jesus' mercy. John R Rice the well-known evangelist of the 20<sup>th</sup> century said, “It was a rather foolish prayer but it was enough. Here was a penitent heart that wants mercy!” p. 539 Jesus grants the thief a home in heaven not based on any good thing he had done but by faith that Jesus was the Son of God. “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior. That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” Titus 3:5-7 According to his own admission, he was worthy of death! He certainly didn't have time or opportunity to do any good work! His salvation was by faith that Jesus was his dying Savior!
2. **It is never too late to receive Christ!** This man had wasted his life but here in the last hour he received understanding of the truth, forgiveness through faith in the person of Jesus! We see here a death bed, no, death cross experience! As long as there is life there is hope! “All that the Father giveth me shall come to me and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.” John 6:37
3. **This was a work of God!** In death the Holy Spirit brought clarity to this man's heart! Jesus was the great hope of Israel who was rejected by the wicked leaders. It was easy enough for the thief on the cross, a wicked criminal, to identify those same traits in the Religious Leaders! He was not blinded by their crafty lies and tricks. He knew Jesus did “nothing amiss”. The drawing of God was evident in his life!

It is my prayer that all of us can sing, “There is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Immanuel's veins; and sinners plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains. The dying thief rejoiced to see that fountain in his day; And there may I, though vile as he, wash all my sins away.”

**When I Survey the Wondrous Cross –  
Isaac Watts, 1674-1748**

When I survey the wondrous cross  
On which the Prince of glory died,  
My richest gain I count but loss  
And pour contempt on all my pride.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,  
Save in the death of Christ, my God;  
All the vain things that charm me most-  
I sacrifice them to His blood.

See, from His head, His hands, His feet,  
Sorrow and love flow mingled down;  
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet  
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?

Were the whole realm of nature mine,  
That were a present far too small:  
Love so amazing, so divine,  
Demands my soul, my life, my all.

