
Lesson 51

Cruel Mockery

The Scripture Lesson

Luke 23:34, 35; Matthew 27:39-43

On the cross, Jesus remained silent most of the time. We know of only seven times, during the six hours He hung on the cross, that Jesus spoke. Those precious words are sometimes called the seven Cross Words.

The first one was probably spoken by Jesus while the soldiers were pounding the nails through His hands and His feet. He prayed to God then and said, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” Can you imagine that? The people crowding around were there because they wanted to see Him *die*. They had cried, Crucify Him! Crucify Him! and now they were getting their way. And Jesus prays that they might be forgiven. Why did He do that? He did that because some of *His people* were there. They, too, had said that Jesus was worthy to die; but they did not yet know that they were crucifying the *Savior*. Later on they will repent of their terrible sin. It was for them that Jesus prayed — that they might be cleansed by His blood from their sins.

But Jesus also prayed for some who were not even there. He prayed, really, for *all of His people*. That’s because all of His people are *sinners*. Why was Jesus nailed to a cross on Good Friday morning? Was it just because wicked

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people cried, “Crucify him”? No, it was because of *your* sin, and because of *my* sin — because of the sin of all of His people. For *us* He died. “Father,” He said, “Forgive them ...” — because I am dying for them.

The place where Jesus was crucified was near a road that led into the city; so, on this Feast Day, hundreds of people passed by. The leaders of the people were there too. They shouted at Jesus. They said, “He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God.” Perhaps it was when the passersby heard what their leaders were saying, that they stopped to poke fun at Jesus. They said, “If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross.”

Do you see what they meant by that? The leaders of the Jews were saying that there is now *proof* that Jesus was not what He said He was. He said He is the King of the Jews? Well, a fine King *He* makes, hanging up there on the cross. And He said He’s the Son of God? Well, that is impossible! For God would never let His Son be nailed to a cross!

Were they right? Oh, no! They were *wrong!* Jesus *was* indeed forsaken by God on the cross. But it was for *our* sakes. He bore the wrath of God against sin — for us. If He had come down from the cross, you and I could not be saved.

The mockery was very wicked. And yet, by it the mockers were fulfilling the prophecy that said concerning the Messiah, “All they that see me laugh me to scorn.” All of the mockery, too, was part of what Jesus must bear — for us. Jesus did not come down, for He loved His people, even to the death of the cross.

The Penitent Thief

Luke 23:36-43

When Pilate condemned Jesus to death, he ordered that two malefactors (criminals) be crucified along with Him. By sending them to be killed at that same time and place, Pilate was fulfilling the Scriptures. For, according to Isaiah 53, the Messiah would be “numbered with the transgressors.” He would be treated by men as if He were nothing better than an ordinary criminal.

Not only that, but Jesus would also be treated by *God* as if He were a transgressor. The curse of God was on the two *malefactors* — because they were actually sinners. But the curse of God was on *Jesus* too. It was on Jesus, not because He was Himself a sinner, but because He took upon Himself all of the sins of His people. Jesus will take away the curse that *they deserved*, by dying for them on the cross.

Not for *everybody* would Jesus die. He would die only for His people. His people would therefore come to love that cross, for it is their salvation. But those who are *not* His people will laugh at the cross. They see no need for a Savior from sin, and they think it foolish to believe that Jesus’ death could ever do anybody any good.

There are, then, two kinds of people in this world. In the malefactors who were crucified with Jesus that day on Calvary, we find one of each. One of them very soon began to show how he despised Jesus. He began to mock Him. He said, “If thou be the Christ, save thyself and us.” He wanted a savior, you see, but not a savior from *sin*. If Jesus could not take him down from the cross, He was good for nothing.

But then the other malefactor began to rebuke the first one. He asked, Don’t you fear God? How can you mock Jesus that way, when you

know that in a very short time you must appear before God as your Judge? How can you mock Him when you know that *we* deserve to die, and this man has done nothing wrong?

Do you see what this malefactor was doing? Maybe it seems to us as if he was doing the best and the easiest thing. Certainly he was doing the *best* thing, for he was rebuking one who mocked the Lord, and he was confessing before everyone that he *believed* in Jesus. But he was not doing an *easy* thing. Think how often *we* do not *dare* to do what this man did, because we are afraid of what people might think of us. And here at Calvary this malefactor was confessing his faith before a crowd of people who hated Jesus and were already mocking Him.

Then the penitent thief (the thief who *repented*) turned to Jesus and said, “Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.” Let all the others mock and say that He is no King. This thief knew that Jesus *is* King. And he knew that Jesus had the power to admit whomever He pleased into that kingdom.

How did he know all that? He saw the very same Jesus and the very same cross as did the other malefactor. But the Spirit of God worked in his heart so that he *believed*. He believed that there was *salvation* possible through this Man who hung on the middle cross. So he prayed, “Lord, remember me....” And from Jesus he heard the blessed promise, “Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise.”

Memory Work

Group A

Psalm 22:7, 8 “All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted on the Lord that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him.”

Group B

Mark 15:28 “And the scripture was fulfilled, which saith, And he was numbered with the transgressors.”

ACTIVITIES

This paper has been prepared in the hope that it will be used by students of all ages. The activities are designed so that the oldest will be challenged, and the youngest will find some of it within reach. Parents should encourage their children to attempt only what they can handle without frustration. For some that will be much, for others little.

DO YOU AGREE?

If you do, write Yes; if you do not, write No.

- _____ 1. The first Cross Word was "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."
- _____ 2. Jesus thought of us too, when He prayed that prayer, for we are also guilty of rejecting Him.
- _____ 3. The leaders of the people urged Jesus to come down from the cross, and they promised to believe in Him if He did so.
- _____ 4. The passersby mocked Jesus by telling Him that if He could destroy the temple and then rebuild it in three days He ought to be able to save Himself from the cross.
- _____ 5. Satan, who was behind all of the mockery at the cross, surely hoped that Jesus would *not* come down from that cross.
- _____ 6. That two thieves were crucified with Jesus was a fulfillment of Isaiah 53:12.
- _____ 7. The thieves did not join in mocking Jesus, because they were suffering the same death that He was.
- _____ 8. One of the thieves actually believed that this man on the cross was Israel's Messiah.
- _____ 9. Jesus assured the repentant thief that in the resurrection of the last day he would be brought to be with Him in paradise.

QUESTIONS FOR YOUNGER READERS

1. How many "Cross Words" are recorded by the gospel writers? What was the first one?
2. When Jesus prayed, "Father, forgive them....," He prayed also for *us*. But we had not yet been born, so we had nothing to do with His crucifixion. Why then did Jesus pray that *we* be forgiven the great sin of crucifying the Christ?

3. How did it happen that there were many people who passed by the cross that day? What did these passersby say to Jesus?
4. According to the wicked leaders of the Jews, how did Jesus' hanging on the cross prove that He was not the Son of God?
5. What action of Pilate was used by God to fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah that the Messiah would be "numbered with the transgressors"?
6. Because all men are sinners, all men are under the curse of God. Jesus, however, had no sin. Why then was God's curse also on *Him*?
7. God's people know themselves to be sinners. What do they therefore think of Jesus' cross? What do the wicked people think of that cross?
8. What did the first malefactor think of Jesus and His cross?
9. How did the second malefactor rebuke him? Why did it take a lot of courage for him to say that? Are there occasions in which God's people today must make the same kind of confession of Jesus?
10. What blessed promise did Jesus give the penitent thief?

COMPLETING SENTENCES

1. "Having _____ his own which were in the world," John wrote, Jesus "loved them unto the _____" (John 13:1). Evidence of that amazing love is perhaps nowhere more clearly seen than in the first of the seven words of the cross. From Luke's account it appears that Jesus spoke those words at the time that He was experiencing the initial physical shock of being nailed to the cross. At that moment, whom does He think about? About Himself and His own terrible suffering? No, about His own and their eternal welfare. "Father,

_____ them,” He says, “for they _____ not what they do” (Luke 23:34).

2. For whom did Jesus pray, when He said, “Father, forgive *them*”? Not, certainly, for *all* those at the cross. Jesus Himself, you remember, had declared in His great intercessory prayer, “I pray not for the _____” (John 17:9). In the beautiful 53rd chapter of Isaiah, we read that that prophet saw beforehand the sufferings of Christ and His making intercession for the _____ (Is. 53:12). Isaiah says, too, that He “was wounded for _____ transgressions,” and that “_____ we like sheep have gone astray” (Is. 53:5, 6). By our daily sins we all reject Christ just as really as did those who at His trial cried, “Crucify Him.” The prayer of Jesus in the first word of the cross, therefore, is for *us*.

3. Among the great multitude which gathered that morning around the central cross were the Sanhedrists. Up to this point these wicked rulers had been highly successful in manipulating the crowd, so that every objection of Pilate was shouted down by all the people. But this was a fickle mob; and the leaders were afraid that they might yet change their minds and then begin to blame the Sanhedrin for killing this great prophet. The leaders had therefore tagged along, in order to maintain their control over the thinking of the people. They tried to do that by mocking Jesus. They say, “He saved _____; _____ he cannot save. If he be the _____ of Israel, let him now come _____ from the cross, and we will _____ him” (Matt. 27:42). The miracles of Jesus, you see, had always been troublesome to the leaders. Jesus had, in fact, Himself pressed on them the importance of those works. “If I do not the _____ of my _____, believe me _____. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the _____: that ye may know, and believe, that the _____ is in me, and _____ in him” (John 10:37, 38). Now at last, say the Jews, the truth is known. The fact that He is on the cross,

and that He does not come down, proves that He cannot be the Son of God. He is an impostor. “He trusted in _____,” they say, “let him (that is, God) _____ him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the _____ of God” (Matt. 27:43).

4. The Sanhedrists were not the only ones to mock Jesus as He hung on the cross. The passersby, probably following the example of their leaders, also “_____ him, _____ their heads, and saying, Thou that _____ the temple, and buildest it in _____ days, save _____” (Matt. 27:39, 40). What they meant, of course, was that, because He obviously was not able to save Himself, His words about the temple are now shown to have been nothing more than an idle boast. The truth is, however, that Jesus had actually said that *they* would destroy the temple and that *He* would rebuild it. And, ironically, these passersby are mocking this prophecy of Jesus at the very moment that it is being fulfilled before their eyes. For through their destroying the temple (that is, His body), He was fast becoming the chief cornerstone of the temple of God (that is, the church), the foundation of which is the perfect righteousness that He was meriting for His people by His suffering and death. “Let him save _____, if he be _____,” the mockers say (Luke 23:35). Save *Himself* if He be Christ? No, exactly because He *is* the Christ, He will not save *Himself*, but *us*.

5. Concerning the Roman soldiers who had nailed Jesus to the cross we read that “sitting down they _____ him there” (Matt. 27:36). They were, however, not content simply to watch. Luke tells us that they also _____ Him, coming to Him and offering Him _____. Perhaps they offered to give it to Him if He would come down and get it; for we read that they added, “If thou be the _____ of the Jews, _____ thyself” (Luke 23:36, 37).

6. There were crucified with Jesus two _____. Thus do Jesus’

enemies again unwittingly fulfill Scripture; for it was by their crucifying Jesus with two thieves, that the Scripture was fulfilled that the Messiah would be “_____ with the _____” (Mark 15:27, 28).

7. Further evidence of the finger of God in this history can be seen in Pilate’s selection of these two malefactors to be crucified with Jesus. The fact that they were both malefactors means already that they can be seen to represent all men — for *all* are transgressors of God’s law and are thus cursed of God: “for it is written, _____ is everyone that _____ not in all things written in the book of the _____ to do them” (Gal. 3:10). The crosses on Calvary, therefore, speak of the curse of God on the whole world. There is, however, one distinction of significance that can be made among men: some are elect, the others are reprobate. And in the providence of God, Pilate’s selection of malefactors included one of each. Interestingly, the two malefactors were crucified on either _____ one, and Jesus in the _____ (John 19:18). Jesus’ position in the middle surely points to the truth that it is the cross of Christ that makes such separation between men in this world.

8. That Jesus worked such separation between the malefactors on the crosses can be seen in the hardening of the one and the conversion of the other. We read that “one of the malefactors which were hanged _____ on him, saying, If thou be _____, save thyself and _____” (Luke 23:39). What he wanted was not a Savior from *sin*, but a Savior from the *consequences* of his sin. He despised a Messiah who allows Himself to be crucified and prays for His enemies. Already it is clear that “the preaching of the _____ is to them that perish _____” (I Cor. 1:18).

9. But the other malefactor in answer _____ him, saying, “Dost not _____ fear God, seeing thou art in the same _____? And we indeed _____, for we receive the _____ reward of our _____; but this

man hath done _____ amiss.” Thus he confesses his sin; and, in the presence of all kinds of people who were reviling the Man on the central cross, this malefactor confesses his faith in Jesus. Believing, too, that Jesus’ kingdom will exist somehow beyond the grave, and that Jesus had it in His power to admit whomever He pleased, the man said, “Lord, _____ me when thou _____ into thy _____” (Luke 23:40-42). The two malefactors had seen the same thing. But in the one the Spirit worked faith, so that he believed that the strange Sufferer on the middle cross was indeed the Redeemer of Israel. Just as the cross is foolishness to them that perish, so also, to those who are _____ it is the _____ of God (I Cor. 1:18).

10. The penitent thief was no doubt concerned that his crimes might bar him forever from the blessedness of Christ’s kingdom. He simply, therefore, cast himself on the mercy of Christ. And that is never done in vain. “Verily I say unto thee,” Jesus said to him, “_____ thou shalt be with _____ in _____” (Luke 23:43). Blessed assurance, that was, for the malefactor. But no less so for Jesus Himself; for the Father had given Him, while He was yet on the cross, a trophy of His victory, in this sinner’s repentance.

QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT

1. Can you explain how the first Cross Word is a powerful evidence of the great love that Jesus had for His people?

2. We believe that when Jesus prayed, “Father, forgive *them*,” He was praying for *all* of His people. But we believe, too, that when He added, “for they know not what they do,” He was speaking specifically of the terrible sin of crucifying the Son of God. Why then would He have included *us* in His prayer, if we were not even present to approve or disapprove Pilate’s sentence of death?

3. In light of all of Jesus’ words and works during the three and a half years of His public ministry, how could Jesus say of those present at His trial and crucifixion that they “know not what they do”?

4. Not often would the dignified Sanhedrists attend personally the execution of the sentence after a trial. But they did in the case of Jesus. Once Jesus was turned over to the Roman soldiers, they were confident that the sentence would be carried out; but they followed along to witness this bloody spectacle. Why, do you suppose, did they do that?

5. Read Matthew 27:41-43. Do you see how the Sanhedrists were using the cross to prove that Jesus was an impostor?

6. The Sanhedrists, in their mocking of Jesus, declared that if He were to come down from the cross they would believe in Him. Can you think of a later event which showed that, far from being ready to believe, they were determined to shut out all evidence that Jesus was what He claimed to be?

7. The blaspheming Sanhedrists seemed to have an airtight case: Jesus does not come down, because He cannot come down, because He is not the Son of God. What was wrong with their logic?

8. The passersby chose to mock Jesus by reminding Him of what He had said (that is, of what they *thought* He had said) about destroying and rebuilding the temple. Why did they bring up that three-year-old prophecy of Jesus?

9. Though none but Jesus understood it at the time, that prophecy concerning the destroying and rebuilding of the temple was being fulfilled on Calvary. Can you tell who was doing what (that is, who was building and who was destroying), and how?

10. The real temple (the temple of which the building in Jerusalem was only a type, or picture) is the spiritual bond of friendship and fellowship between God and man. Sin makes that fellowship between man and the holy God impossible. Can you tell, then, how *we* are temple *destroyers*?

11. Do you see how the wicked Sanhedrists not only were temple destroyers, but also, in spite of their evil intent, were instruments in God's hand to bring about the rebuilding of the temple?

12. Because David was a type of Christ, his personal lament in Psalm 22:7, 8 is at the same time a Messianic prophecy. Do you see how that prophecy was literally fulfilled on Calvary?

13. The mockers on Calvary were tools of the devil. The mockers did not expect or want Christ to come down from that cross. What do you think — did Satan, too, want Jesus to stay on the cross?

14. The soldiers also joined in the mockery. Were they only expressing their contempt for the Jews, or could it be that they also saw something in this particular Jew that led them to despise Him personally? How, do you suppose, did they mock Him by offering Him vinegar (Luke 23:36)?

15. Many of the details of Jesus' crucifixion that seemed mere coincidence to those who observed them were in fact of significance. What Scripture was fulfilled in Jesus' being crucified with malefactors? How did Pilate's selection of those two particular thieves make it possible for the two malefactors to represent the entire human race?

16. Both of the thieves saw and heard a simple but powerful gospel message on Calvary. The two-fold effect of that "sermon" illustrates how the preaching always cuts like a two-edged sword — the reprobate are hardened; the elect are saved. The one thief taunted Jesus by challenging Him to come down in order to "save thyself and us." What kind of a Messiah would have been to his liking? Do you see how he is like all men apart from grace?

17. The other thief asked, "Dost thou not fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation, and we indeed justly...?" What kind of a Savior did he want? How did he come to recognize that? Do you see how he is like all of the elect?

18. Do you see now the significance of Jesus' cross being the middle one of the three on Calvary?

19. Can you show, from the words of the second thief, that what he said on the cross was really a public confession of sin and a public confession of faith? What can *we* learn from his willingness to make such confession under those circumstances?

20. What words of the penitent thief suggest that his faith surpassed even that of the Eleven at this time? Do you understand why the repentance of this malefactor must have cheered the heart of the Savior?

21. How is Christ's answer to the penitent thief a source of comfort to us?