

# Our **GUIDE**

## for little ones

Published by the  
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IN THE SUNDAY SCHOOL

Lesson 51

### Cruel Mockery

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

“Hellish agonies!”

That sounds bad, doesn’t it? It is.  
It’s the pains of hell.



That’s how our Heidelberg Catechism describes the sufferings of Christ. Especially His sufferings on the *cross*.

When we think of the suffering of Jesus on the cross, we think first of the awful pain of crucifixion, of being nailed to a cross. Terrible as that agony was, however, it was not, by itself, “hellish.”

Jesus suffered something worse. Something worse by *far*. When you listen to your minister read our Form for the Lord’s Supper, you hear him tell what that suffering was. Listen: “He bore *for us* the *wrath of God* under which we

should have *perished everlastingly*.”

Try to understand that. What *you* would otherwise have had to suffer forever in hell; what *I* would otherwise have had to suffer forever in hell; what *all of God’s people* would otherwise have had to suffer forever in hell — all of that suffering *combined*, all of it *together*, was what Jesus suffered on the cross. That was “hellish.”

We must never forget that what Jesus did, He did for *us*. Every person who ever lived, except for Jesus, deserves the everlasting punishment of hell. We do too. But Jesus took *our place*. He

**Note to Parents:** These papers are intended for the younger Sunday School students — grade 3 and below. Vocabulary and concepts are such that children in this age group, even the 3rd graders, will profit most if the stories are read *to* them, not *by* them. Most lessons have two stories, for two sittings if that proves to be beneficial. Our hope is that parents will find these lessons to be useful tools in the teaching of Bible stories and Bible truths to their children in the “off” season.

willingly took all of our sin and guilt *on Himself* — so that all of the wrath of God for our sin and guilt could be aimed straight at ... *Him!*

In His going to the cross, therefore, and in His suffering there for six hours, Jesus was thinking about ... *us*. We were in His *heart*. How do we know? Listen to the first words that He spoke from the cross. “Father, forgive them,” Jesus said, “for they know not what they do.” Yes, “Father, forgive. Forgive My people, all of them, for the sins that have made this cross necessary. Forgive them why? Just because *I ask?* Oh, no! Those sins must be *paid for*. Thy wrath must be *borne*. *I* will bear it. For them. All of the punishment that *they* deserve, for *their* sin — put it all on *Me*. And *forgive them.*”

Think of it: Jesus *let* the soldiers drive the spikes through His hands and feet — because He loved us.

And Jesus, after He was put on the cross, *could have come down*, easily, but He didn't — because He loved us. He refused to save *Himself*, because He wanted to save *us!*

And what do the people at Calvary say? They *mock* Jesus. They say, “Come down from the cross — if you can!”

That seems almost unbelievable, doesn't it — unbelievable that anyone could ever say that to the suffering Messiah. Who would do that? Let's look, for a minute, at the people who were at Calvary that day.

The chief priests are there. They

had never *looked for*, nor did they *want*, a suffering Messiah, a spiritual king, a savior from sin. They therefore hated Jesus. They come to Calvary to *mock* Him. Listen to what they say. “If he be the king of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him.”



Do they *want* Jesus to come down? No, they want to be rid of Him once and for all. Do they think that maybe He *might* come down? No, they expected Him to *stay on the cross*. What they are really saying is this: “At last we have *proof* that Jesus was *lying*. He said that *God* was His *Father*. Well, then, what is He doing on the *cross*? If He is the Son of God, surely He has power to come down. But He doesn't. He stays up there. So He cannot be the Son of God. He's a *blasphemer.*”

That's what the chief priests wanted everybody at the cross to believe. And the passersby believed it. A suffering Messiah was as distasteful to them as it was to their leaders.

They reviled Him, wagging their heads, and saying, “If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross!”

The Roman soldiers, too, had nothing but contempt for this weakling on the cross. They despised Him. “If thou be the king of the Jews,” they sneered, “save thyself.”



And then there were the malefactors — two criminals who, by the com-

mand of Pilate, were crucified at the same time as Jesus. There they were, hanging on the crosses, suffering themselves the torments of crucifixion, knowing that they are about to die. They hear the mockery. And one of them chimes in, “If thou be the Christ, save thyself ... and us.”

Did you hear it? “Save thyself.” “Save thyself.” “Save thyself.” The chief priests, the passersby, the soldiers, one of the malefactors — they all said the same thing. Does Jesus *not* come down? Does He *stay* on the cross? Then He cannot be the Son of God. He’s a fake, a fraud, an imposter, a blasphemer. That’s what they thought. Except ... for one man.

Does that surprise you? Does it surprise you that, at the cross, Jesus was *rejected*? Try to imagine the scene. Three crosses. Three men hanging on them. They all look the same. You look at the figure on the middle cross. Spikes have been driven through His hands and feet. He’s bleeding, slowly, to death. Can *this man* be ... the *Son of God*? It was hard enough to believe that a newborn baby in a manger in a cattle stall in Bethlehem could be the Son of God. It was harder still to believe that a man who could be beaten, and spit upon, and put on a cross, and who was going to *die*, could be the Son of God. Could a man like *that* possibly be *King*? Who could believe that? Nobody. Even the faith of the *disciples* faltered.

The truth is that, to the natural

eye, the cross is ... *foolishness*. To every natural eye. To *yours* too, and to *mine*. The real *wonder* at Calvary, therefore, is not that the Jews stumbled over the cross, but that one man ... *didn’t*. We will learn about him in our next lesson.

### How Well Did You Listen?

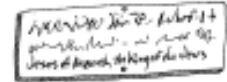
1. Did Jesus deserve the punishment of hell? What people *do* deserve that punishment? Why, then, does not God put *us* in hell?
2. What did the chief priest say to Jesus on the cross?
3. Did the passersby feel sorry for Jesus on the cross?

## The Penitent Thief

*Luke 23:36-43*

“Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.”

So said the sign above Jesus’ head.



Did anyone at the cross believe that? Did anyone think that Jesus really was *King*? Not the chief priests. Not the passersby. Not the soldiers.

What about Jesus’ faithful followers? They had always believed His word. They had believed that He was what He said He was. Even now, when Jesus hangs there on the cross, they love Him still. Dearly. But what about the *kingdom*? Even Jesus’ *disciples* found their faith in Jesus crumbling. How can the Son of God *die*? And how can a dead Jesus ever *reign*?

Yes, what about the *kingdom*? Did anyone at Calvary believe what that sign on the middle cross said: Jesus, the *King*?

Yes, someone did. Who was he? The chief priests knew so well the Scriptures. Was it, maybe, one of them? No, the chief priests all said the same thing: “If he be the king of Israel, let him now *come down from the cross*.” Was it, then, a friendly passerby? No, all the passersby mocked Him.

Can you believe that it was ... one of the *malefactors* — one of the two men who were being put to death this day, by the Romans, for a life of *crime*? Wonder of wonders, one of those criminals looks now on Jesus ... and *believes*.

Most likely neither one of those two malefactors had ever before seen Jesus of Nazareth. Now, on this Friday morning, both of them watch as Jesus is put on the cross. They hear Him say, “Father, forgive....” They hear the harsh words of the chief priests and they notice Jesus’ silence. That’s all. They both see and hear the same thing. But then something very different happens in their hearts.

One of the criminals looks at the sign above Jesus’ head and thinks, “*This man — a king!*? What a joke!” And he mocks, “Save thyself, *and us*.” The other criminal looks at the same sign: “Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews” ... and he *believes*. Does Jesus *look like a king*? No. Does anyone else at the cross think that He *is a king*? It seems not. But none

of that matters to this thief on the cross. “Lord,” he says to Jesus, “remember me when thou comest into thy ... *kingdom*.”

Amazing faith! Jesus’ glory had never been so *hidden*. But this thief on the cross *sees* it. And he *believes* it. How can that possibly be?!

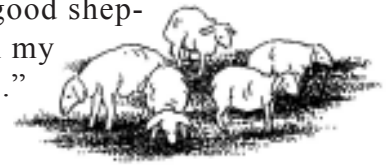
Yes, how can that be? That’s an important question. We see the answer when we look closely at Calvary.

What do we see there? We see two *malefactors*, two *evil doers*. That’s what men are. *All* men. The Bible tells us that there is *none* that doeth good, no not *one*. The two malefactors on Calvary, therefore, are a picture of *all men*. Us too.

But when we look at Calvary we see that the two malefactors are *different*. We see them there, one on the right side, the other on the left, ... and Jesus in the midst. That’s the beauty of that awful crucifixion scene — two malefactors, on either side one, and Jesus in the middle. *Jesus* separates. It’s *His cross* that makes the difference.

Try hard to understand that. Think: If Jesus had *not* died, where would *we* be. We would all be on the side of the *other* malefactor. We would all be on the side of the chief priests and of the passersby and of the soldiers who mocked, mocked, mocked.

Long before, Jesus had said to the Jews, “I am the good shepherd. I lay down my life for the sheep.” Here, at last, on




Calvary, Jesus is doing that. He is laying down His life for ... malefactors. Not for *all* malefactors. But for *elect* malefactors. For the *sheep*. *Their* sins He bears. *They* are given spiritual eyes to see, so that the cross is not to them *foolishness*, but the *power of God unto salvation*.

Yes, spiritual eyes to see. That's a *gift*. A gift made possible by Jesus' death on the cross. A gift worked in our hearts by His Spirit. But — notice this! — when the repentant thief said, "Lord, remember me...", Jesus had *not yet died*. His Spirit had not yet been poured out on Pentecost. Even His beloved disciples, therefore, did not yet understand. They looked still at the cross and thought ... *foolishness*. They will learn. The amazing thing is that, here on Calvary, the repentant thief was given an *early glimpse* of it. He was able, *dimly*, to look *past* the cross and see *glory*, a *kingdom*, with Jesus as its *Lord*.

But was that *all* that he saw? Did he see Jesus only as *King*? No, he saw more. Listen to what he says.

To the other, mocking malefactor, he said, "Dost thou not fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed *justly*." Do you see the difference? The first malefactor said only, "Get us down from this cross — if you can." The second one said, "We *belong* up here. We *deserve* to die. We deserve to be *crucified* — to be *cursed of God*. We are *sinners*."

"But *this man* (Jesus) hath done nothing amiss." Amazing confession! —

 spoken in front of a mob of people who hated the man on the middle cross.

But still that isn't all. Remember that this malefactor is on a *cross*. Death stares him in the face. He knows he *deserves* to die. He knows that he deserves to be forever shut out of the kingdom of God. What hope can there be for a sinner like ... *him*? There must needs be a *Savior*. The repentant malefactor knew that, and he knew where to look. To the middle cross. To Christ crucified. That's the only hope. The only hope for the malefactor. The only hope for sinners. The only hope for ... us. Looking to Jesus, the malefactor said, "Lord, remember me..."

No one ever looks to Jesus, like that, in vain. The malefactor didn't either. Jesus' answer was immediate. "Today," Jesus said, "*today* thou shalt be with me in ... *paradise*."

We can well imagine how those words of Jesus must have cheered the heart of that one sinner. Paradise — today. But can we imagine, too, how the words of the malefactor must have cheered the heart of *Jesus*? Think, for a moment, of *that*. Remember Jesus' prayer, just a few minutes earlier. "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." Jesus prayed that prayer for His people. God heard that prayer. And He answered it. Right then and there. He gave to Jesus one of His own, one of His sheep — a malefactor. How? By the power of the cross. A little taste

of what was to come. For soon the gospel would be preached, the gospel of the crucified Christ. Where? To the ends of the earth. To whom? To every nation, tribe, and language. Foolishness still, it will be, to many. But to the multitude of redeemed, the power of God to salvation. The penitent thief on the cross was proof. Proof of the power of the cross to save.

### How Well Did You Listen?

1. How many malefactors were crucified with Jesus? How were their crosses arranged at Calvary?
2. At the time of Jesus' crucifixion, did His disciples understand the cross?
3. Did the repentant malefactor believe that Jesus was *King*?

### How Well Do You Understand?

1. What did Jesus suffer on the cross that made His suffering "hellish"?
2. Jesus had the power to come down from the cross. Why did He then not *do* it?

### Follow the Dots

Follow the dots to complete the letters. Color the picture.

3. Why did the chief priests urge Jesus to come down from the cross — if they wanted Him to stay up there?

4. How are *all men* like the two malefactors who were crucified with Jesus?

5. Think of what the second malefactor said. How did he show that he knew he was a *sinner*? How did he show that he believed that Jesus really was *King*? How did he show that he knew who was *Savior*?

### Memory Verse

Luke 23:42 "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom."

