

## Luke 23:26-43 – “Witnesses of the Cross”, March 26, 2023

### I. Welcome and Review

A. Good morning! Ohaiyou-gozaimasu! Welcome to Calvary Chapel Iwakuni. It's great to be here with you all as we gather to worship our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

1. *Welcome any new people and those who may be streaming content.*

B. Before we continue any further, let's go ahead and dismiss our elementary aged children to their Sunday School class.

1. As well as our Bible English class with Mr. Dan. (2<sup>nd</sup> Service)

C. Today we are going to be continuing our study of the gospel of Luke and looking at the details Dr. Luke records for us pertaining to the day in which Jesus Christ was crucified for our sins and the sins of the entire world.

1. Last week, we looked at the final aspects of Jesus' third civil trial before Pontius Pilate.

a. Remember that Jesus faced three religious trials and three civil or political trials. He came before Annas, Caiaphas, and the Jewish Sanhedrin during His religious trials. And He came before Pontius Pilate and Herod Antipas during His civil trials; once before Herod Antipas, but twice before Pontius Pilate.

2. Last week we noted how Luke emphasized the fact that Pontius tried to free Himself of the burden of having to deal with the religious leaders and the crowd of people who had gathered before him, by releasing Jesus to the people as part of the custom of that day.

a. There was a custom that had been ongoing where the Roman procurator would release a prisoner of

the people's choosing during the festivities surrounding the Passover.

- b. Pilate figured he could kill two birds with one stone by simply releasing Jesus to the Jews after chastising Him.
  - c. Since Pilate believed Jesus to be innocent, this made the most sense to him.
  - d. He would release Jesus because He did nothing deserving of death, but before doing so, he would chastise Jesus to help satisfy the religious leaders. And at the same time, he would appease the people by keeping the custom of the day.
3. Pilate even tried to stack the deck in his favor by giving the people only two choices. Normally the people would have their choice of prisoners to be released, but Pilate only gave them two choices: they could have Jesus, or Barabbas.
- a. Last week we noted how Barabbas was a very bad, bad, man. He was a rebel, a terrorist of sorts well known for his thievery and murderous exploits.
  - b. Pilate presumed that none of the people would ever want this kind of person released in their community and so he all but assured that Jesus would be chosen by the people.
4. But to the shock of Pilate, the religious leaders stirred up the people and persuaded them to pick Barabbas over Jesus. When Pilate asked what he should do with Jesus, the people shouted, "Crucify Him!"
5. Three times, Jesus tried to overturn the decision of the people, asking them repeatedly what Jesus had done to deserve death and that he had found him innocent.
6. But when he noticed that a tumult was rising, he decided to give in to the people's clamoring and

released to them Barabbas and handed Jesus over to their will.

D. Our text this morning picks up from there. Jesus has been handed over to the will of the people to be crucified. And in our text this morning we're going to note several different witnesses of the crucifixion.

1. Our text is going to be Luke chapter 23, verses 26-43 and the title of our study is going to be "**Witnesses of the Cross**".
2. As we go through our text we're going to note the different people that were part of Luke's crucifixion details and we're going to note their responses to the cross and what we can glean from them.
3. I'd like to ask you all to rise to your feet in honor of God and His Word. I'm going to read through our text from my Bible, I want to encourage you all to do your best to follow along in your own Bible.
4. Luke continues his gospel account with the details surrounding the crucifixion of Christ beginning in verse 26. He writes... (R & P)

## II. Introduction

A. In our text this morning we're going to look and several different people and people groups that were involved in Luke's account of the crucifixion.

1. We know from other gospel accounts that Jesus would be scourged and mocked and treated shamefully and brutally before taking up His cross.
2. We also know and understand that the crucifixion was something excruciatingly painful. The word "excruciating" literally comes from the Latin for "out of the cross". Luke will mention the crucifixion of our Lord, but does not share many details of the cross.

3. Luke chooses not to give us the grim details of the scourging and crucifixion of our Lord. And for our time this morning we'll follow His lead by not spending much time discussing those things.

a. The current plan is to wait until Good Friday's service to speak more on the details of Jesus' broken body and His shed blood as we come to the table in Communion.

b. So, we will consider those details, but we'll wait to do so until then.

4. For us this morning, we'll simply note the various people Luke records as being there at the crucifixion and what they saw and how they responded to the cross.

B. In our text, we'll note seven different people and people groups that Luke tells us about and the first such person is found in our opening verse, verse 26. Read it again with me.

### III. Luke 23:26; Simon the Cyrenian

A. Here we are told how Jesus was led away to be crucified. The people leading Him away would have been the Roman soldiers that were part of the group that went out to arrest Jesus the night before.

1. This leading away to the place of crucifixion would have taken place after Jesus had been scourged. The details of Jesus' scourging are mentioned in all three other gospel accounts, but Luke is silent on it for his part.

B. Typically, those sentenced to crucifixion would have to carry their cross from the place of their sentencing to the actual crucifixion site.

1. Most of the time these sites would be situated along a road side entering into the city. Criminals would be

crucified there as a warning to others entering into the city as to what will happen to any who come against or oppose Rome.

2. The condemned criminals would actually only carry the cross beam through the city on their way out to their crucifixion. More often than not the vertical upright beam, called stipes, would be implanted in the ground at the place of execution.
3. After the hands were nailed to the crossbeam, they would lift the criminal up onto the upright beam where they would then nail the feet.

C. So, Jesus was tasked with carrying His cross, but evidently the Roman soldiers decided it was best for someone to carry His cross for Him. And that is where our first witness comes onto the scene.

1. We are introduced to a man named Simon here who was laid hold of by the Roman soldiers and forced to bear Jesus' cross after Him.
2. We are told by Luke that this man was a Cyrenian; meaning that he was from the city of Cyrene which was located on the northern coast of Africa, in what is today modern day Libya.
3. Cyrene had a large Jewish population at this time, and we get the sense that this man probably was Jewish as well.
  - a. The fact that his name "Simon", was a popular Jewish name, and that he was there in Jerusalem during the Passover feast gives further indication as to his most likely heritage.

D. As we read our introductory verse about Simon, the question begs itself, "Why did Simon have to carry Jesus' cross for Him?".

1. Though Luke does not give us the reason as to why the Roman soldiers seized Simon, let me suggest to you two possibilities.
  2. Number one, I believe it quite possible that Jesus lacked strength.
    - a. Jesus has been up all night without any rest or sleep. Recall how the night before the disciples couldn't keep their eyes open to pray. Well Jesus hasn't got any rest whatsoever since His arrest. He's been led from one trial to the next, ushered all over throughout the city. So, there is that fact.
    - b. But also, we have to understand that Jesus had just been scourged by two Roman lictors. His body was beaten severely, His back was torn to shreds, and He was a bloody mess. We'll get more into the details of what a Roman scourging would entail on Good Friday, but suffice it to say that Jesus was in no condition to carry a 100 pound crossbeam through the city.
  3. And number two, I think Simon carried His cross because Jesus lacked sin. He lacked strength, but even more importantly He lacked sin.
    - a. The carrying of a cross through a city was a way to identify you as guilty of great sin. Guilty of breaking the law, of having done something deserving of death.
    - b. But Jesus did nothing deserving of death. He was faultless; without sin. He was perfect, holy, blameless, and righteous. Perhaps He did not carry His cross through the city because He was not guilty of committing any crime worthy of the cross.
- E. Back to Simon the Cyrenian and what His witness of the cross teaches us.

1. In Mark's gospel we are told some very intriguing details about Simon. We are told in Mark 15:21 that Simon was the father of Alexander and Rufus. (**Mk. 15:21**)
2. Some speculate as to why Mark would throw that information in.
  - a. One suggestion that merits consideration is that Alexander and Rufus were well known people to Mark's intended audience.
  - b. When we studied the gospel of Mark, we noted how Mark was writing to Christians in Rome.
  - c. And interestingly enough, at the end of Paul's letter to the Romans, the name Rufus comes up again.
    - i. Romans 16:13 reads, "Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine." (**Ro. 16:13**)
  - d. It would seem based upon Paul's greeting of Rufus that he was a prominent member of the Roman church, not only him, but his mother as well.
  - e. If this is indeed the same Rufus, which we can't prove, but I think is highly likely, it would seem that this interaction with Simon the Cyrenian had a lasting impact upon him and his family.
  - f. Jesus said, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it." (**Mt. 16:24-25**)
  - g. Simon the Cyrenian literally picked up a cross and followed Jesus to the place of His execution. And he found new life and it seems he shared it with his family as well.
3. Simon started out this day headed to the temple to do his part in observing his religious ceremonies and

traditions, but it would seem he ended the day having begun an intimate relationship with Jesus.

4. Consider how things were going for Simon.
  - a. He's headed into the city, no doubt he was headed to the temple.
  - b. And all of a sudden some Roman soldiers seized him and forced him to come alongside a battered and bloodied man, a criminal that had been sentenced to execution through crucifixion.
  - c. The soldiers tell him to pick up Jesus' cross, which I'm sure was covered in Jesus' blood. Without any say in the manner, Simon obeys the orders given to him, probably in fear of what would happen to him if he tried to disobey a Roman soldier.
  - d. This act would ceremonially defile Simon and not permit him to enter into the temple to worship Jehovah.
  - e. Things seemed to be going horribly wrong for Simon. He may have been thinking, "God, what did I do to deserve this?", "Why is this happening to me?", "Could this day get any worse?".
5. But I believe the witness of Simon the Cyrenian tells us and shows to us, how God can use terrible circumstances and situations and turn them around for our good.
  - a. We just covered chapter 45 in the book of Genesis on Wednesday night this last week. And in Genesis 45, Joseph reveals himself to his brothers who had sold him into slavery, but over and over Joseph speaks about how it was God who sent him to Egypt, not his brothers. How this was all part of God's plan.

- b. Later in the book of Genesis, Joseph states, “But as for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive.” (**Gen. 50:20**)
- c. Genesis 50:20 is the OT equivalent of Romans 8:28. There Paul writes, “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.” (**Ro. 8:28**)

6. Simon would testify to this truth. Of how **God can turn the craziest of situations** and the worst of circumstances into something glorious, into something that would be used for our good and for His glory.

- a. Simon came to Jerusalem that day with dead religion, but he left with a personal relationship with Jesus and shared it with His family.
- b. God took a seemingly horrible situation and turned it around for the good of Simon and his entire family.
- c. And God can still do the same in our lives as well. God can take what the enemy intends for evil and turn it around for our good.
- d. God can work all things together for good. So, don't lose heart if the situation you find yourself in seems bleak or hard or dark or hopeless. Seek the Lord and trust Him to see you through and to turn that situation into something that He uses for your good.
- e. He did it for Simon, and He can do it for you.

F. Well, let's continue on to our next witness of the cross. This time it is a group of people that we read about in verses 27-31. Take a look with me.

#### IV. Luke 23:27-31; The Women

A. Here we read about a group of women who mourned and lamented Jesus. Thought this group of women goes

unnamed, it is likely that these women consisted of the women who had followed Jesus from the area of Galilee.

1. Jesus, as we'll see in the weeks to come, had a number of devout women followers that loved Him and served Him.
2. These women were weeping and wailing for Jesus, seeing Him bloodied and battered, being led off to His own execution.

B. But Jesus says to these ladies, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children."

1. Why would Jesus say this to these women? Well, we have to look at Matthew's parallel account to understand more of the context.
2. Right before Pilate handed over Jesus to the will of the religious leaders, Pilate came out to the people and washed his hands before them and said, "I am innocent of the blood of this just Person. You see to it." And we are told how the people answered Pilate saying, "His blood be on us and on our children." (**Mt. 27:25**)
3. I believe Jesus said this regarding the people's overall rejection of Him and that Jesus knew what that would mean for them and their children.
  - a. For anyone that rejects Jesus is surely to be lamented for their fate is sealed. They have chosen to reject God's gift to them, God's grace being extended to them. Any such person is to be lamented.

C. But I also believe Jesus is pointing to prophecy here. A two-fold prophecy in fact.

1. When Jesus says, "the days are coming in which they will say, 'Blessed are the barren, wombs that never

bore, and breasts which never nursed!", I believe He is referring to what Luke recorded earlier in chapter 21.

- a. If you recall from our study of Luke. Back in chapter 21, Jesus was speaking to His disciples about the destruction of Jerusalem and His coming and the signs of His coming.
  - b. In Luke 21 Jesus said, "But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those who are in the midst of her depart, and let not those who are in the country enter her. For these are the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled. But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! For there will be great distress in the land and wrath upon this people." (Lk. 21:20-23)
  - c. These verses in Luke 21 spoke of the destruction of Jerusalem that would take place in the year 70AD.
  - d. Jesus says to the daughters that they should weep because the days are coming where God's vengeance would be poured out upon the city and its inhabitants.
    - i. When the city of Jerusalem was taken by the Romans they laid waste to man, woman, and child. Women saw their children slain right before their eyes.
    - ii. That is why Jesus speaks of it being better for those who didn't have children, for they wouldn't have to see their own children killed by the Romans laying waste to the city.
2. But I believe there is a second element of prophecy in Jesus' words as well. For not only does he refer to the soon destruction of Jerusalem, but also to the coming

of the great Day of the Lord where His wrath is poured out upon a Christ rejecting world.

- a. When Jesus speaks of how the people will begin to say to the mountains, “Fall on us!” and to the hills, “Cover us!”, He is quoting from the book of Hosea.
  - b. In Hosea 10:8 the prophet declares, “Also the high places of Aven, the sin of Israel, Shall be destroyed. The thorn and thistle shall grow on their altars; They shall say to the mountains, “Cover us!” and to the hills, “Fall on us!” (**Hos. 10:8**)
  - c. These words were spoken by the prophet in regard to God’s judgment against Israel for their sin.
  - d. And these verses are also alluded to in the book of Revelation as well. After the sixth seal is opened and right before the first of the trumpet judgments that take place during the second half of the Tribulation we read of how “The kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand.?’” (**Rev. 6:15-17**)
  - e. In the days that follow during the trumpet judgments Revelation tells us that “in those days men will seek death and will not find it; they will desire to die, and death will flee from them.” (**Rev. 9:6**)
3. So Jesus, in speaking to these women, speaks of coming prophecy and the judgment of God that is going to come upon the city of Jerusalem as well as the entire world for rejecting Jesus Christ.

4. In verse 31 Jesus says, “For if they do these things in the green wood, what will be done in the dry?”
  - a. The idea here is that if the religious leaders indignation and rage burned so hot with anger towards Jesus during the days He was upon the earth, how much hotter will God’s wrath burn in a dry world that has completely rejected Christ and His Spirit upon the earth?
  - b. The day of God’s wrath is going to be a day like no other; a day far worse than the day Jesus was crucified for our sins.

D. And I think the overarching witness of these ladies to us would be in line with what Jesus is speaking about here. I think they would attest to us and any who would listen to them that **to reject the Lord is a decision to invite upon yourself the wrath of God.**

1. It is foolishness not to accept the grace of God that has been offered through His Son, Jesus Christ.
2. All who reject Christ will face the wrath of God one day. They will be rejected by God. For Jesus said, “Therefore whoever confess Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven.” (**Mt. 10:32-33**)
3. He also said, “For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, of him the Son of Man will be ashamed when He comes in his own glory, and in His Father’s, and of the holy angels.” (**Lk. 9:26**)
4. John writes, “Whoever denies the Son, does not have the Father either; he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also.” (**1 Jn. 2:23**)

5. If you reject the Son, you reject the Father who sent Him. And all who reject God will face eternal damnation apart from God in hell.

6. A sobering thought, but one we must take seriously. This is what I believe the women would testify to us based upon Jesus' words to them.

E. Let's continue on in our text and see who else was there to witness the cross and their reaction. Read with me verses 32-33.

#### V. Luke 23:32-33; The Two Criminals

A. Here we are told about two criminals that were crucified along with Jesus.

1. In Matthew's gospel he calls them robbers; the same term John used to describe Barabbas. And in Mark's gospel we are told that Barabbas was actually in prison chained together with his fellow rebels. (**Mk. 15:7**)

2. It is quite possible that these two criminals were part of the group that Barabbas had been chained to. If this is indeed true, then we see that Jesus essentially did in fact take the place of Barabbas.

3. Barabbas was the one who should have been crucified between his two fellow robbers and criminals, those who had committed murder in the rebellion as Mark alludes to, but it was Jesus who took his place.

B. Now, we will get more into these two criminals and what they testify of as witnesses of the cross later on in our text down in verses 39-43, but I want to point out something that really stood out to me here.

1. When I read "And when they had come to the place called Calvary, there they crucified Him, and the criminals, one on the right hand and the other on the left." it immediately makes me think of James and John.

2. We know that John was there at the crucifixion. For John's very own gospel alludes to him being there when Jesus spoke to him about the need for John to take Jesus' mother Mary into his own home and be a son to her in His place. John refers to himself as the disciple whom Jesus loved. (**Jn. 19:26**)
  3. I can't help but wonder what John thought when he saw the criminals crucified next to His Lord, one on His right and the other on His left.
  4. For it was James and John who came to Jesus and begged Him saying, "Grant us that we may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on Your left, in Your glory." (**Mk. 10:37**)
    - a. When Jesus entered into the glory of His kingdom, they wanted to be right there, on His right and on His left.
  5. Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" (**Mk. 10:38**)
    - a. Jesus was referring to His suffering, the scourging and crucifixion He would endure for us all as He went to the cross.
  6. They didn't know what they were asking. In essence they were asking to be the two criminals that were crucified on the right hand and the left hand of Jesus.
  7. I wonder if it hit John at all. I wonder if when he saw Jesus raised up upon the cross if he considered his hope and request he had made previously to the Lord; pleading with the Lord to be allowed to be on his right or left hand side.
- C. As I consider the witness of the cross here and these two criminals being crucified one on the right and the other on

the left, it makes me thankful for all the times Jesus has not answered my prayers the way I wanted them.

1. I'm careful not to say "unanswered prayers" for Jesus does answer our prayers. He just simply says "no" sometimes, or "not yet", or "wait".
2. As I consider these two criminals it makes me thankful that God knows infinitely more than me, and **He knows what is best for me**. I'm thankful and appreciative for all the times that He has said "no", or "not yet", or "be patient".
3. God is at work putting together His plans and purposes that are far greater than our own. Trust Him! He knows what He is doing.

D. Let's continue on in our study. Take a look at the first part of verse 34.

#### VI. Luke 23:34a; Jesus

A. Here we hear of Jesus' own testimony, His own words, His own witness if you will of the cross. Jesus said while upon the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do."

1. This is the first of seven statements Jesus made upon the cross of Calvary. Time won't allow us to look at all seven. But I would encourage you to look into them on your own.

B. This one statement tells us what the cross is truly all about. It is about forgiveness. The cross speaks of the forgiveness that Jesus requested for all those who had crucified Him, but it also speaks of the forgiveness of all who would put their faith in the completed work of the cross.

1. Because of the completed work of the cross, our sins can be forgiven. Our sins are removed, separated

from us, never to be counted against us, or brought back up before the Lord.

a. The Psalmist declares, “As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us.” (**Ps. 103:12**)

2. Isaiah the prophet declares of the Lord, “I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake; And I will not remember your sins.” (**Isa. 43:25**)

3. The writer of Hebrews states of the Lord, “Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.” (**Heb. 10:17**)

a. When the Scriptures speak about God not remembering something it isn't that God all of a sudden can no longer remember that we've sinned, but it is speaking about God choosing not to recount our sins. He chooses not to remember them.

b. He chooses instead to look upon the cross and know that our sins have been paid for by His Son.

4. Our sins can be forgiven and forgotten by the Lord all because of the work of Jesus Christ upon the cross of Calvary. This is the testimony of Jesus upon the cross. **That our sins can be forgiven.** That a way has been made for us to have our sins wiped away.

a. Jesus Christ is the way, the truth and the life. And it is through faith in Him and His work upon the cross that we can be granted the forgiveness of sins.

C. Let's continue on in our text, picking up with the rest of verse 34 and jumping down to verse 36 & 37.

## VII. Luke 23:34b, 36-37; The Soldiers

A. The “they” in verse 34 who divided His garments and cast lots were the Roman soldiers that had led Jesus to the cross.

B. They not only divided His garments and cast lots, but verses 36 & 37 detail for us how they mocked Him and offered Him sour wine.

1. These things were all part of the OT scriptures that prophesied of these exact events.

a. Psalm 22 speaks of the pain and suffering the Messiah would endure for us, even mentioning details about the crucifixion and how his hands and feet would be pierced.

i. The Psalmist writes, “For dogs have surrounded Me; The congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me. They pierced My hands and My feet; I can count all My bones. They look and stare at Me. They divide My garments among them, And for My clothing they cast lots.” (**Ps. 22:16-18**)

b. Psalm 69 prophesied of how Jesus would be offered sour wine. It reads, “They also gave me gall for my food, And for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.” (**Ps. 69:21**)

C. These details we read of here in regard to the actions of the Roman soldiers remind us of a very important truth regarding the cross and Jesus’ crucifixion. Namely, that this is what had been pre-ordained ahead of time. **This was all part of God’s redemption plan for us from the beginning.**

1. Jesus is not the victim here. He is the victor. In going to the cross, Jesus has completed the mission the Father sent Him upon.

2. This is the way it was meant to be. God had planned it out this way before He ever created this world. Jesus is the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world as spoken of in the book of Revelation. (**Rev. 13:8**)

3. The crucifixion is the unfolding of God's prophetic word. It is the climax of God's redemption plan for human beings. Only to be topped by the resurrection of Christ, which we'll look at in a couple of weeks as we look to celebrate Resurrection Sunday on the 9<sup>th</sup>.

D. Let's look back up at verse 35 which we skipped over in looking at the details of the soldiers. Follow along.

## VIII. Luke 23:35; The People & The Rulers

A. Here we read of the people and the religious rulers that were gathered there before Jesus and how they sneered Jesus.

1. The word "sneered" carries the meaning of turning up your nose towards someone. It means to scoff at someone or to deride them, to ridicule them.

B. These people did so by saying, "He saved others; let Him save Himself if He is the Christ, the chosen of God."

1. Throughout the details of the crucifixion, we hear over and over people clamoring for Jesus to save Himself.
  - a. The Roman soldiers spoke of it saying, "If You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself."
  - b. One of the criminals will say it in verse 39, "If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us"
  - c. And here the people along with the rulers are saying the same. "Save Yourself", "Save Yourself", over and over they say it.
2. This constant clamoring for Jesus to save Himself came straight from the pits of hell. The devil wanted Jesus to save Himself. To get down off of the cross, to not follow through with His sacrifice.
3. Here is something we must understand. Jesus could have come down from the cross. Jesus could have called for legions of angels to come down to His

rescue. With the whisper of a word, He could have been off that cross and wiped out all who had come against Him.

4. But Jesus didn't do that. Why? Why didn't Jesus save Himself? Jesus didn't save Himself, so that He could save you and I.

5. **Through the cross salvation is made available to us. It is the only way to be saved.**

a. Salvation doesn't come through good works or deeds. It isn't a matter of having more good than bad, or having the good outweigh the bad.

b. Salvation doesn't come to us because we earn it. It is a gift of God's grace. A gift that is only made available to us through Jesus' completed work upon the cross of Calvary.

c. Without the cross we have no hope of salvation. Nothing can be done by us to save ourselves, because Jesus did all the work that was needed. Upon the cross He cried out "It is finished!" (Jn. 19:30)

d. The work has already been done. And all we have to do is believe upon that work Jesus did for us and surrender ourselves to Him as Lord and Savior and we will be saved.

C. We're running out of time here, so let's keep on moving. Take a look at verse 38 with me as we note another witness of the cross.

IX. Luke 23:38; Pontius Pilate

A. The sign that was placed above Jesus read, "This is the King of the Jews" and according to John's gospel it was Pontius Pilate who wrote it.

1. Pontius Pilate had written above Jesus that He is the King of the Jews as a way of identifying why He was crucified.
    - a. When someone was crucified, they would often list their crimes above them so as to detour anyone from engaging in the same criminal activity.
    - b. With no sin to list, no crimes committed, Pilate simply wrote that Jesus was the King of the Jews, and he wrote this message in Greek, Latin, and Hebrew.
  2. Greek was the language of the common people. Most people in that area spoke Greek, or were at least familiar with Greek.
  3. Latin was the official language of Rome. People of power and influence knew and spoke Latin.
  4. And Hebrew was of course the language of the Jews.
- B. In writing this message above the head of Jesus in all three of these languages, Pontius insured that anyone that walked by and saw Jesus would be able to read and understand who He was.
1. Now, Pontius Pilate's assessment was incomplete. Yes, Jesus was the King of the Jews, but He was even more. Jesus was, and is, the King of kings and Lord of lords.
  2. And I think Pilate's witness here in verse 38 speaks to a very important fact regarding Jesus' place as King.
  3. Pilate wanted everyone to know who Jesus was. And his witness here reminds us of the truth that **Jesus is for everyone**. Jesus is not just king of the Jews, or King of the Romans, or the Greeks.
  4. Jesus is King of kings. He is king over this entire world as we know it. He is King over all people; whether it be Jews, Romans, Greeks, Americans, Japanese,

Filipino, Chinese, Indian, and every other nationality you can think of. He isn't just the king of the Jews, or the king of the westerners, He is king over all and we must worship Him as such.

C. Well, let's look to our final verses and once again revisit the two criminals upon their crosses next to Jesus. Read with me verses 39-43.

## X. Luke 23:39-43; The Two Criminals

A. In these verses we see a contrast between these two criminals.

1. The first criminal rebuked Jesus.

a. He blasphemed Him by saying, "If You are the Christ". Jesus was the Christ, to suggest the possibility that He wasn't was blasphemous before the Lord.

b. He said, "If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us." Again, a call to not complete His Father's mission.

c. But Jesus would not save Himself, so that He could save us.

d. You see the cross was God's demonstration of His love for us. To step down from the cross would be Jesus saying He didn't love us enough to go through with it. But we know He did love us. He loved us to death.

i. John 15:13 teaches us, "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends." (**Jn. 15:13**)

ii. 1 John 3:16 says, "By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us." (**1 Jn. 3:16a**)

iii. Later on in 1 John it reads, "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His

Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” (1 Jn. 4:10)

iv. Romans 5:8 states, “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Rom. 5:8)

e. **The cross testifies of God’s great love for us.**

2. Looking at the second criminal we see that he repented before Jesus.

a. The second criminal recognized his own sin and how he deserved the punishment he was receiving and at the same time understood and knew that Jesus had done nothing deserving of death.

b. When he came to this understanding He made a simple request of Jesus, “Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.”

c. And Jesus replied, “Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.”

d. The criminal didn’t say the sinner’s prayer, he didn’t read his Bible and remember Scripture. He didn’t go door to door evangelizing people, he didn’t speak in tongues, he didn’t get baptized, he didn’t join a local church and attend faithfully, he didn’t tithe and give offerings to the Lord.

e. He simply said, “Lord, remember me when you come into Your kingdom.” He called Jesus Lord; it’s the Greek word “kurios”. It means Lord, master, owner; the one who exercises supernatural authority over mankind. It is the NT Greek equivalent of the OT Hebrew word “Jehovah”.

f. This criminal believed that Jesus had done no wrong, and he believed that Jesus was Lord over all.

- g. He confessed Christ as Lord and that was enough to secure His spot by Jesus' side. So simple and so beautiful.
- h. This is the gospel message. If your understanding of the gospel and the work of salvation can't fit the criminal on the cross into it, then you've got a distorted understanding of the gospel.
- i. Salvation really is that simple. It wasn't easy for Jesus, but He did make it simple for us.
  - i. Romans 10 states, "that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." (**Rom. 10:9-10**)
- j. The criminal upon the cross confessed his sin and believed in Christ's completed work upon the cross. He knew that Jesus was not going to stay dead after the cross. He believed Jesus would enter into His kingdom and he wanted to be by His side when He did so. And that is all that it took.
- k. The testimony of this second criminal is that **the gospel really is a simple truth**; one that even a child can understand.
  - i. Confess your sins, turn to Jesus, and place your hope and faith in Him and His work upon the cross. That's it. What a wonderful testimony of the simplicity of the gospel.
  - ii. I hope and pray that we all understand this truth and that we have believed upon this truth. And that we live this truth out in our every day.
  - iii. If you are here this morning and have not believed upon this simple truth, I pray you would reconsider

your current rejection of Christ and that you would turn to Him today. And make the best decision and most important decision you ever could make.

iv. Let's pray.