

The Gospel of Christ Jesus A crucified Saviour, Luke ch. 23 vv. 33–38

*[Please note : sections in blue type are not broadcast on every radio station.
King James Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]*

Introduction

Our talk today is number 3 of 5 looking at Christ Jesus the Saviour! From time to time in our broadcasts we return to the subject of the Gospel (or good news) of Christ Jesus. In this current series we have considered Him as “a faultless Saviour” and as “a rejected Saviour.” Today, from the Scriptures we will read together, we will consider “a crucified Saviour.” In the Lord’s will next week, we will consider “a risen Saviour”, and the week following that, “a ‘today’ Saviour.” How wonderful to be reminded that the good news of the Saviour is always up-to date, and that after 2000 years, Jesus still saves today!

Our reading is from Luke’s Gospel chapter 23 beginning at verse 33 to the end of verse 38. I will read the passage and quote other verses from the Authorised Version of the Bible, sometimes called the King James Version, and these will be referenced and listed in the transcript which can be found on our website, www.truthfortoday.org.uk Please feel free to download any of our talks to listen to, or print them off to read. If you have been blessed by our ministry, then please tell your Christian friends about us.

Luke ch.23 vv. 33-38. “And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left. Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots. And the people stood beholding. And the rulers also with them derided him, saying, He saved others; let him save himself, if he be Christ, the chosen of God. 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. And a superscription also was written over him in letters of Greek, and Latin, and Hebrew, THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.”

If you can, read the whole chapter, Luke 23. Even better, read the corresponding chapters in the other Gospels: Matthew 27, Mark 15, and John 19. These are the divinely given accounts of the very foundation on which our salvation and blessing rests, the cross of Christ, the crucified Saviour.

Before we look more closely at the verses we have read, I want you to pause for a moment and consider the thought of a saviour. Imagine a hopeless situation where it appeared nothing could be done to make things better. With seemingly no way out, all seemed lost, and all hope is gone. Two biblical examples come readily to my mind; the first, the desperate plight of the Hebrew people in Egypt, slaves under Pharaoh’s cruel taskmasters, and the second, the terrified armies of

the Israelites, paralysed by fear of the formidable giant Goliath. Step forward Moses and David, God's men for the moment, saviours, deliverers, heroes!

I'm sure you know these stories, how Moses in peril of his own life repeatedly challenged the mighty Pharaoh to let God's people go. The plagues, the Passover, the parting of the Red Sea – what an awesome display of God's power in the hands of the saviour, Moses. Then David, the shepherd boy, undaunted by the seemingly invincible giant as he defied the armies of the Lord of hosts, challenging them to send out their champion to fight with him. From king Saul down the ranks, none was willing to accept the challenge. But David more than met the challenge, not relying on unproven armour, but on the God whom he knew and had proven, even in his youth. David was the victorious conqueror and the saviour of Israel.

Now think about the scene we have read about, and which is the subject of our meditation today. A crucified Saviour, it almost seems a contradiction! How could a Saviour be crucified!? Perhaps it is little wonder that when we read into the next chapter, we find two disciples returning from Jerusalem to their home town, despondent and sad. They had hoped that this man, Jesus, was the Saviour, the One who would have redeemed Israel. They had concluded that this could not now be the case since He had been crucified.

A few years later, to the Christians at Corinth, the apostle Paul wrote of the seemingly foolish means of salvation and the seemingly foolish way it was being preached.

“For the preaching of the cross is to them which perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.” ...”For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: but we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men” (see 1 Corinthians ch. 1 vv. 18, 21-25).

If you can, read the whole section and see the stark contrast between God's estimation, and man's lack of appreciation, of the cross of Christ. The seeming contradiction of a crucified Saviour is beautifully taken up by the writer of this hymn, Samuel Whitlock Gandy (1780 – 1851).

His be the Victor's name
Who fought the fight alone;
Triumphant saints no honour claim,
His conquest was their own.
By weakness and defeat,
He won the meed and crown;
Trod all our foes beneath His feet
By being trodden down.

He Satan's power laid low;
Made sin, He sin o'erthrew;
Bowed to the grave, destroyed it so,
And death by dying slew.
Bless, bless the Conqueror slain,
Slain in His victory;
Who lived, who died, who lives again ---
For thee, His church, for thee!

In Luke 23 verse 33 we read that they came to “the place, which is called Calvary.” This was a well-known place to the people of Jerusalem. It was the place of execution, “nigh to the city” according to John. I was going to say “outside the city walls” as in the popular Easter hymn, but I don’t think I find that in Scripture. Calvary is the Latin name for Golgotha, which we find in the other 3 Gospels and means, “a place of a skull.” I’m not sure why it was called this, some believe the rock resembled a skull. Today in Jerusalem, just outside the walls of the old city there is a garden tomb and beside it a rock face which in certain light you can maybe see a skull. But the traditionally held site of the crucifixion is much closer to the temple itself, and I believe it perhaps is more historically accurate. When I visited the Holy Land in recent years, I tried to imagine the Lord Jesus Christ, on the cross, looking towards the temple, and addressing His Father. We have the first saying from the cross in our verses today, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.”

Irrespective of where the actual spot was, it was a great privilege to be in the area where the Son of God shed His blood that I, and you, might be forgiven of our sins.

He died that we might be forgiv’n,
He died to make us good,
That we might go at last to heav’n
Saved by His precious blood.

Cecil Frances Alexander (1818 – 1895).

The malefactors, or evildoers, were crucified, one on either side of Jesus. His was the central cross which would only be right, given that He was 'THE KING OF THE JEWS.'

We read that the Lord Jesus Christ spoke 7 sayings from the cross. We need to read the 4 Gospel accounts to get them all, but Luke records 3 of the 7 including the first and the last. [The 7 sayings from the cross are,](#)

- “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (see Luke ch. 23 v. 34).
- “Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise” (see Luke ch. 23 v. 43).
- “Woman, behold thy son!” (see John ch. 19 v26).
- “Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?” or My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? (see Matthew ch. 27 vv. 46, Mark ch. 15 vv. 34).
- “I thirst” (see John ch. 19 v. 28).
- “It is finished” (see John ch. 19 v. 30).
- “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit” (see Luke ch. 23 v. 46).

These saying are a subject in themselves, but in our talk today we will only comment briefly on the 3 we have in our chapter. It is remarkable and surely noteworthy that Jesus addresses His Father in the first and last saying. In the central cry and quoting the words of Psalm 22 v. 1, He addresses His God, the Holy One of Israel, who had forsaken Him on account of what He was made, “sin for us”, (see 2 Corinthians ch. 5 v. 21 JND). But the eternal fellowship which He enjoyed with His Father was unbroken even as He hung on the cross.

We read, “Then said Jesus, Father forgive them; for they know not what they do.” The Lord knew that the Father listened to His prayers. He tells us this explicitly in the story of Lazarus (see John ch. 11).

Those of us who know His Father as our Father and His God as our God can have this wonderful assurance, too, that the Father always hears our prayers. But who was the Lord praying to His Father about? Who were the “them”, I wonder? He had just been speaking to the Jewish women, the Daughters of Jerusalem. The Roman soldiers had just beaten Him and nailed Him to the cross and were now gambling for His clothes. The Jewish people, together with the rulers were ridiculing

Him. What love, what grace! He could have called legions of angels to set Him free and destroy all His enemies, but instead He prayed, "Father, forgive them." The Jews together with the Romans were responsible for the death of Christ, that is the murder of an innocent man, yet the Lord prayed to His Father that there might be forgiveness for them. I wonder how many repented in the days which followed and received the forgiveness of God for this awful crime.

I think we learn something from the account of the martyr of Stephen in Acts ch. 7 where we read, "they stoned Stephen." Just as in the case of the Lord Jesus, of course "they" knew what they were doing, it was a deliberate and wicked act, but Stephen cried with a loud voice, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge" (see Acts ch.7 v. 60). Those who were at Jerusalem that day called for Jesus to be crucified, and had we been there our voices would have been blended with the mob, I'm sure. But although man was guilty of the death of Christ, this was God's will. In His lifetime the Lord Jesus had spoken (at least on 3 separate occasions) about being "lifted up" (see John ch. 3 v. 14, 8 v. 28, 12 v. 32).

Taking the first of these references to Him being lifted up, John ch. 3 v. 14, the hymn writer penned the words,

There is life for a look at the Crucified One,
There is life at this moment for thee;
Then look, sinner, look unto Him and be saved,
Unto Him who was nailed to the tree

Look! Look! Look and live!
There is life for a look at the Crucified One,
There is life at this moment for thee.

Amelia M Hull (1812 – 1884).

No doubt Satan thought he had gained the victory at the cross, but death had no grip on the Lord of life. The third day, Jesus rose again from among the dead – hallelujah, Christ arose! The risen Lord was seen of His own in the 40 days which followed, and on one occasion there were over 500 disciples present, but the last sight that the world saw of Him was the cross of Calvary. The cross of Christ, the crucified Saviour, was God's wonderful plan of salvation! Satan failed to reckon on this, and man could not grasp it. Whilst on one hand the cross demonstrated the wonder of God's love to the world, on the other it demonstrated the enmity of a world against God. But the crucified Saviour was not the end, no only the beginning! The Gospel message is now preached, that salvation is through believing in a risen, glorified Saviour! Paul writing of worldly wisdom said, "Which none of the princes [or rulers] of this world knew: for if they had known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory" (see 1 Corinthians ch. 2 v. 8). You see, in crucifying the Saviour they had fulfilled God's plan of salvation.

Perhaps I should take this moment to ask you directly, have you accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as your Saviour? Sometimes folk speak about "having a belief or faith" but some of their ideas seem very vague and unclear. They seem uncertain about the matter of eternal salvation. Well, the Bible could not be clearer. We have all sinned and need personal salvation, forgiveness from our sins. The Lord Jesus Christ's death and resurrection are the only means whereby we can be saved. We must believe in Him, trusting only in His redeeming work. The moment we believe we are saved, and sealed by the Holy Spirit, and made ready for an eternity with Christ in heaven. (see Romans ch. 3 v. 23, Acts ch. 16 v. 31, 1 Corinthians ch. 15 vv. 1-4, John ch. 3 vv. 16-18, Ephesians ch. 1 vv. 13-14, ch. 5 vv. 25-26, 1 Thessalonians ch. 4 vv. 13-18).

If you do not know the Lord Jesus Christ as your own personal Saviour, then open your heart to Him now. In simple faith He will enter the heart of those who invite Him in. [As a child I sang,](#)

Into my heart, into my heart,
Come into my heart Lord Jesus,
Come in today, come into stay,
Come into my heart Lord Jesus.

Harry D Clarke (1888 – 1957).

And He did just that and has never left! My sins were forgiven, I was saved, and ready for heaven. Hallelujah, what a Saviour! My failure has no effect on my eternal salvation, happily that is entirely dependent on the One who never fails. What peace and assurance I have (and you can have, too), knowing that He is an “all the way home Saviour” and will never let us go.

We read,

“And the people stood beholding. And the rulers also with them derided him, saying, He saved others; let him save himself, if he be Christ, the chosen of God. 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” (vv. 35-37).

I'm sure there must have been a stir in Jerusalem each time there was a public crucifixion. The people would want to know who it was who was being crucified and what his crimes were. I guess it would have been ‘headline news’, however that was communicated in those days. The mock trial which had resulted in Pilate presenting Jesus to the people would have raised even more interest in the crucifixion of this ‘imposter’ as the Jews saw Him. That being the case, it is most striking to see what Pilate wrote as a title to be put on His cross. We need to look at all the Gospels to get the full superscription and note that this was written in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin. So everyone who witnessed this crucifixion could read, “THIS IS JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS.” The chief priests said to Pilate,

“Write not, The King of the Jews; but that he said, I am the King of the Jews”. But Pilate answered, What I have written I have written” (see John ch. 19 vv. 21-22).

Reading on in our chapter we find that one of the criminals, who was crucified next to Jesus, gave witness to the fact that Jesus had done nothing amiss, nothing worthy of this punishment, unlike himself and the other criminal. Turning to Jesus, he said, “Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom”, and the reply from the Saviour was, “Verily I say unto thee, To day thou shalt be with me in paradise.” Later we read that the centurion who saw all that had taken place, “glorified God, saying, Certainly this was a righteous man”(see vv. 42-43 & 47). Mark records that the centurion said, “Truly this man was the Son of God”, and Matthew tells us that there were others, too, who said, “Truly this was the Son of God” (see Mark ch. 15 v. 39, Matthew ch. 27 v. 54).

But the crowd (who I expect were mostly Jews) and their rulers seemed unmoved by what they were witnessing. They derided or ridiculed Him. The unrepentant malefactor joined in too, “If thou be Christ, save thyself and us.” Again, their thinking seemed to be, if He was Christ, then God would not allow Him to be crucified. The crucifixion of the Messiah, the Christ, the chosen of God, was something they just could not grasp. This was not the Messiah they had been waiting for or expecting. They were under the rule of the Romans and surely, they thought, their Messiah would bring them freedom and deliverance. As we have already said, a ‘crucified Saviour’ did not fit their idea of what a saviour ought to be. The cross of Christ remains a stumbling block to many Jews today who still will not have “this man.”

The great irony is that had Jesus saved Himself, and come down from the cross, He would not have been the Saviour. How often we have heard it said that it was not the nails which held Him to

the cross, it was His love. His love to His Father and His desire to finish the work given Him to do, and His love for all those who come into eternal blessing because of His sacrifice.

So many beautiful hymns come to mind as I read these verses, none more so than this,

Himself He could not save,
He on the cross must die,
Or mercy could not come
To ruined sinners nigh;
Yes, Christ, the Son of God, must bleed
That sinners might from sin be freed.

Himself He could not save,
Love's stream too deeply flowed,
In love Himself He gave,
To pay the debt we owed.
Obedience to His Father's will,
And love to Him did all fulfil.

Albert Midlane (1825 – 1909).

How thankful we should be that the Lord Jesus Christ accepted the cross as the will of His Father, and that His joy was to complete the work of salvation. Viewing the cross as already having been accomplished, He prayed to His Father, "I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do" (see John ch. 17 v. 4). How wonderful that from the cross He could proclaim, "It is finished" just as we have recorded for us at the close of Psalm 22, "He hath done it" (see Psalm 22 v. 31 JND). The writer of the Hebrew epistle writes,

"Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God" (see Hebrews ch. 12 v. 2).

In complete confidence the Lord said,

"Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost" (v.46).

The teaching of the apostles is that the church of God is composed of both Jews and Gentiles. All those who have accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as their Saviour are baptised (by the Holy Spirit) into that company, the body of Christ. In the days which followed Pentecost, the good news of salvation through faith in Christ Jesus was preached in Jerusalem, Judea, and throughout the wider regions. Today the Gospel of Christ Jesus is preached worldwide, and the church has members from "every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation" (see Revelation ch. 5 v. 9).

Today, the nation of Israel remains in a state of unbelief in relation to who Jesus is, but the day is coming when they will have their eyes opened. The prophet Zechariah writes of that day, still future,

"And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son..." (see ch. 12 v. 10).

Charles Wesley (1707 – 1788) wrote concerning that day,

Israel's race shall now behold Thee
Full of grace and majesty;
Though they set at nought and sold Thee,
Pierced and nailed Thee to the tree,
They in glory
Shall their great Messiah see.

Returning to our passage we read that “the soldiers also mocked him, coming to him, and offering him vinegar, and saying, If thou be the king of the Jews, save thyself.” The Lord did not receive the vinegar at that time. The accounts of both Matthew and Mark tell us that the mixture of vinegar, or wine and gall, was not received by the Lord. I believe this was offered to those who were to be crucified as a stupefying drink, with the intention of dulling the pain, but the Lord would not receive this. Rather He chose to experience the full reality in His body, soul, and spirit, of being crucified. At the end, after He had suffered and accomplished everything, He said, “I thirst.” Again He was offered vinegar, which He accepted (see John ch. 19 vv. 28-30).

I do trust that the reading and consideration on this solemn passage of Scripture has bowed our hearts in worship to the One who bore the cross for us.

May God bless you all.

Thank you for listening to this Truth for Today talk on The Gospel of Christ Jesus – a crucified Saviour, Luke ch. 23 vv. 33 – 38. Talk No. T1290

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