

The Cross of Christ

Luke 23:23

In Luke chapter 23, Luke provides for us a glimpse into the cross of Jesus. The cross that he bore on our behalf. You remember Luke, the inspired historian said, when they came to the place called Calvary, there they crucified him. And the male factors or thieves, one on the right hand and the other on the left. To understand that Jesus paid our sin debt, that he was willing to suffer, bleed and die so that we might have the opportunity to enjoy fellowship with God and ultimately to be in heaven one day with him.

The Bible speaks in very graphic terms about the suffering of our Lord Jesus Christ. Peter said that Christ also suffered for us in first Peter chapter two. He bore our sins in his body on the cross. Again, that's what Peter would write in first Peter chapter two. In chapter three, verse 18. Peter would say that Christ also once suffered for us, the just for the unjust, to bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but made alive by the spirit.

You remember the Hebrew writer said, though we were a son, yet learned obedience by the things which he suffered. I can't imagine in many respects the brutality of the cross, what the Lord experienced on my behalf. But how grateful I am that Jesus was willing to be the vicarious substitute for my sins. You remember the Apostle Paul said on one occasion, him who knew no sin, he became sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in him.

To realize that Jesus bore my sins on Calvary nearly 2000 years ago, inside the gates of Jerusalem. I can read of the Lord Jesus Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane. He. In John chapter 17, the Lord Jesus had been involved in a very intimate discussion with the apostles. They had partaking of the Passover feast. He had instituted that memorial feast that we know as the Lord's Supper, where he talked about the blood of the new covenant that would be shed for the remission of the sins of those who live.

Well, it's in that context that we can read of the Lord Jesus Christ lifting his eyes to heaven and saying, father, the hour has come. Glorify your son, that your son may also glorify you. You remember in verse four he would say, I've glorified you on the earth. I have finished the work which you've given me to do.

To understand that Jesus was born into this world, to die to bear our sins. John, in the revelation in chapter 13 verse eight, said that he is the lamb slain before the foundation of the world. When man sinned in the garden, God had the answer. The answer was the promised seed of Genesis 3:15 and so throughout the Old Testament we read of the development of that coming from a seed, the one who would again vicariously suffer, bleed, and died for our sins.

Just inside the walls of Jerusalem. Jesus, with the weight of the cross before him, is praying to the father. He had taken Peter, James, and John with him. They had accompanied him into the garden. The Bible tells us that Jesus began to pray to the father, saying, father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me. Three times Jesus asked the father about the impending cup that he would drink, that if there were any other way for his will to be accomplished, please let it come to pass.

But you remember, he tempered his thoughts by saying, nevertheless, not as I will, but your

will be done. Jesus, fully compliant to the will of the father. Jesus was willing to go to the cross. Now, can I fully grasp the fact that the second member of the Godhead was willing to come to Earth, Tabernacle in human flesh, and die on my behalf?

Really, the creator suffering at the hands of creation. And that's exactly what happened. You remember the Bible says the word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten of the father, full of grace and truth. When Paul wrote to the saints in Philippi, Paul said, have this mind in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, existing in the form of God, counter not being on an equality with God, a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men, and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient unto

death. Yes, even the death of the cross. So here is the God-Man, leaving the bliss of heaven. Well, we call him the God-Man. He was the God-Man while on earth. But Jesus left the glories of heaven to come to earth and to die for me. Now that ought to get our attention. The Bible says in the book of Luke that Jesus, being in agony, prayed more fervently.

And the Bible says that his sweat became as drops of blood falling to the ground. There is a medical condition in which this can occur. Now it's rare, but when people are under tremendous duress or stress, this can happen. And so here we see the humanity of Jesus. Again, the Lord Jesus wrestling with the weight of the cross.

Now, I would grant that Jesus suffered horrifically from a physical vantage point, and no doubt there was a lot of physical trauma to his body. The emotional strain and toil that that took probably incomprehensible. But when I think about what Jesus said from the cross, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? That really lends insight into the battle that he experienced in Gethsemane for me and for you.

Now Jesus, the Bible tells us, was betrayed by one of his own. For 30 pieces of silver, a fellow by the name of Judas Iscariot that had been with him for some three years, and he, like the other apostles, had a front row seat to the work of Jesus. He saw how he interacted with people in his day the compassion, the love, the care, the mercy, the extension of grace.

Time and again, he had the opportunity to visually see and hear the miracles. He saw. Those who were blind. He saw those people giving sight. He could hear those who had been mute that were later able to talk. He saw the dead raised. I mean, he saw all these things, and yet he betrayed him. Is there anything worse than someone that we might call an ally, a friend, a family member, someone that we consider to be very, very close to?

Is it not just gut wrenching when they betray us, when they fail to stand with us? Jesus experienced that. The Bible says that he was betrayed, bound. Taken before the Sanhedrin council. You know, the Bible says that he was beaten blindfolded. They wanted to know who is it that slapped you or hit you over and over again. The Lord Jesus experienced taunts.

And then the Bible tells us that he was brought before Robert, before Pontius Pilate. Interestingly, three times Pontius Pilate said, I find no fault in this man. Pilate realized that Jesus was an innocent man. The problem? Pilate was weak. Pilate was a politician, and so he gave in. When Pilate found out that Jesus was from Herod's jurisdiction, Herod being in Jerusalem at that time, he sent him to Herod here that longed to see Jesus.

He hoped to see some miracle done by. And the Bible tells us that he arrayed him in a gorgeous robe. And again we think about the thoughts and the sneers and the jeers. And after

having done all of that, sent back to Pilate again, Pilate had Jesus scourged. My understanding is that the scourge would be enough to kill a man.

Imagine, if you can, those who in that day in time took a leather whip and attached to that whip, or fragments of bone, or maybe metal shards, and they would literally they would literally lay open a man. Jesus was scourged by a Roman soldier. Can you imagine the shreds of flesh on his back? Probably his chest, the blood, the immensity of the blood that no doubt he would have lost from that?

When Pilate finally gave Jesus up to be crucified. The Bible tells us that they compelled a man by the name of Simon of Cyrene to bear cross. Now that's significant. Some have said that crossbeam weighed about 125 pounds. Jesus, no doubt, would have been a sturdy man. Strong. And yet he fell beneath the weight of the cross. Why?

Exhaustion. Loss of blood. Fatigue. I mean the Lord Jesus Christ. They beat him to a pulp. The cross that he fell beneath the weight of wasn't his cross. No. Jesus didn't have a cross? No, the cross that he was bearing was your cross. It's my cross. You see again, Paul said, him who knew no sin. He became sin on our behalf that we might become the righteousness of God in him.

I hear Paul saying in Second Corinthians chapter five again that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. And so Jesus fell beneath the weight of the cross. And Simon was compelled to bear that cross to Calvary, to Golgotha. And as Luke said in chapter 23 and verse 33, when they came to the place called Calvary, there they crucified him.

And the male factors of the thieves, one on the right hand and the other on the left. Imagine if you can. The Lord Jesus has the crown of thorns upon his head. The head is a highly vascular area of the human body. No doubt a lot of blood would have flowed from where those thorns pricked his brow. And they placed Jesus on that wood, on that tree, on that cross, and they nailed his hands and his feet to that old rugged cross, and then lifted that cross up.

Can you imagine the searing pain, the anguish, the hurt that he experienced on that occasion? My understanding is that the Persians, that they were the inventors of crucifixion, the Romans, however, they perfected it. They wanted a man to die by crucifixion and to suffer and suffer immensely. That was our Lord. He's hanging upon that cross. And imagine if you can.

Blood is flowing down his face. He doesn't have a. He doesn't have a hand free to wipe his brow so that he might see more clearly, but the blood is flowing on his face. And then what about the lack of oxygen? It's my understanding that the only way that those who were crucified could catch your breath, or maybe a deep breath, would be to push up with their feet.

Can you imagine the searing pain that would no doubt have riveted the body? Every time Jesus sought to get a breath? Unthinkable. The anguish, the pain, the horror of Golgotha. The Bible tells us that Jesus was on that cross for six long hours. Now we're talking about the saints just outside the walls of Jerusalem. Now, the single darkest day in the history of mankind was that day.

The flip side of that is it was the single greatest day in the history of the human family. Because, you see, on that day, God was dealing with the problem of sin, dealing with the problem of sin through His Son Jesus Christ. I can't imagine Jesus. I can't imagine the taunts, the snares. You remember they said, if you're the Son of God?

Well, number one, the question his sonship, he was a Son of God without question. And then to question his sovereignty. Well, if you're the Son of God, come down from the cross. Will believe you. Then could Jesus have come down from the cross? You know, he could have. Here's something to think about. Those who were jeering him and saying, come down from the cross and we'll believe you.

Had they genuinely known what was transpiring on that day, they would not have wanted Jesus to come down from the cross. And why is that? Because they, like us, needed him on that cross. They, like us, needed him to satisfy the scales of justice and the house of God, to pay the price for our redemption. The purchase price of our redemption was the shed blood of Jesus.

You see, the Bible says unto him who loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood. Revelation chapter one, verse five I think about the power of the blood of Christ, and I can hear Paul say, In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of his grace. Again, going back to the Lord Jesus, celebrating the Passover, and then the institution of what we call that memorial feast that occurs every first day of the week, the Lord's Day Sunday when Jesus said this is the blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.

You see the new covenant under which we live, ratified by the shedding of the blood of Jesus. And so here's Jesus hanging on that cross, writhing in pain, trying to rise just a little bit to catch your breath. And then can you hear him saying from the cross, father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. The Jesus expressing forgiveness to those who were before him, though they were taunting and jeering, though they were cheering on his death, the Lord Jesus spoke words of forgiveness.

You know, the Bible says that initially both of the thieves that were hanged nailed on the Lord Jesus Christ. And then over a period of time, one of the thieves began to soften, recognizing that in Jesus there was something different. And so he looked at the other thief, or said to the other thief, we indeed justly, he said, we receive the due reward of our deeds.

But this man, he's done nothing amiss. He recognized he recognized Jesus was innocent. The Lord didn't deserve to die on Calvary, but he was dying as a common criminal. And so he turned to the Lord Jesus Christ. And he said, Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom. And Jesus said, today you'll be with me in Paradise.

Now let me just very quickly parenthetically say here, there are a lot of people that have used this verse or these series of verses to somehow rule out what they believe is the importance of baptism. And the idea is, well, the thief on the cross, he wasn't baptized. Well, maybe he was, maybe he wasn't. We don't know. I do know that in Matthew's account, when John was preaching a baptism of repentance, that those in Jerusalem and Judea and those around the river Jordan, they came out and were baptized by him, confessing their sins.

Is it possible he'd been baptized according to the baptism of John? That could have happened? And then how would he know anything about the kingdom? Because you see John the Baptist and Jesus both preached about a coming kingdom. So he knew something. And then there's a second thought. And that is Jesus had power on earth to forgive sins.

Mark two verse ten. And then thirdly, and probably most importantly, we're not talking about the same covenants. We're not comparing apples to apples. You see the thief not under the mosaic dispensation. We're under the law of Christ. And so under the law of Christ, the

terms of admission into the kingdom of God set forth clearly by the apostles in acts chapter two, they heard the gospel.

They believe the gospel, and they wanted to know men and brethren, what shall we do? And Peter said, repent, let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of your sins. Verse three, or rather, verse 41 says, some 3000 souls yielded obedience to the gospel and were added to them. Verse 47 says, and the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

Now that was just a little excuses from our study. But let me ask this question. When you look at the cross, the cross of Calvary, what do you say? Let me tell you what I see. I see the depth of passion that God had for the human family. In other words, his immense love. You know, the Bible says, But God come in with his own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

To somehow wrap my mind around the fact that God in heaven, despite my sins, despite whatever ill will I might have toward others, or maybe even half toward him, he still loves me. Those folks that were assembled around the cross, the people that took place in the mockery of a trial and crucifying the Son of God. He still loved them, didn't he?

I mean, when he said, father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. Was that not an expression of his love? Didn't Paul say in Romans chapter five, verse six, but didn't the Bible say that Christ died for the ungodly when we were yet without strength? Sure he did. Didn't Jesus say, For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life?

Was it not the Apostle John that said many years ago here in this love, not that we love God, but that it loved us, sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. When Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus, he said, But God, who is rich in mercy. For the great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, made us alive together with Christ.

To understand that God loves you. And here's a thought God will always love you. You know Jeremiah chapter 31, verse three, Jeremiah said, on behalf of God to the nation of Israel, I've loved you with an everlasting love. God loves us, and there'll never be a time when he doesn't love us. Now he may not love what we're doing.

The Lord Jesus does not love, does not condone, does not approve of sin. He loves sin, but he loves us. No wonder John said we love him because he first loved us and then when I think about his purpose, the fact that Jesus had a divine purpose in going to Calvary, what was that purpose to liberate us? To give us an opportunity to enjoy fellowship with the father.

You remember Jesus said during his earthly ministry in John 14 verse six, I am the way, the truth, the life. No man comes unto the father, but by me. The Apostle said, Peter and John in Acts chapter four, verse 12, which say, neither is our salvation in any other. There is no other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.

If we're going to be saved, we have to be saved in and through Jesus, the Son of God. Now go back again and look at the events that transpired in the garden. The Bible tells us in Isaiah 59, verses one and two that sin separates us from God. The first couple enjoyed full fellowship with God, and then they transgressed the law of God given to them in the garden.

As a result of that, man became a stranger from his God. And God immediately introduced the promised seed of chapter three, verse 15. And going forward in time, you see the development of the coming of the redemptive plan of God, ultimately finding its fruition in Jesus. In

Psalm chapter 40, David talks about the coming of the Christ and the body that he would tabernacle in.

And you remember he said, I come in the volume of the book. It is written to me to do your will, O God. You see, Jesus came to reconcile us to the father. Paul, in writing to Timothy in first Timothy chapter two, said God would have all men to be saved, come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all.

Now let's just pause there for a moment. Jesus served as our mediator. He is our intercessor. He is the one who has reconciled us. So you might envision it like this. On the one hand, you have God the Father. On the other hand, you have the human family. And then you have the Lord Jesus Christ standing between those two parties.

And Jesus taking those two parties and bringing them together through his death on Calvary. No wonder Paul would say in Ephesians chapter two, in verse 16 that Jesus reconciled both you and Gentile in one body under God through the cross. Thank God for the cross. Now we can talk about the love of God. We can talk about his passion for us.

He has great purpose and that is to liberate us from sin. And we see that time and again throughout the gospel narratives. Listen to Jesus. Jesus said, I came not to be ministered unto, but to minister to give my life as a ransom for the many. Well, the ransom price was his blood. Jesus was willing to die for me.

He gave his body and his blood so that I might enjoy an opportunity to have fellowship with God, to be forgiven of sin. I want to close by saying, by asking this question, have you availed yourself of the benefits and blessings of the death of Jesus? And by that I mean, have you done what the Bible says to do to become a Christian?

I'm not talking about what people say. I'm not about what the Bible says. If we'll do what they did on Pentecost day, then we will enjoy the same benefits and blessings. Well, what did they do? Well, they believed in Jesus. They knew who he was. They put him to death. They were instructed to repent of their sins. That's what Peter said when they wanted to know.

What do we need to do? Furthermore, they were baptized into Christ. Now, Peter said that they were to be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. That means by his authority. Why then were they baptized? Well, so their sins could be forgiven so that they could enjoy salvation. Mark 16:16 so they could have their sins washed away.

Acts 22:16 and so that they might be added to the church. You see, the Church and Christ go hand-in-hand. You can't separate the two. The reason is because the church is the house of the saved. In Ephesians 5:23, the Bible says he is the Savior of the body. Well, who's the head, that's Jesus. He's the Savior of the body.

Well that's Christ. Well, the body is the church. So that means if we're in Christ and we're in the church that belongs to Christ, then we are among the saved, the redeemed, the cleansed. Thank you for your kind attention today as we've talked about the cross of Christ. And my prayer is that if you're not living as a Christian, you'll obey the gospel today.

Force too late. God bless.