

**The Crucifixion, Part 1:
The First Three Hours**
Looking into the Face of Jesus
The Life of Christ, 2: Pages 523-539
Manuscript: Lesson Plan 118

Introduction

The texts for this lesson are Matthew 27:35, 36, 39-44; Mark 15:24, 29-32; Luke 23:34-37, 39-43; and John 19:23-27. We will be drawing from all four accounts, but open your Bible to Luke 23 and John 19.

Remember that everything that we have recently discussed. All of the passion, emotion, pain, suffering, all was leading to this! The crucifixion of Jesus can be divided up into 2-3 hour intervals—three hours of light and three hours of darkness (see Mark 15:25, 33).

Right now, let us read Luke's and John's accounts (read).

There were several parties at the cross. First, we need to study . . .

The Soldiers—John 19:23-25

Four soldiers were assigned to the detail (John 19:23). They divided His garments into four parts, probably including His robe, headdress, belt, and sandals. They did not know what to do with His tunic (in Greek, literally "the garment worn next to the skin"). Why did they not know what to do? It was seamless and in one piece. This made it more valuable because most tunics were made of two or more pieces of cloth. This has often been called the one thing of value that Jesus owned. They decided to cast lots for it (John 19:24). Unknowingly, they fulfilled a prophecy of Scripture (Psalm 22:18).

The soldiers' purpose was to "keep watch over Him"—Matthew 27:36. They were responsible for "guarding" Jesus (see Matthew 27:54). They were not there to protect Him, but to make sure His friends would not remove Him from the cross. They had the same job in regards to the two thieves.

Now we turn our attention to . . .

The Crowd—All Accounts

Luke 23:35a says that a crowd "stood by, looking on." There were also those "passing by" (Mark 15:29, 30). Those looking on and those passing by were hurling verbal abuses at Christ. The soldiers and rulers/scribes sneered at Him as well.

Think about the verbal abuse of those watching. Those passing by said, "Ha! You who are going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save Yourself, and come down from the cross" (Mark 15:29, 30)!

Those passing by said, "If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross" (Matthew 27:40b).

The rulers chimed in with, "He saved others; let Him save Himself if this is the Christ of God, His Chosen One" (Luke 23:35b). And they followed that with, "He trusts in God; let God rescue Him now, if He delights in Him; for He said, "I am the Son of God" (Matthew 27:43); and, "He saved others; He cannot save Himself" (Matthew 27:42a). Perhaps as they pointed at the sign Pilate had written,

they laughed, "He is the King of Israel; let Him now come down from the cross and we will believe Him" (Matthew 27:42b).

The soldiers "also mocked Him, coming up to Him, offering Him sour wine, and saying, "If You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself!" (Luke 23:36, 37).

Finally there was the thief who said, "Are you not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!" (Luke 23:39).

You might think that all of this verbal abuse from the crowd, piled on top of everything else Jesus has had to endure, may have gotten to Him. But look at . . .

The Response of Jesus

Jesus knew that the people did not understand something of great importance. Jesus could not save Himself and still save the world. The rulers said that, if He would come down off the cross, they would "believe Him"; but they did not understand what He was going to do in a few days would be greater than coming down off the cross.

So, how did Jesus respond? Recall that Jesus taught His disciples to pray for their persecutors (Matthew 5:44). Jesus did just that. He prayed, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34a).

This is the first of seven "sayings" of the Lord on the cross. This was probably said early on in the sequence of events. Did Jesus' prayer forgive the sins of those He prayed for? No. They could not be forgiven until they repented of their sins and did God's will (see Acts 2:22, 23, 36-38).

In focusing of Jesus as He hung on the cross, it may be easy to forget that two others were paying the same (apparent) penalty. We now consider . . .

The Thief on the Cross

There was a bright spot during the first three hours of Christ's death. Matthew and Mark make it clear that both thieves insulted Jesus. Luke's account says that one of them stood up for Jesus. They probably both initially insulted Jesus, but one was eventually won over by Christ's spirit—perhaps His prayer for those tormenting Him cause a change in heart.

Turn your attention again to Luke's account (Luke 23:39-43). After one of the criminals hurled another insult, the other spoke up. Let us read what he said in Luke 23:40, 41 (read). He admitted that they were punished justly and that Jesus was innocent. He then asked Jesus to remember Him. Jesus said he would be with Him that day in Paradise (Luke 23:43).

Let us talk for a moment about Paradise. This stood for the Hadean world where the righteous dead await the Judgment—Abraham's bosom (remember the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:22). In Acts 2:31 Peter said that Jesus went to the Hadean world. We also know it was not heaven because several days later, Jesus said that He had not yet ascended to His Father (John 20:17).

Why was the thief able to be saved? Consider that we do not know that he was an alien sinner. He was more than likely a Jew since Rome would not crucify a Roman citizen. They crucified those who were the disobedient that lived near the area. He also asked, "Do you not fear God?" He could have been baptized by John or even the apostles.

However, this does not even matter because of the next three points. These three reasons make whether or not the thief was baptized irrelevant. First, he was saved before the Old Law was removed (Colossians 2:13, 14; Hebrews 9:15-17).

Second, he was saved before Christ gave the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19, 20; Mark 16:16; Luke 24:46, 47). And third, he was saved before the gospel was preached (1 Corinthians 15:1-4; 2 Thessalonians 1:8; 1 Peter 4:17).

The point to remember is that the thief is not an example of how individuals are saved today because of the above points. However, the thief is a great example of how Christ was dedicated to His mission to the very end; it was a positive moment of the cross scene and shows how the heart of a man can be touched by Christ's life and His death.

We now turn our attention to . . .

The Women at the Cross

Three of the Gospels have a list of the women at the cross of Jesus. Let us start by looking at John's list of women (John 19:25). John lists four women at the cross: Mary—Jesus' mother; Mary's sister; Mary, the wife of Clopas; and Mary Magdalene.

Matthew and Mark also list four women (Matthew 27:56; Mark 15:40). They list Mary—Jesus' mother (had left the scene); Salome—the wife of Zebedee; Mary—the mother of James and Joseph; and Mary Magdalene.

It is likely that Mary's sister was Salome, which would make James and John Jesus' cousins.

Jesus had compassion on His mother. He left His mother in John's care. He probably did not trust His brothers because they had not yet believed in Him. This also more than likely confirms that Joseph had already died. John 19:27 tells us, "From that hour" John took her in. This may have been the time he led her away from the scene.

There were others at the cross as well (Luke 23:49 says, "And all His acquaintances and the women who had followed him from Galilee stood at a distance watching these things").

Conclusion

Luke 23:49 is a powerful statement. We are now watching at a distance. What will your response be? Which thief will you be?