

# THE REAL JESUS: HIS CROSS

Week Six | September 23, 2018 | Murdered

## PREPARATION

### GETTING READY

Before your group meets next time, spend some time alone in God's Word reading through this week's text, Luke 23:26–56. Pray that God, through His Spirit, would bring to life the truth of this text and how it applies to your life.

## THIS WEEK

### KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

If we want to see the full demonstration of God's power and wisdom, we must look at the cross.

### THEOLOGY APPLIED

At His darkest hour, Jesus demonstrated humility, forgiveness, and commitment to God's care and His plan. We are called to be like Christ.

### MEDITATE

*"And Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do'" Luke 23:34a.*

## GETTING STARTED

+ Use this section to prepare your heart and mind for the truths of this week. This section will help to introduce the focus of this week's lesson.

On the day of Jesus' death, His last words were "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" and "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!"

Even historians and textual scholars who are skeptical of the Bible believe this must have happened. Not only is there abundant historical evidence for the event, they also argue that it is very unlikely this story is made up. If someone were creating a religion by spinning a false narrative, they wouldn't write it this way. They would have Jesus peacefully passing away with His followers around Him as He gave His last words of advice. The great founder of their new religion wouldn't be a seemingly unheroic, helpless, despondent man dying on a cross. This account must be eyewitness testimony of what really happened, because no human mind would make this up. It seems foolish. It seems like a defeat. The optics aren't good.

But that's the point, says Paul. He writes, "For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart'" (1 Corinthians 1:18-19). The world has a very clear idea of power and wisdom. Power is about winning, being the top dog, being in control, being untouchable. Likewise, wisdom is having the smarts needed to stay in the game and get ahead. But the Bible says if we want to see God's wisdom and power, we have to look at the cross.

On the cross, we see the Son of God forsaken, beaten, and killed like a common criminal. The world's perspective says this is the ultimate example of weakness and defeat. But the Bible says it is a demonstration of power strong enough to conquer both sin and death.

On the cross, we see God who came down to us and substituted Himself for sinful and unlovely people. The world says this move is stupid. It looks like someone didn't know how to make a good deal and got the short end of the stick. Plus, smart people climb up, not down. And yet the Bible says the cross is where the wisdom of God is put on full display.

The day the Buddha died, he gave his followers his final teaching. "Behold, O monks," he said, "This is my advice to you. All component things in the world are changeable. They are not lasting. Work hard to gain your own salvation."

From the world's perspective, this kind of death and these last words make a lot of sense. Laying in his bed surrounded by his disciples, the Buddha says life is short and things are decaying. Therefore, they should take their salvation seriously and work hard to get it! But Jesus, hanging on a cross, forsaken by everyone—including God—brings salvation to us. He proves that "the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men" (1 Corinthians 1:25).

## ❏ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

Today we will study Jesus' crucifixion. In this text, we see a remarkable demonstration of who the Real Jesus is. We will see the wisdom and power of God on full display through Him.

1. JESUS' HUMILITY
2. JESUS' FORGIVENESS
3. JESUS' COMMITMENT

### GOING DEEPER

*+ This next section will help show what God's Word says about this week's particular focus. Read through the Scripture passages and connect the text to this week's biblical truth.*

## JESUS' HUMILITY

### ❏ LUKE 23:26–38

**Q:** *How did Jesus respond to the people who were mourning and lamenting what was happening to Him?*

**Q:** *How did Jesus respond to those who crucified Him?*

After Pilate handed Jesus off to the Jews, they quickly moved forward with their execution plan. Luke tells us about several different encounters Jesus has on His way to the cross.

In verse 26, the soldiers grabbed a man named Simon of Cyrene. Cyrene was located in modern day Libya, North Africa. They put the cross on his back and told him to carry it as Jesus followed. The text says Simon was “coming from the country.” He was probably just passing through on business and had no idea what was happening, yet he got to feel the weight of Jesus' cross.

Verse 27 says the crowd was grief-stricken over what was happening to Jesus. But His response to them is very enlightening. In verses 28–31, He told them not to weep for Him. Instead, they should be weeping for

themselves, grieving over their own sins. An innocent man was being punished on their behalf, taking the condemnation they deserved. Their response should have been repentance before God, confessing that they deserved what Christ Himself was bearing.

Then, Jesus encountered more mockers and scorners. Jesus was nailed to a cross between two criminals. Beneath them were soldiers and religious rulers. The soldiers gambled to divide His garments, and the religious rulers mocked Him. There isn't much difference between the two groups.

The soldiers, in verse 37, taunted Him, saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" Like the mockers in Luke 22:63–65, these men spewed all kinds of ignorance and blasphemy. Their words might have sounded "wise" from the world's perspective. Their logic went something like this—*If Jesus were really God He could save Himself. But Jesus isn't saving Himself. Therefore, He cannot be God.* Makes sense. But we learn that the cross confounds even the best logic. There is a higher logic at play, a greater wisdom.

The Romans gave a subtle jab to the Jews by putting a sign above Jesus that read, "This is the King of the Jews." It was intended to mock not only Jesus, but the Jews as well, a reminder that the Romans were their conquerors and the Jews were weak and pathetic. It was a figurative flexing of muscles, a demonstration of worldly "power."

Q: *What is your reaction when you think about the cross? Do you feel sorry for Jesus or do you weep for your own sins?*

Q: *In what ways have we twisted Christianity to be more aligned with the wisdom of the world than the wisdom of the cross? How have we become like the religious rulers in these verses?*

## JESUS' FORGIVENESS

### LUKE 23:39–43

Q: *What is the difference between the two criminals' responses to Jesus?*

**Q:** *In what ways does the second criminal “get” the gospel?*

Jesus looked down on the scene of religious rulers and soldiers engaged in power plays with one another. The only thing they agreed on was that they hated Jesus and wanted Him dead. What a perfect picture of the fallen, corrupt world. And His response? “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.” While He was being tortured, Jesus extended compassion to a broken world. While being mocked, He made it possible for God to forgive them. Paul says, “While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

In verses 39–42, Luke gives an account of Jesus’ conversation with the two criminals crucified on either side of Him. The first criminal insulted Jesus just like the soldiers and religious leaders. He saw the situation through the same lens as the world, and the cross looked like folly to him. With his final breath, he chose to blaspheme God.

The second criminal responded differently. Instead of mocking Jesus, he tried to talk sense into the other criminal. “Do you not fear God?” he said. He is saying “Are you really such a fool as to think you can mock God?” By this statement, the second criminal reveals what he believes about Jesus—that He is God, and He is not mocked. He reminds the other man that he is in no position to condemn anyone. They are both criminals, but Jesus is innocent. They are not in a place of superiority!

The second criminal thinks rightly about himself. He recognizes he is a sinner who deserves to die for his sins. Jesus, in contrast, is the only one present who is innocent. He does not deserve to die. Then, in verse 42, he asks Jesus to remember him when He comes into His kingdom. The second criminal puts his hope in God’s grace. His salvation comes not through His own doing, but through his faith in God’s “remembrance” of him.

**Q:** *How does this passage change the way you approach unbelievers? How does it help you pray for them better?*

# JESUS' COMMITMENT

## LUKE 23:44-56

**Q:** *How does the text describe the scene? Why do you think it is significant that creation was affected by what was going on?*

**Q:** *What were the different reactions to Jesus' death?*

The hour of Jesus' death had come. Creation mourned. The sun went dark for three hours. Darkness covered the land. But in that moment, a miracle happened. In the temple, the curtain, which divided the most holy place where God dwelled from the outer court where the people worshipped, was ripped in two. There was no longer a separation between the presence of God and the people. No longer a division between where God lived and where His people were. No longer were the priests the only ones allowed to approach God on behalf of the people. Now all people could come to God as priests.

In verse 46, Jesus utters His last words. "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" In His final moment, His attention was focused on God, His heart fixed on God's trustworthiness. He committed Himself into the hands of His loving Father. No matter how bleak the circumstances are, even if they take us to our death, do we demonstrate such trust in God's care for us, or is our trust contingent upon our circumstances?

One of the soldiers who helped put Jesus to death and many in the assembled crowd had their eyes unveiled. They saw Jesus for who He really was, the innocent Lamb of God. They realized what they had done, that they were complicit in His death. They were mockers, scorners, blasphemers, and murderers.

A man named Joseph, a member of the council, did not agree with the decision the other religious leaders had made regarding Jesus. He knew Jesus was the Messiah and refused to participate in their execution plan. He requested Jesus' body so he could bury it in an unused tomb he owned. He desired to honor the Lord with his possessions. But Joseph only saw Christ's death. He forgot about all the times Jesus promised He would not only die, but would rise again. Joseph forgot about the resurrection.

Verse 54 tells us it was the day before Passover. The women would be ceremonially unclean and unable to prepare

for Passover if they handled a dead body. So they saw where the tomb was, but waited a couple of days until Passover was over before they visited it on the third day after Jesus' death. After Jesus died, the women quickly fell back into religious observation to atone for their sins. They had to remain clean by keeping themselves from being defiled. They didn't realize that they were made clean by the blood of the Lamb.

♀: *Have you forgotten about the resurrection? Is the counterfeit Jesus you worship still buried in the grave or is He alive and reigning?*

♀: *Is the counterfeit Jesus you worship one who enjoys the victory of the resurrection without going through the cross? Does He "win" the way the world does, by climbing the ladder and conquering, or does He win by losing, as we see through the cross? Do you glory in the power and wisdom of Christ crucified, or do you superimpose a worldly idea of power on Him, creating a counterfeit god?*

♀: *Have you forgotten you are cleansed by the blood of the Lamb? Have you fallen back into religious observation to clean yourself up?*

## NEXT STEPS

+ *Connect the truths from God's Word to your daily life. Process how what you've learned this week will impact the way you live beyond today and into the future.*

♀: *Of all the people we encounter in this text—Simon, the mourning crowd, the criminals, the soldiers, the religious leaders, the centurion, the crowd of spectators, Joseph, the women—who do you identify with most? How does this text both correct and comfort you?*

♀: *Do you see yourself as complicit in Christ's death or does it feel far removed from you?*

- Q: *Is there a specific way God is calling you to grow in humility and forgiveness?*
- Q: *Do you commit yourself into the Lord's care, regardless of the circumstances?*
- Q: *Discuss this quote by C. John Miller: "Repentance is humility in action."*
- Q: *The criminal on the cross experienced a deathbed conversion. Have you ever observed one of those? What do you think about them? Regarding such conversions, what do we learn about grace in light of Matthew 20:1-16.*

## PRAY

+ *Use these prayer points to connect your time in prayer to this week's focus.*

- Father, thank You for being a trustworthy God. Thank You that I can entrust myself to Your care, knowing nothing happens to me apart from Your loving consent and omnipotent hand.
- Jesus, I too am complicit in your death. I am one of your mockers, scorners, blasphemers, and murderers. Thank You for dying to forgive sinners like me.
- Holy Spirit, please continue to transform me into the image of Christ. Root out my pride and grant me humility. May I be quick to forgive like Christ forgives me. May I trust in God and humbly accept that which comes from His hand.

## COMMENTARY

**LUKE 23:26** Jesus was scourged before being forced to carry His cross. He was too physically weak at that point to carry a 100-pound cross on His back.



**LUKE 23:32** Being crucified between two criminals fulfills the prophecy in Isaiah 53:12, that in His death the Messiah would be “numbered with the transgressors.”

**LUKE 23:34** By asking God to forgive them, Jesus is exemplifying His own teaching in Luke 6:35 on loving one’s enemies.

**LUKE 23:36** By offering Jesus sour wine, or “wine vinegar,” they would have prolonged His suffering by quenching His thirst and keeping Him alive longer.

**LUKE 23:44–45** The sixth hour would have been noon. The ninth hour would have been 3pm.

*\*All exegetical content and commentary resourcing for this lesson was provided by the ESV Study Bible Commentary Notes, the Christ Centered Exposition (Luke), and Preaching the Word (Luke).*

