

Session 4

March 24, 2024

## THE DEATH OF JESUS

Luke 23:32-49

There were seven last sayings of Jesus from the cross. None of the Gospel accounts records them all, but a good harmony of the Gospels will put them in the right order. Luke's account contains three of them. This week's lesson will touch on all three, with a slight interlude to allow for the mockery that took place on that day; the circumstances of which make the Lord's statements that much more meaningful. The events of this text divide nicely into four key themes.

**Forgiveness (vv. 32-34).** Luke the historian is again careful to record the unique setting at Calvary. His words—as well as the other three accounts—are simple and factual, and nearly devoid of emotion. What captivated me in these few verses is the irony. It's ironic that Jesus, the sinless Son of God, was to be executed between two who had been rightly condemned to death for their sin (v. 32). It's ironic that the place of execution was called Calvary, which means “skull” (v. 33). While the name was likely the result of the rock formations and indentations in the rugged hillside, the very word conjures visions of death. It's even more ironic that while the Roman guards were in the very act of crucifying Him, He prayed not for His own deliverance, nor for the collective destruction of His enemies, but rather for their forgiveness. As Jesus told His disciples (see Matt. 26:53) and the hymnist wrote for the church, “He could have called 10,000 angels...” Instead, He chose to die. But before that happened, He chose to pray for those who were killing Him. For reflection: *The Gospel accounts of Christ's crucifixion are notably devoid of emotion. While so many modern preachers fill the story with graphic descriptions and emotive conjecture, why do you think the Gospel writers kept to the facts?*

**Foolishness (vv. 34b-39).** The foolish reactions of the bystanders began with a roll of the dice. It's interesting that the only thing that happened by chance on this day was the dividing of His garments. Actually, that His clothing would be pilfered was predicted in Scripture (Ps. 22:18). Then He was met with religious mockery (v. 35) by the Jewish leaders responsible for His crucifixion. Then He was met with secular mockery by the Romans who offered Him sour wine (v. 36) and declared Him “a king” (v. 37). Notably, Jesus was called the king of the Jews only at His birth by the magi who believed it (Matt. 2:2), and at His death, by His enemies who did not. For reflection: *Read Matt. 19:19-22. What do you think is the significance of the sign placed on Jesus' cross? Why do you think Matthew included such a detailed account of it?*

**Faith (vv. 39-44).** Through the centuries, many have noted the “categories of humanity” represented at Calvary. According to Matthew and Mark, both thieves started off “reviling” Jesus. All of us start out that way (see Rom. 3:23). But when confronted with the reality of his own sin and the deserved consequences for it, as well as the righteousness present in Christ even at His death, one thief turned toward Him for forgiveness. This was a distinct act of faith. The thief knew he was dying that day, yet looked to a coming kingdom, where King Jesus would reign (v. 42). This is the story of redemption: Christ stands between the sinner lost and the sinner saved! For reflection: *How could you use this positioning of Jesus between the two thieves as a witnessing tool when sharing the gospel?*

**Finality (vv. 44-49).** The period of darkness and splitting of the temple's veil as well as the other supernatural events at the time (see Matt. 27:51-53), are all significant, but what I want to focus on is the finality of the Passion. Jesus' final cry to God was preceded by His declaration "It is finished" and followed by Luke's simple statement, "He breathed His last." This indicates two important truths. First, Jesus' earthly work was done; and second, Jesus was dead. These two truths would be especially important three days later! For reflection: *Read Matt. 27:51-54. What does Matthew emphasize in v. 54? Why do you think verse 54 is so important?*