

Luke

The Gospel for Everyone

Study 27 | Luke 23:26-43

“The Passion of God”

News and Needs

Upcoming Events:

- **Good Friday Service**, April 2nd, 7:30 PM at St. Augustine’s Church (116 6th Avenue).
- **Easter Potluck**, Sunday, April 4th, immediately following the worship service.
- **Prayer Night**, Thursday, April 8th 7:30 PM at the church.
- **Introduction to Resurrection Class**, Saturday, April 10th, 9AM-1PM, at the church.
- **Prayer Class**, Sunday, April 11th, immediately following the worship service in the sanctuary. The topic will be: *Tasks for Prayer*.
- **Dinner with Friends**, April 15th, 16th, and 17th. See website for more details.

Opportunities to Serve:

- **New Orleans Mission Trip**, April 24th - May 1st. **Registrations are due by April 4th**. See website for more details.
- **Easter Choir**, The Resurrection Choir will sing on Easter Sunday, April 4. Rehearsal will be that day at 3:30pm at the church. If you are interested in participating, please contact Evan Mazunik at evan@evanmazunik.com.

1. Why does Jesus tell the crowds to weep and fear for themselves? What does this stern warning tell us about this soon to be executed King and the Kingdom he brings?

Even on the way to be crucified, Jesus is still calling Israel to forsake their misplaced pride and false trust in their place in the grand national scheme. To put aside their ambitions to collide with Rome, overthrow their occupation, and reestablish Israel at the top of the national pecking order. Israel should follow Jesus in the way peace, or Judgement is coming. On that day of judgement, the curse of a barren womb will be reversed. For on that day, you will want to be able to flee and get out of Jerusalem as fast as you can. You won't want to have little children slowing you down. In some ways, for those children, it would have been better to never have been born. Those caught in the devastation will cry out for the mountains and hills to fall on top of them and hide them from the death and destruction. Jesus' comment about the wood says to the effect, "You think this is bad? Just wait, it is going to be worse. They do violence to me now when there is no cause for it. It will be worse when there is cause for violence."

Over and over again, as Jesus has marched on to his death in Jerusalem, he has warned Israel that Judgement will come if they will not bow the knee to him as King and follow him in the way of true victory and true peace. This is Jesus' last warning to that effect before he dies. And with his other warnings of this immanent judgement, there are two references. The first the disciples and early Church would see in their lifetime, when Rome destroys Jerusalem, the Temple, and therefore Old Testament Judaism as they knew it. That happens in 70AD. The second, is to a still future Judgement, when Jesus will return in glory to judge the living and the dead and his kingdom will have no end.

The beauty of the Gospel is that Jesus, though not a traitor, though not a violent insurrectionist, or terrorist, goes on to die the death of a criminal. Jesus dies the death of a rebel, so that we, the true rebels against God's gracious rule, can be forgiven. Even as Jesus is calling Israel to repent of their pride and violence, he is marching up a hill to die for them, that they might be reconciled to the Father, and find true peace.

2. What is revealed about Jesus when he prays for his enemies' forgiveness? What does this have to say about the forgiveness you've received from Jesus? What does this have to say about extending forgiveness to others, even our enemies?

Here you want to steer clear of the trite answer, "Jesus is God, he's perfect, that's why he can pray for his enemies' forgiveness." Your group should dig deeper into what it means that King Jesus prays for his enemies, in the midst of dying one of the cruelest execution methods devised, and mercilessly being mocked while he dies. Think about the crowds mocking Jesus to come down off the cross and save himself. This is the God of the Universe. He could have come down if he wanted to. He also could have wiped his persecutors out with a glance. But yet he doesn't. He stays true to the Father's course, the Father's plan to provide redemption for wicked man and a broken world. Jesus is the faithful Adam, the true Israelite. He doesn't reach out and grasp for what is not yet meant to be his (Philippians 2). He didn't do it in the wilderness when he was tempted by Satan. He didn't do it in the garden when he actually begged the Father to let this cup pass from him. And he doesn't do it now, even as the very people he is dying for mock him.

I John 3:1 - "Behold what manner of love the Father has given unto us, that we should be called children of God, and so we are." Even though we are rebels against God, even though we turn from him and try to live as though we do not need him, even though we spit in his face after he blesses us with so many good gifts, he still pursues us. He still prays for our forgiveness. Why? Because God is a God full of compassion, abounding in steadfast love. From the day our first parents chose to go their own way in the garden, God has faithfully pursued a course of action to redeem mankind, and reconcile us back to himself. It's a mystery, maybe, why he does it. But we see it revealed in the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, we pray for our enemies to escape the Judgement that is coming for sin and rebellion against the Lord. We pray for them to cast themselves upon Jesus' cross, and find the mercy of the Father. If God, the King of the Universe can forgive his enemies, so can we who have been forgiven of so much. That may sound old and trite, but it is a truth that we can't get into our hearts deep enough. Only those who know the extent of the damnation they deserve, understand the love they have been shown in Christ. And therefore are able to show that love to others. If you can't forgive, look again at Jesus' cross.

3. What do the interactions between the thieves and Jesus show us about King Jesus? What struggles or sins in our lives do we think are beyond the power of his cross? Who in our lives do we think there is no time left for the cross of Jesus to save? What evils in our neighborhoods, city, and world do we think the power of the cross can not redeem?

Yes, Jesus promises that Judgement will befall Israel if they do not repent and believe the good news of Jesus, and put their trust fully in him. But there is always time. Jesus is merciful, and he gives all men every where time to repent. It is never too late. And when we do, we will find Jesus there with open arms.

The thief's repentance is simple. He casts himself fully on the mercy of Jesus. And Jesus accepts his repentance. We must be careful that we are not too critical or unaccepting of others' repentance. Yes, we hold one another accountable to live as becoming a Christian, but we must guard ourselves from setting standards of penance higher than Jesus would demand.

Too often, we think Jesus' mercy is all good for the thief, but somehow, our sin falls outside of Jesus' ability to save us. Rather than cast ourselves upon the cross of Jesus, we stay busy crucifying ourselves. This is understandable, it takes a full surrender to Jesus' mercy, like the thief, and our hearts too often hold on to our sin and guilt as a last measure of control we don't want to entrust to Jesus' power to save. Jesus' perfect sacrificial death is sufficient. To live as though he has no power over our sin and struggle is just a form of disbelief.

The great mercy Jesus shows the thief on the cross should also give us hope that there is no one outside of Jesus' power to save. Who have you given up hope that Jesus could ever draw to himself? This is tough, as often they are people most loved by us. But we must never give up hope, never stop praying for them, never stop laying down our lives for them. Likewise, there is great evil and injustice all around us. Again, we must guard ourselves from ever thinking that Jesus could never work in that place of brokenness. Nothing is too far gone for our good and gracious King to bring his kingdom to bear.

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