

### 3 Days that Changed the World Friday – An Unthinkable Death – Luke 23:32-49

In middle of Easter mini-series – 3 Days that Changed the World

Looking at the last days of Christ's life including the day before he was crucified, the day he died, and the day he rose again

Doing this because – by better knowing what he did/endured, we'll better know him

Last week – looked at the perversion of justice God used on Thursday, to convict his Son

Today, it's Friday, April 7<sup>th</sup> AD 30, and an Unthinkable Death from **Lk 23:32-49**

Notice the timeline – won't take the time to go back through it

There to help you put the events of these last days together

For a more extensive one – outline online or at Books and Things table in lobby

Context – Jesus is on the way to Golgotha/Calvary to be crucified

Just warned the women who were following him of impending destruction

Prophecy fulfilled in AD 70 when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem; scattered people

Luke continues in v32 (read passage). . .

**Christ's death was unthinkable because . . .**

• **It was physically excruciating (v32-33)**

Agonizing, unbearable, terrible, awful, painful

Unfortunately, it was also fairly common in those days

Practiced from 6<sup>th</sup> century BC until Constantine banned it in 337 AD

But it was the Romans perfected it

It was so uncivilized, barbaric, and inhumane that it was against the law for a Roman to be crucified

Started with a scourging – known as the “intermediate death”

Two men whipping the back of the criminal with leather strips tipped with bone/metal

Loss of blood and shock weakened them and hastened their eventual death

Sometimes killing them prematurely

After the scourging, the victim was forced to carry the cross to the place of crucifixion

Outside the city walls; Hands nailed to the cross beam; Cross beam attached to the post

Feet nailed through the heel; Legs twisted sideways, 90 degrees to the torso

Resulted in lack of blood flow which caused cramping and spasms

In spite of all that, death on a cross was a slow, agonizing torture

They would hang for days; Low to the ground

Dogs would sometimes try to eat their flesh

Often times their legs were broken to speed their death

Eventually they died of exhaustion, dehydration, and asphyxiation

No wonder . . .

*Christ crucified* [is a] *stumbling block to the Jews and folly to Gentiles* (1 Cor 1:23)

It was unthinkable to the Jews that their Messiah, the Chosen One, would suffer so

It was unthinkable to the Gentiles that a god would die a criminal's death

Christ's death was unthinkable because it was physically excruciating

That doesn't include the emotional suffering of public humiliation

• **It was publicly humiliating (v35-38)**

Started with a lack of clothing

It was common practice to strip a criminal naked before nailing him to the cross

The usual sites for the crosses were along roads as people entered and left the city

On top of that, he was taunted – the cruelty is unthinkable

Rulers scoffed at him (35) – if you're so powerful, prove it; rescue (save) yourself

See, he can't do anything about it – he's obviously not the Messiah or Son of God

So they would've felt vindicated in convicting him of blasphemy

Soldiers mocked him (36) – what kind of a king hangs powerless and naked on a cross

Offered him sour wine – trying to weaken his resolve; get him to say something

Have a little fun; Get him drunk and take advantage of him

Refused – so as not to diminish the effectiveness/worth of his sacrifice in any way

Inscription – it was not only a slam against the Jewish people in general

But a slam against his claim; Perpetual invitation for people to hurl insults

Christ's death was unthinkable because it was publicly humiliating, physically excruciating, and worst of all . . .

• **It was spiritually devastating (v44)**

While the facts are there re the physical suffering . . .

Gospel writers don't go into much detail

Could be because original audience knew what was involved

But more likely – they wanted to focus on the *spiritual* aspects of his death

With all the attention given to the physical recently, we must be careful not to lose sight of what the biblical writers focused most on – the spiritual implications of his death

Many people died on a cross and suffered like Christ – he wasn't unique in that

What was unique is *why* he suffered and died

And *that* he suffered and died *innocently*, as a *perfect* sacrifice

No one else could claim that; No one else would do that

Bible says someone might suffer/die for a good man, but for a sinner like you and I –

Only Jesus was willing to do that

It's the spiritual aspects of his death set him apart, not the physical

The darkness of v44 clues us in that something spiritually devastating was going on

Mark tells us that it was devastation of separation

That's why Jesus cried out – *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?* (Mk 15:34)

Why have you turned your back on me? Why have you separated yourself from me?

Answer is given throughout the rest of the NT

He was spiritually separated from the Father because of our *sin*

He bore our sins in his body on the tree (1 Pet 2:24)

He became sin who knew no sin (2 Cor 5:21)

Because of that he suffered God's wrath (1 Jn 2:2)

Cursed for our sake (Gal 3:13)

Just as our sin separates *us* from God (Is 59:2), our sin separated *him* from God

When all he knew was God's perfect and complete favor up to that point, it was spiritually devastating to be separated from him, and under his wrath

Point is this – the *infinitely* perfect, close relationship that the Father, Son, and HS enjoyed since before time began . . . was *infinitely* broken 6 hours one Friday

As bad as the physical pain and public humiliation was, it *pales* in comparison to the spiritual devastation of God’s wrath and separation

And yet . . .

**God used an unthinkable death to . . .**

• **Fulfill his Word (v32-34, 46,49)**

Lest you think God’s Word is easy come, easy go – think again

What he says, goes

The crucifixion of Christ is one of the clearest, most significant examples in Bible of God fulfilling/applying his Word

Consider these various statements about the Suffering Servant in **Is 53**, about 750 years beforehand –

*His appearance was marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the children of mankind*

*He was despised and rejected by men*

*We considered him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted*

*He was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities*

*He was oppressed, and he was afflicted*

*He was cut off from the land of the living; It was the will of the Lord to crush him*

God used an unthinkable death to fulfill an unbelievable prophecy

Listen to Ps 22 (turn there) – David writes on behalf of a Messiah he didn’t even know and wouldn’t come for another 1000 years

1 – *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning?*

6 – *I am . . . scorned by mankind and despised by the people. All who see me mock me; they make mouths at me; they wag their heads.*

[They say] *“He trusts in the Lord; let him deliver him; let him rescue him, for he delights in him!”*

14 – *I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted within my breast; my strength is dried up like a potsherd [ceramic], and my tongue sticks to my jaws; you lay me in the dust of death.*

*For dogs encompass me; a company of evildoers encircles me; they have pierced my hands and feet – I can count all my bones – they stare and gloat over me; they divide my garments among them and for my clothing they cast lots.*

Because that didn’t happen to David, this Psalm was considered a Messianic prophecy  
God used the unthinkable death of Christ to fulfill it

**John 19:36** – *These things took place* [referring to piercing of side, and unbroken legs] *that the Scripture might be fulfilled: “Not one of his bones will be broken.”*

Applying the instructions of Ex 12:46 re the Passover lamb, to Jesus

**John 19:37** – *And again another Scripture says, “They will look on him whom they have pierced.”*

Quoting God in **Zech 12:10** – *“And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn.”*

God’s Word is so important, he used an unthinkable death to fulfill it; and he did so to . . .

• **Save our souls (v39-45)**

See it in the . . .

1. Symbolism of the Passover meal the day before

Cover that this Friday when come to the Lord’s Table

2. Imagery of the torn curtain in the temple

3. Christ’s interaction with the criminal on the cross

➤ Re the curtain – read 44-45

No ordinary curtain – 90 feet high

Separated the Holy of Holies, the place of God’s presence in the middle of the temple, from the rest of the world

No one could pass through that curtain except the high priest, and then only once a year on the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) . . .

To sprinkle the blood of the sacrifice on the ark, ensuring a right relationship between God and his people

Point is – only one person, once a year could enter God’s presence

When this curtain was torn in two (top to bottom; Matt 27) . . .

It was meant to illustrate that the death of Christ removed the barrier of the Law with all its impossible restrictions – and replaced it with himself

Heb 10:20 – Christ opened *a new/ living way* into the presence of God through himself

That is – through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ (a relationship based on faith, belief, and repentance) . . . the way to God is open to all, anytime, all the time

Not just one person, once a year

Good time to say, when it comes to being reconciled to God – it’s not *what* you know, it’s *who* you know

You don’t need a priest/pastor to go to God – you need Jesus

Bible says there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus who gave himself as a ransom for all (1 Tim 2:5)

God used an unthinkable death as a ransom to save our souls – see it the imagery of the torn curtain and in Christ’s . . .

➤ Interaction with the criminal on the cross (39-43)

Who somehow recognized/believed that Jesus’ death was not a failure . . .

But the means to carry out his purpose

Starts by rebuking the “bad” criminal in v39-41

Hello! Is anybody home?

The Son of God is getting the same treatment as we are, and he’s obviously innocent

Which means something’s up here – not a good time to be hurling insults

Pleas for mercy would be more appropriate, don’t you think?

He turns to Jesus and says – *remember me when you come into your kingdom* (42)

I deserve to be punished, but have mercy on me

Jesus does, saying – *Truly . . . today you will be with me in Paradise* [heaven] (43)

Whether the repentant criminal knew it or not, God was about to save his soul precisely because he didn’t save his Son’s

2 principles here we can't miss

1. You don't have to know it all or understand everything in order to be saved
2. There is such a thing as a death-bed/death-row conversion

God used an unthinkable death to fulfill his Word, save our souls, and . . .

• **Change our lives (v46-49)**

➤ Read v47 (Mark – Surely this man was the Son of God)

The soldier got it

He was so close to the situation the truth overwhelmed him and he couldn't help but admit it and be changed

Is that you?

Have you allowed yourself to get close enough to the cross, be overwhelmed by Jesus?

Do you get it? Have you admitted the truth and praised God?

Or are you fighting it?

Likely that some of you are, because you're afraid of being changed

You're afraid of getting too close to his unthinkable death . . .

For fear you'll have to admit something you'd rather not (he's Lord and you're not)

For fear you're beliefs will be challenged

Just like soldier had to give up his preconceived notions that Jesus *deserved* to die

So you stay as far away as possible from church, the Bible, other believers, and the unthinkable death that Jesus died to change your life

Fortunately, the soldier didn't; He got close and was changed, and . . .

➤ So were the crowds – read v48

They were disturbed; Who wouldn't be after seeing such a spectacle?

It was right in front of them; Fresh in their minds/hearts

There's a real risk if you've been a believer for some time, of letting the memory of his unthinkable death fade

No longer is it disturbing, offensive, unthinkable for you that Christ suffered and died on a cross, separated from the Father – because of your sins

God used an unthinkable death to change the world

The most unthinkable thing you can do is ignore it

Come near – and let him save you

Come near – and be changed all over again