



THE KING OF THE JEWS
UNIT 27 • SESSION 2

THE CRUCIFIED KING

MAIN POINT

Jesus gave up His life to provide salvation to all who repent of their sin.

LUKE 23:32-38 • JESUS EXTENDS FORGIVENESS TO THE EXECUTIONERS

32 Two others—criminals—were also led away to be executed with him. **33** When they arrived at the place called The Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals, one on the right and one on the left. **34** Then Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, because they do not know what they are doing.” And they divided his clothes and cast lots. **35** The people stood watching, and even the leaders were scoffing: “He saved others; let him save himself if this is God’s Messiah, the Chosen One!” **36** The soldiers also mocked him. They came offering him sour wine **37** and said, “If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself!” **38** An inscription was above him: This Is the King of the Jews.

LUKE 23:39-43 • JESUS PROMISES SALVATION TO THE REPENTANT

39 Then one of the criminals hanging there began to yell insults at him: “Aren’t you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!” **40** But the other answered, rebuking him: “Don’t you even fear God, since you are undergoing the same punishment? **41** We are punished justly, because we’re getting back what we deserve for the things we did, but this man has done nothing wrong.” **42** Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” **43** And he said to him, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

LUKE 23:44-49 • JESUS ENTRUSTS HIMSELF TO THE FATHER

44 It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three, **45** because the sun’s light failed. The curtain of the sanctuary was split down the middle. **46** And Jesus called out with a loud voice, “Father, into your hands I entrust my spirit.” Saying this, he breathed his last. **47** When the centurion saw what happened, he began to glorify God, saying, “This man really was righteous!” **48** All the crowds that had gathered for this spectacle, when they saw what had taken place, went home, striking their chests. **49** But all who knew him, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.

INTRO OPTION 1**KING OR QUEEN OF ANYTHING****SUPPLIES LIST****NONE**

Invite students to stand in a circle. Explain that students will share things their peers are good at, one at a time, as you go around the circle.

After something is chosen, invite that student to say “I am King/Queen of _____.” Keep going until all students get to be the king or queen of something.

Explain that our titles were sometimes funny and creative, but they helped others understand something about who we are. Although the Roman officials meant to mock Jesus, they inscribed a title above Him that said He was the King of the Jews. Truthfully, Jesus is our King; He just wasn’t the kind of king they expected. Today we’ll explore the kind of king He is.

INTRO OPTION 2**SAY IT LIKE YOU MEAN IT****SUPPLIES LIST****NONE**

Have you ever found yourself in a situation where something funny but unfortunate happened to your friend and you laughed? Maybe her ice-cream fell off the cone and onto the ground. Or maybe he tripped over his untied shoelace. If you’ve ever been giving the side-eye for laughing at a time like that, you’ve probably struggled to say “Sorry” like you really mean it.

Invite students to come up with ridiculous phrases that are tough to say without laughing—they can say funny things or be completely nonsensical combinations of words. It’s hard to say something seriously that we don’t mean. But the good news is, when we say sorry for our sin and mean it (turn away from it), Jesus forgives us right then. We’ll see an example of this in today’s session when Jesus forgave a criminal hanging on the cross beside Him.



SCRIPTURE READING

MAIN POINT

Jesus gave up His life to provide salvation to all who repent of their sin.

1. JESUS EXTENDED FORGIVENESS TO THE EXECUTIONERS

READ LUKE 23:32-38

Jesus taught on several occasions that we should love those who persecute us. And now we see Jesus live this out. He didn't just "turn the other cheek" (see Matt. 5:39); Jesus literally asked the Father to forgive those who were putting Him to death. In His most painful moment, Jesus showed mercy and compassion to those who mocked and executed Him. Jesus recognized their ignorance and pleaded to the Father on their behalf, asking for their forgiveness. This is radical love!

WHY IS IT HARD TO FORGIVE THOSE WHO HURT US (MOCK US, BETRAY US, ETC.)?

The bottom line is that it's hard to let go of hurt. When someone mocks us or turns on us, we lose trust in them. We wonder if they'll do it again. Did the betrayal and mocking hurt Jesus? Absolutely—Jesus was human and experienced emotion. But He saw past their actions to their need for salvation. When people hurt us, we can also choose to look past their actions and see their need for God's love.

WHAT DO JESUS'S ACTIONS ON THE CROSS SHOW ABOUT HIS LOVE FOR US?

When we are in pain, we usually can't focus on anything or anyone else. Physical pain is consuming. But even in His pain, Jesus fixed His mind on His purpose of saving us from our sin. Jesus's love for humanity—even those putting Him to death—was at the center of His life and His death.

2. JESUS PROMISES SALVATION TO THE REPENTANT

READ LUKE 23:39-43

Jesus put no boundaries on who could repent and be saved, and this is evident in His interaction with the criminals. When Jesus offered Himself on our behalf, He made a way for everyone—the criminal, the cheater, the drug user, the cheater, the murderer, the liar—to experience eternal life with God. The key to salvation is repentance, or admitting and turning from our sin. While the criminal may have been despised by the people, Jesus loved him and saw his great need for salvation.

WHEN HAVE YOU THOUGHT SOMEONE WAS OUT OF GOD'S REACH? WHY?



LUKE 23:32-38

23:34. “Jesus had proven his ability to forgive sins in his healing ministry (5:24). He had taught that forgiveness comes only to those who forgive others (6:37; 11:4) and that forgiveness has no limits (17:4). He had called for love of enemies (6:27–28). On the cross he practiced what he had taught. He watched those who mocked him, played games with him, scourged him, and crucified him. Then he asked the Father to forgive them. He called for forgiveness because he loved his enemies, but the explicit reason was their ignorance. Neither Jewish accuser nor Roman executor fully realized the gravity of their actions.”⁷

23:34. “Even in this desperate situation, Jesus prays for those who will kill him. He asks that his executors be forgiven, since they have acted in ignorance. Jesus’s intercession lays the basis for God’s offer of forgiveness. National consequences will follow from Jesus’ rejection, but God’s love expressed here shows that the rejection need not be permanent, neither for an individual nor for a nation.”⁸

LUKE 23:39-43

23:39. “The criminal was able to be saved precisely because Jesus did not save himself. Jesus’ cross is intimately involved in his being able to ‘seek and to save what was lost’ (19:10) and to forgive sins (5:20–26; 7:36–50; Acts 10:39–43); in this account he is able to save even the ‘most lost.’ Tax collectors, prostitutes, the poor, the blind, and even criminals being executed for their crimes are able in the eleventh hour to find in Jesus an all-sufficient Savior.”⁹



BIG QUESTION

WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THE TORN VEIL?

The veil separated the holy of holies from the rest of the temple. The holy of holies was where God’s presence lived on earth. This veil was roughly sixty feet tall and four inches thick! No one could step into the holy of holies except the high priest, and this was only once a year to atone for Israel’s sins. People simply didn’t have access to God’s holy presence because unholy sin separated them from Him. When the veil ripped at the time of Jesus’s death, it signified a barrier being removed. God’s presence no longer resides in the temple but in the hearts of believers. We have direct access to God because of Jesus’s final sacrifice (see Heb. 10:19–20). This veil, torn by the very hands of God, symbolizes our direct access to Him through the sacrificial death of His Son.



SCRIPTURE READING

MAIN POINT

Jesus gave up His life to provide salvation to all who repent of their sin.

Many of us categorize people as “good” or “bad” based on their actions. And maybe without realizing it, we put limits on who God can save. We wrongly assume some people are out of God’s reach. Jesus proved this wrong when He promised salvation to a despised criminal on the cross next to Him. No one is out of God’s reach because He offers salvation to all.

THE CRIMINAL HAD NO TIME TO LIVE OUT, OR PROVE, HIS SALVATION. WHAT DOES THIS SHOW YOU ABOUT SALVATION?

We are told to “work out [our] own salvation” (see Phil. 2:12), meaning we grow in obedience to God’s Word. When we accept God’s love and repent of our sin, our lives should look different as a result of the Holy Spirit working within us. But this criminal had no time left. This shows us salvation isn’t something we can work for or earn; it is a gift we accept through faith and repentance.

3. JESUS ENTRUSTED HIMSELF TO THE FATHER

READ LUKE 23:44-49

Although Jesus was in the hands of His executioners, He was in total control. He submitted to this death out of obedience to the Father. Even with Jesus’s last breath, He vocalized complete trust in God, laying down His life as a sacrifice for our sin. The King of all kings entrusted Himself to God, and He displayed authority even in His death.

WHAT DID THE CENTURION RECOGNIZE ABOUT JESUS? WHY?

This centurion likely saw the entire crucifixion from start to finish. He witnessed Jesus’s excruciating pain, but he also saw Jesus’s trust in God and His forgiveness of those persecuting Him. Most importantly, the centurion saw Jesus breathe His last breath. He saw that Jesus was truly in control of His death. Jesus gave His life; no one took it from Him (see John 10:17-18).

JESUS TRUSTED GOD IN HIS MOST PAINFUL MOMENT. WHEN HAVE YOU STRUGGLED TO TRUST GOD IN YOUR PAIN?

It’s easy to trust the Lord when our lives are going the way we want them to, but when we encounter pain, it’s tempting to try to take control of the situation. We must remember God is trustworthy in all situations—even in sickness, pain, and loss. God’s character is good, holy, compassionate, loving, and so much more. We can trust God with our difficult situations because He is faithful to care for us.



BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

23:41,43. “This criminal confessed his sins and acknowledged that he deserved to be punished. Such a confession is an integral part of repentance. In rebuking the other criminal, this one rejected the view that if Jesus were the Christ, he would save himself. . . . To the criminal’s vague ‘when’ Jesus responded with a precise ‘today,’ referring less to within the next twenty-four hours or before the sun goes down than to the realization of Jesus’s reign through his death, resurrection, and ascension. This day through Jesus’s death, salvation was being achieved, and the criminal would share in it.”¹⁰

LUKE 23:44-49

23:45. “So with the tearing of the curtain of the temple, the curtain that separated the holy of holies from the rest of the temple (another curtain separated the holy place from the parts where lay people could go, but this seems less likely). It symbolized the separateness, the remoteness of God. The tearing of the curtain at this time gives symbolic expression to the truth that the death of Jesus has made the way open into the very presence of God (Heb. 9:3, 8; 10:19).”¹¹

23:46. “Even in his crucifixion Jesus was in control of all that was taking place. All that was taking place was in accordance with and the fulfillment of his teachings and plans. He resolutely set out for this goal (9:51), for this was the departure or ‘exodus’ the Scriptures had prophesied for him (9:31). Thus after finishing his mission, Jesus committed himself into his Father’s hands and breathed his last. No one took his life from him. He gave it freely (John 10:18).”¹²



ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE

CHRIST AS PROPITIATION

Because of God’s righteousness and holiness, humanity’s sins must be atoned for in order for people to be reconciled to God. As the propitiation for sins, Christ’s death is the appeasement, or satisfaction, of God’s wrath against sin. Christ’s propitiation for our sins demonstrates both God’s great love toward sinners (see 1 John 4:10) and the necessary payment that results from the penalty of sins (see Rom. 3:26).



CHRIST CONNECTION

Jesus willingly took up His cross and suffered the judgment our sins deserve. At the moment He died, the curtain in the temple sanctuary was torn in two, signifying that sinners have access to God through the blood of Christ. The crucifixion of Jesus is the center of history, revealing God's holiness and justice, our sinfulness and unrighteousness, and Christ's humility and love.



HEAD



HEART



HANDS

HOW DOES REALIZING JESUS HAD AUTHORITY OVER HIS OWN DEATH ENCOURAGE YOU TO TRUST HIM MORE?

If Jesus had authority over His own death, deciding when He would breathe His last breath, then we can trust He has authority over all things in our lives too. This means we can trust God has complete control over anything we face. When we are going through painful situations, it can feel like God isn't in control anymore—like He has somehow forgotten to protect us. But this simply isn't true. Jesus's death reminds us that we can completely trust God with everything.

WHILE WE ONLY REPENT FOR SALVATION ONCE, WE STILL SIN AND NEED FORGIVENESS FOR THOSE SINS. WHAT SINS DO YOU NEED TO REPENT OF TODAY?

Repenting of—or confessing and turning away from—our sin is a step in accepting God's gift of salvation. But because we are human, we'll continue to struggle with sin. Repentance isn't a one-time action; it's a daily discipline for believers. Once we call out for salvation, God faithfully saves us right away. But He also wants us to confess our sins daily to Him. When we do this, God faithfully forgives us when we mess up.

HOW CAN YOU SHOW GOD'S LOVE TO PEOPLE WHO MAY SEEM INCAPABLE OF BEING SAVED BY GOD?

The best way we can reach people with the gospel is by loving them. You may have people in your classes, on your teams, or in your friend groups who seem too far gone. They may resist believing God is even real, or maybe they've even challenged your faith. But no one is out of reach of God's love. All sin separates us from God, but Jesus defeated sin on the cross—for all people. When we love those who seem unlovable, we show them God's love. This can look like simply befriending them, making conversation with them, helping them study, inviting them to hang out, and so on. We model Jesus when we love people others reject (see Mark 2:16-17).