

The following section can be outlined as follows:

- 1) Jesus warns the women of things to come–23:26-31
- 2) He forgives those who kill and mock Him–23:34
- 3) He assures the repentant sinner of salvation–23:43
- 4) He entrusts Himself to the Father–23:46

In verses 26-49 Jesus' identification with humanity stands out. He is seen in weakness. He suffers physically and emotionally. His fate is the same as a criminal. He shares in the place of the unrighteous. He is mocked and ridiculed. He is taunted. He is helpless before His enemies. But to those who know the Scriptures, the cross is also the greatest display of strength. In John 10:17-18 Jesus said, "I lay down My life so that I may take it again. No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again." This means that Jesus remained on the cross out of sheer act of His will. He trusted that God would vindicate Him. He sacrificed His own life to save others.

Hebrews 2:10 tells us, "it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings." "Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people" (Heb. 2:17).

***23:26 When they led Him away, they seized a man, Simon of Cyrene, coming in from the country, and placed on him the cross to carry behind Jesus.***

It was between 8 and 9 o'clock on the Friday of the Passover week. From the ancient palace of Herod the procession "descended, and probably passed through the gate in the first wall, and so into the busy quarter of Acra (the fortress built by Antiochus that was later used by the Seleucids to oversee the Temple and maintain control over Jerusalem). As it proceeded, the numbers who followed from the temple, from the dense business-quarter through which it moved, increased. Shops, bazaars, and markets were, indeed, closed on the holy feast-day. But quite a crowd of people would come out to line the streets and to follow; and, especially, women, leaving their festive preparations, raised loud laments, not in spiritual recognition of Christ's claims, but in pity and sympathy" (Edersheim, . 586).

Jesus worked His way through the streets carrying the crossbeam of the cross on His shoulders and the nape of His neck. When He reached the place of His crucifixion it would be attached to the vertical post. "Unrefreshed by food or sleep, after the terrible events of that night and morning, while His pallid face bore the blood marks from the crown of thorns, His mangled body was unable to bear the weight of the cross" (Edersheim, 587). At the time that Jesus could go no further, Simon of Cyrene was coming into the city from the opposite direction and he was compelled to carry Jesus' cross behind Him.

The fact that Simon's name and the country of his origin are mentioned may suggest that Luke expected his readers to know who he was. Both Jews and Christians from Cyrene (modern Libya) are mentioned in Acts (Acts 6:9; 13:1).

In verse 26 the subject (“they”) is deliberately indefinite for it was not just the soldiers that led Jesus to the cross. Verse 25 says that Pilate delivered Jesus over to “*their*” will; that is, to the will of the religious leaders and clamoring crowds who wanted Jesus crucified (23:13, 23, 25). Of course, the Romans were also present for only they could compel others to carry the cross of a condemned criminal. As Acts 4:27 says, “for truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel.”

Luke’s readers may recall Jesus’ admonition in Luke 9:23 and 14:27 where He had told His disciples that they need to bear their cross daily. The actual crucifixion brings to life what Jesus was really demanding in discipleship. As Bonhoeffer reminds us, “the cross – dying to the old person as a result of an encounter with Jesus Christ—is not ‘the terrible end’ to an otherwise God-fearing and happy life. The cross, rather, meets us at the beginning of our communion with Christ and defines each step of the way with Christ” (Edwards, 682,683).

***23:27 And following Him was a large crowd of the people, and of women who were mourning and lamenting Him.***

***23:28 But Jesus turning to them said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, stop weeping for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.***

***23:29 "For behold, the days are coming when they will say, 'Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never nursed.'***

***23:30 "Then they will begin TO SAY TO THE MOUNTAINS, 'FALL ON US,' AND TO THE HILLS, 'COVER US.'***

***23:31 "For if they do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?"***

A large crowd of people was following Jesus. Women were mourning and lamenting over Him as was the proper and expected display of grief in Middle Eastern culture. Nowhere in the synoptic gospels are women pictured as hostile to Jesus, and there is no reason to conclude that the women here were just going through the motions. As Zechariah 12:10 predicted, "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."

Jesus told the women not to weep for Him. His agony would end soon and would result in glory. They should instead weep for themselves and their children. Verse 29 gives the reason for the lament: Jesus’ death spells the doom for the nation. Jesus is not uttering threats, nor is He looking for sympathy; He desires conversion. This is Jesus’ final appeal to turn to God’s visitation in the person and ministry of Christ.

Jesus’ warning is couched in eschatological terminology. "The days are coming" harkens to the Day of the Lord, that fearful day when God’s wrath is poured out upon the world (Lk. 19:41-44; 21:20-24). In that day God’s wrath will be so intense that people will wish that the mountains fall upon them rather than face God’s anger. Jesus’ warning comes from Hosea 10:8: “they shall say to the mountains, Cover us, and to the hills, Fall on us.” The same imagery is repeated in Revelation 6:16-17 when John describes

the great tribulation; he predicts that the people will say to the mountains and to the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?"

Jesus concluded, "For if they do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?" Green wood does not burn easily; dry wood does. There are many suggestions for what this may mean. Perhaps it means, "If God has not spared Jesus from judgment (and He is innocent), what will happen to a guilty nation?" In this case, "they" is reference to God (12:20 has a similar reference) (Bock, 1847). "Thus applied, it means that the sufferings of the Savior, as compared with the sufferings of the guilty, were like the burning of a green tree as compared with the burning of one that is dry" (Barnes).

**23:32 Two others also, who were criminals, were being led away to be put to death with Him.**

**23:33 When they came to the place called The Skull, there they crucified Him and the criminals, one on the right and the other on the left.**

**23:34 But Jesus was saying, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." And they cast lots, dividing up His garments among themselves.**

When they came to the place called The Skull they crucified Jesus.

The Place of the Skull's location is unknown. In 1885, Charles Gordon identified it with a skull-shaped hill outside of Jerusalem, but this is by no means certain.

Cicero described crucifixion as the "most cruel and horrifying punishment." The cross was Rome's instrument of terror, inflicting both pain and shame upon its victims. The most crowded roads were chosen for the guilty to be crucified upon to be a deterrent to crime. Crassus crucified more than 6000 slaves along the road between Capua and Rome after the defeat of the slave rebellion. Men were normally crucified naked. Although pictures tend to show Jesus elevated above the ground, most crosses were probably near or slightly above eye level. Josephus reports that the Romans crucified captives in different positions and in different ways. Some people lived for days depending on the severity of the flogging beforehand (Edwards, 695).

The thought that God's Messiah could suffer on a cross (Heb. 12:2) was scandalous.

The Jews wanted signs from God, external evidences to ground their faith in. They felt if something happened that would dazzle their minds they would know that it was true (Matt. 12:38-39; 12:39-40; Mk. 8:11; Lk. 11:16; 16:31; Jn. 6:30). But Jesus refused to give signs to a perverse people; instead, He chose to die like a common criminal. This was blasphemous to the Jews (Deut. 21:23, Gal. 3:13); it was a stumbling block.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, Greeks would only accept something as true if it could be proven on rational grounds. They demanded rational proof to base their faith upon. To the Greek, those who believed in a crucified Savior believed a hopeless contradiction (Ro. 9:33; I Pet. 2:8); it was foolishness.

Thus Paul said, "For indeed Jews ask for signs, and Greeks search for wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block, and to Gentiles foolishness. . ." (1 Cor. 1:22-23).

Both Jews and Greeks alike have a prerequisite to belief. But God doesn't respond to their demands. Instead, He offers the message of the cross. For that reason Paul preaches Christ crucified, the power of salvation (1 Cor. 1:23).

Christians understand that it was by means of the cross that Jesus died for the sins of man and made intercession for the transgressors (Isa. 53:12). So it is no surprise that Jesus' first words verbalize His intercession on behalf of sinners: "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." When He prayed, "for they know not what they do," He most likely means that they really didn't understand who they were crucifying. Peter says to his fellow countrymen in Acts 3:17, "You acted in ignorance, just as your rulers did also." They did not know who Jesus was nor could they understand what God was doing through Him. The redemptive work of God on the cross surpassed the knowledge of the observers.

Jesus forgave His enemies as He had taught His disciples to do (Lk. 6:27-28; 11:2-4); His prayer is echoed by Stephen in Acts 7:59-60.

Psalm 22:18 states, "they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots;" this is said to be fulfilled in Luke 23:34.

***23:35 And the people stood by, looking on. And even the rulers were sneering at Him, saying, "He saved others; let Him save Himself if this is the Christ of God, His Chosen One."***

***23:36 The soldiers also mocked Him, coming up to Him, offering Him sour wine,***

***23:37 and saying, "If You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself!"***

***23:38 Now there was also an inscription above Him, "THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS."***

Three groups of people ridicule Jesus on the cross: the rulers, the soldiers, and one of the criminals who was crucified next to Him. There was scorn from every segment of society—the religious, the criminal, Jew and Gentile.

The rulers said, "He saved others; let Him save Himself." Of course, they were not speaking of spiritual salvation; "to save" simply means "to deliver." They are saying, "He delivered others (by miracles), let Him deliver Himself." The rulers believed that they had stopped Jesus from spreading His false messianic hopes and they were enjoying their victory through mockery. Yet, even in their mocking they were fulfilling the Scriptures. The messianic psalm, Psalm 22:6-8 says, "All who see me sneer at me; they separate with the lip, they wag the head, saying, 'Commit yourself to the LORD; let Him deliver him; Let Him rescue him, because He delights in him.'"

In verse 36 the soldiers also mocked Jesus and offered Him sour wine (cheap wine). According to the Talmud, wine was a primitive narcotic used to ease pain, but it's doubtful that in crucifixion sour wine would help at all; Jesus had been scourged and nailed to a cross with open wounds (most likely with bones and muscle exposed) in the heat of the sun; even the strongest narcotics we have today would not do much in such conditions, let alone a sip of sour wine. Furthermore, both the context and Psalm 69:21, which predicts this, show that the drink was not given with kind intentions to ease Jesus' pain. In

the context the soldiers offer it with mockery. Psalm 69 says, "They gave me poison for food, and *for my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink*"—that is, they did what they did with evil intent.

It was common to put a sign above the head of the criminal to announce the crime for which He was being crucified. The sign above Jesus' head that read, "*This is the king of the Jews*" was Pilate's attempt to offend the Jews—but he wrote more truth than he knew.

**23:39** *One of the criminals who were hanged there was hurling abuse at Him, saying, "Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!"*

**23:40** *But the other answered, and rebuking him said, "Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?"*

**23:41** *"And we indeed are suffering justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong."*

**23:42** *And he was saying, "Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!"*

**23:43** *And He said to him, "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise."*

Jesus' crucifixion with criminals is the fulfillment of Isaiah 53:12: "he poured out his soul to death and *was numbered with the transgressors*; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors."

One of the criminals is bitterly sarcastic; one is repentant.

Grammatically, in Greek, the question, "Are You not the Christ?" usually expects an affirmative answer (οὐχὶ - Marshall, 871), but it is obvious from the context that the criminal did not really believe that Jesus was the Christ. It is contempt. His disdain for Christ showed that he had no fear of God.

The other criminal rebukes him for his scorn (23:40). The rebuke reveals the man's spiritual condition:

First, he knew he was sinful; he said, "we are suffering justly . . . we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds." In other words, he admitted that he is a sinner deserving of judgment (23:41). He made no excuses for his behavior. He recognized that they would soon have to answer to God for their sins (23:40). It was time to repent, not mock someone who was suffering unjustly.

Secondly, he knew he needed mercy and made a plea to Christ saying, "Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!" (23:42). This is also an expression of faith. It is hard to know what the man knew about Jesus, but he believed that there was a kingdom after death, that Jesus was the King of it, and that He had the authority to grant access to it. He believed that Jesus was the arbitrator of eternal hope and eternal judgment and he entrusted his fate entirely into Jesus' hands (Edwards, 691). He also believed that Jesus could save even after He died – something that the other man could not conceive of.

The man's simple faith was met with a positive response from the Savior. Jesus promised an eternal relationship with Him ("Today you shall be *with Me*. . .") in a glorious environment (" . . . in *Paradise*").

Paradise is a word of Persian origin that describes a garden or park and reminds us of the garden spoken of in Genesis 3 where man and God fellowshiped together. It gives a visual of eternity and compliments

Jesus' picture of the eternal state in Luke 22:29-30 where He speaks of enjoying a banquet with Him. The word "paradise" occurs in two other places in the New Testament. In 2 Corinthians 12:4, Paul says he was caught up into paradise, which he explains by saying that he was caught up into the third heaven. And in Revelation 2:7 Jesus expects that the beauty and satisfaction of such a future existence provide ample incentive to overcome the lusts of the world. He said, "To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God." "There can, therefore, be no doubt that paradise is heaven, and consequently when Christ promised the dying thief that he should that day be in paradise, he promised that he should be in heaven" (Hodge, II, 727). In conclusion, Jesus confirms that there is life after death, and that the spirit of the believer immediately passes into heaven at death (*Today you will be with Me. . .*).

Jesus' response implies a number of other things, as well. It shows that there is life after death, and that after death each individual will retain his own identity (*YOU will be with Me. . .*). People's souls do not cease to exist at death. Secondly, it demonstrates that salvation is by grace through faith—the man had no time to do anything to earn his way to heaven; he did have faith that Jesus could grant him entrance. Thirdly, Jesus' response shows that He also saw Himself as the arbitrator of eternal hope and eternal judgment.

Repeatedly, people mocked Jesus, concluding that He could not save others if He could not even save Himself. The assumption was that Jesus had to come down from the cross to save. What people could not grasp is that in not saving Himself, Jesus was able to save others.

***23:44 It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness fell over the whole land until the ninth hour,***

***23:45 because the sun was obscured; and the veil of the temple was torn in two.***

Jews reckoned daytime in 12-hour increments, and nighttime in three watches of four hours each. Daytime was from dawn (6 AM) to dusk (6 PM). The crucifixion began at the third hour (9AM; Mk. 15:25), about 3 hours after the third phase of the Jewish trial (Lk. 22:66). The sixth hour would be noon and the ninth would be 3 PM. In other words, three hours after Jesus had hung on the cross, darkness fell over the whole earth for three hours from noon to 3 PM; literally, verse 45 says, "the sun failed."

Some have tried to explain this as an eclipse of the sun; however, astronomers say that an eclipse at Passover (when there is a full moon) is an astronomical impossibility (Edwards, 693). Some say it was darkened by a dust storm. It seems that it is easiest to take the darkening of the sun as a supernatural, unexplainable event as were the other events surrounding Jesus' death.

Darkness in the Bible was often a symbol of divine judgment (Amos 8:9; Joel 2:10, 30-31; Zeph. 1:16-18; Matt. 24:29; Rev. 6:12; 8:12). The darkness in the last hours of Jesus' life signaled the importance of the event; the judgment of God was coming to pass.

The tearing of the temple curtain has generated a lot of discussion. There were many curtains in the temple complex. The two most important ones were the curtain that separated the temple proper (the Holy Place) from the outer court (Exo. 38:18; Num. 3:26) and the inner curtain that separated the Holy

Place from the Holy of Holies (the small inner room where in former times the presence of God dwelled – Lev. 21:23; 24:3).

The curtain that led into the Holy Place was a beautifully embroidered Babylonian tapestry, depicting the earth, sea, and heavens. The priests entered through this curtain twice a day to burn incense—one went in with a lidded ladle that contained about one gallon of ground incense and another entered bearing live coals.

Beyond this curtain was another curtain, the curtain that divided the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies. This curtain was said to be a handbreadth thick (4 inches thick). Only the High Priest could enter the Holy of Holies through this curtain once a year on the Day of Atonement in order to sprinkle blood on the mercy seat to make atonement for the nation. The curtain symbolized the transcendence and holiness of God barring all people from His presence.

None of the Gospel writers specify which curtain is intended. Extra-biblical literature uses the word *katapetasma* (καταπέτασμα curtain) for both curtains. In the LXX (the Greek translation of the OT) *katapetasma* typically refers to the inner curtain unless it is qualified in some way. In the New Testament the only places that refer to the curtain outside of the gospel narratives occur in Hebrews 6:19; 9:3; 10:20. All of these occurrences also refer to the inner curtain (Edwards, 694). Thus, the *katapetasma* is generally the default term for the inner veil separating the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies. If the curtain that was torn was this curtain, then the tearing of the curtain symbolized direct access to God made possible through Christ's death. Of course this is true even if it was the other curtain that was torn. Hebrews 4:16 encourages believers to draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Although the tearing of the veil between the Holy of Holies and the Holy Place is more emotionally and theologically appealing, the curtain leading into the Holy Place is also a possibility considering that the events that surrounded Christ's death were public in nature. No one would see the inner veil unless he was a priest, but every Jewish male who entered the Court of the Israelites could see the curtain that led to the Holy Place. In addition, Luke has used the word *naos* (ναός "temple") three times already in his gospel to speak of the entrance to the Holy Place (1:9, 21, 22). If he is consistent with his word usage, then this was the curtain that was torn. In this case, the tearing of the curtain probably signified that the temple had become obsolete at the death of Christ; it is no longer the center of God's activity (Lk. 19:45-20:18; Acts 7:45-50; Jn. 4:21-24; Heb. 9-10). Christ, not the temple, is the place where God and man meet. In this case, "the emphasis is not on atonement (as in Heb. 9-10) but on God's access to people" (Bock, 1861). The complete destruction of the temple would happen about 37 years after this event.

It is also important to note that the verb "was torn" is in the passive voice. In this case it is a "divine passive" emphasizing that God was the one who tore it.

***23:46 And Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, said, "Father, INTO YOUR HANDS I COMMIT MY SPIRIT." Having said this, He breathed His last.***

Jesus prayed at 3:00 PM (23:44); this was also the hour of prayer in Judaism. He prayed from Psalm 31 (Psa. 31:5) which was a hymn of trust in the midst of deep sorrow over things that the psalmist had no control over. As Bock (1862) points out, the use of the psalm is “typico-prophetic;” that is, Jesus suffers as the righteous sufferer *par excellence*. Interestingly, Psalm 31 was used in later Judaism as the evening prayer in requesting God’s protection while sleeping (Bock, 1862).

The *hands* of God (“into Your hands”) represent God’s care. “I give My spirit” is a euphemism for Jesus giving His life up to God. The prayer is Jesus expressing the total relinquishment of His life to God.

**23:47 Now when the centurion saw what had happened, he began praising God, saying, “Certainly this man was innocent.”**

A centurion was a Roman officer who was in charge of about 100 men. This centurion was probably the soldier in charge of the crucifixion. In observing both Jesus and the supernatural phenomena that occurred (the darkening of the sun [Lk. 23:44], and an earthquake [Matt. 27:54]), the centurion praised God. Luke once again gives a condensed form of what happened. Matthew 27:51-54 says, “. . . the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth shook and the rocks were split. The tombs were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the tombs after His resurrection they entered the holy city and appeared to many. When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, ‘Truly this was the Son of God!’”

The word for “praising” is δοξάζω (*doxazo*) and is almost always translated as “glorify.” It is one of Luke’s favorite words to describe the reaction of people to the revelation of the power of God and His mercy (Lk. 5:25-26; 7:16; 13:13; 17:15; 18:43). Glorifying God bookends Jesus’ life; the shepherds glorified God at Jesus’ birth (Lk. 2:20); the centurion does so at His death.

The centurion lets the events speak to Jesus’ identity instead of projecting his expectations upon Him as the Jews had done. The NASB translation chooses to translate the adjective *dikaios* (δίκαιος) as “innocent.” Although this makes perfect sense in this context where Jesus has been declared guilty, the term most commonly means “righteous” (58 of the 73 times it appears in the NT; it is also translated as “just,” “justice,” and “right”—it is only translated as “innocent” here). Thus, the NIV and KJV translate the centurion’s words as, “Surely this was a righteous man.” I tend to agree with Edwards that Luke is deliberately using a word that ties Jesus to the righteous sufferer in Isaiah 53 (Edwards, 698). At the beginning of His ministry Jesus described Himself in terms of fulfilling the role of the Righteous Servant in Isa. 61 (Lk. 4:18-19). In Acts 3:14, 7:53, and 22:14 Jesus is specifically called the Righteous One (δίκαιος *dikaios*). In Luke 22:37 (Isa. 53:11-12) Jesus implied that His death was to be understood in terms of the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53 (see my notes there). “For Luke, the centurion’s declaration that Jesus is righteous designates the cross as the fulfillment of the mission of Isaiah’s Suffering Servant. . .”(Edwards, 698).

The centurion’s remarks become the final judgment over what has really taken place.

***23:48 And all the crowds who came together for this spectacle, when they observed what had happened, began to return, beating their breasts.***

The phenomena that surrounded Jesus' death demonstrated that someone significant had died and also caused the crowds to reconsider what they had done. Luke says that they began beating their breasts – an expression of grief.

The pardon of a criminal by Jesus and now the people's remorse are glimmers of hope for Israel in the midst of their most horrific act of rebellion against God.

As a side note, we should remember that Luke's Gospel was to Theophilus. Luke told him, I "investigated everything carefully from the beginning . . . so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught" (Lk. 1:3, 4). The large number of people who saw the cosmic events at the time of Jesus' crucifixion provided a huge base of eyewitnesses who could verify the truthfulness of Luke's words.

***23:49 And all His acquaintances and the women who accompanied Him from Galilee were standing at a distance, seeing these things.***

Two other groups who were closer to Jesus than the crowds were also watching—His acquaintances and the women who accompanied Him from Galilee. This seems to be a vague way of referring to the disciples, most of whom did not go near to the cross.

The women are those mentioned in Luke 8:1-3; these were the women who were faithful to Jesus for some time and followed Him as He traveled, not the women in Luke 23:27 who were in the crowd.

Matthew 27:55-56 says, "Many women were there *looking on from a distance*, who had followed Jesus from Galilee while ministering to Him. Among them was Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee." But John 19:25-26 also speaks of some standing near the cross. He writes, ". . . *standing by the cross of Jesus* were His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus then saw His mother and the disciple whom He loved [John] standing nearby, He said to His mother, "Woman, behold, your son!"

Verses 35, 36 and 39 recorded three groups of mockers; verses 47, 48, and 49 record three sets of witnesses.

Verse 49 leaves the reader to contemplate Jesus' innocent sufferings. He is forced to decide if he will align himself with the sneering crowd or respond in remorse and repentance. Will he see Jesus as the one who grants entrance into the kingdom or as a false messiah who could not save others for He could not save Himself?