



JESUS' CRUCIFIXION AND DEATH

Part 97 of Luke's Gospel: Investigating the Man Who Is God

Pastor Mark Driscoll | Luke 23:26–49 | November 06, 2011

Luke 23:26–49

²⁶ And as they led him away, they seized one Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, and laid on him the cross, to carry it behind Jesus. ²⁷ And there followed him a great multitude of the people and of women who were mourning and lamenting for him. ²⁸ But turning to them Jesus said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. 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!'" ³⁰ Then they will begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall on us,' and to the hills, 'Cover us.' ³¹ For if they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?"

³² Two others, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. ³³ And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. ³⁴ And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." And they cast lots to divide his garments. ³⁵ And the people stood by, watching, but the rulers scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!" ³⁶ The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine ³⁷ and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" ³⁸ There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews."

³⁹ One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!" ⁴⁰ But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?" ⁴¹ And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong." ⁴² And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." ⁴³ And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

⁴⁴ It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, ⁴⁵ while the sun's light failed. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. ⁴⁶ Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" And having said this he breathed his last. ⁴⁷ Now when the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God, saying, "Certainly this man was innocent!" ⁴⁸ And all the crowds that had assembled for this spectacle, when they saw what had taken place, returned home beating their breasts. ⁴⁹ And all his acquaintances and the women who had followed him from Galilee stood at a distance watching these things.

GOLGOTHA

Just behind me is Golgotha, the place of the skull. Use your imagination. You can see two eyes and a nose. It was named Golgotha, the place of the skull, for that natural rock formation. To the left is the place where Jesus was ultimately buried and risen. On top is an ancient burial ground. It was Christian, and we are told is now, today, Muslim. At the top of the hill, we see the place that Jesus was most likely crucified. It does meet the biblical criteria. It's along a busy road, and this location is, in fact, outside of the city; hence, we believe it is, in fact, the place that Jesus was murdered.

INTRODUCTION

One hour, give me one hour, the most important hour of your whole life. Your eternal destiny hangs in the balance. One hour. Whatever you know, nothing is as important as one thing: who Jesus is and why he died. Nothing is as important as that fact. Unlike other religions, Christianity is not a system of theory, philosophy, or ideology. It is founded on a person named Jesus Christ, and the fact of his death and resurrection. And all of human history, from the first sin of our first parents, was anticipating, yearning, leaning into the coming of a Savior, the God-man, Jesus Christ, and he came into human history, and he lived and he died.

We have been in the Gospel of Luke, as a church, for more than two years, and the entire storyline of the Bible, the longing of human history, and the Gospel of Luke now culminate in the most important death of the most important person in the history of the world. And so if you would be so kind, follow with me in Luke 23:26–49.

WHO WAS THERE: THE WOMEN

First, we will examine who was there for the crucifixion, the murder of Jesus Christ. We will begin with the women. Beginning in Luke 23:27–31, we

read, "And there followed him—" This is Jesus on his way to crucifixion, on his way to execution. "And there followed him a great multitude of the people and of women who were mourning and lamenting for him. But turning to them Jesus said, 'Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. 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!" Then they will begin to say to the mountains, "Fall on us," and to the hills, "Cover us." For if they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?'"

As Jesus is on his way to his place of execution and crucifixion, those women who loved him were present, and they were weeping, and they were wailing, and they were mourning for him, and Jesus curiously told them, "Do not weep for me. Weep for those who do not trust in me." The only thing worse than what Jesus suffered is what you will suffer if you do not belong to him.

And he tells them, "Weep, daughters of Jerusalem," speaking to the nation of Israel, to those who assumed they were the people of God. They were religious and moral, perhaps like some of you, but they did not trust in Jesus' righteousness. They trusted in their own. As a result, they rejected him when they should have received him.

I pray, I hope, I trust, I'm begging and pleading that that would not be you, that you would not just be a good person, or a moral person, or a religious person, or a spiritual person, that you would not just look at the death of Jesus and think that it was a horrific evil, and you grieve for him, and you feel sorry without also examining your own life and asking, "Should I be weeping for myself? Should I be weeping over my sin? Should I be weeping over my folly and my rebellion? And if I don't come to Jesus, weeping over my eternity under the judgment of God."

Friends, these are sober matters. These are serious matters. These are matters that you have to decide what you will conclude, that ultimately weeping for Jesus, as passionate, as emotional, as compelling as that might be, it is not enough unless you also weep over your own sin and acknowledge that apart from him people suffer a fate that is worse than the fate that he suffered, an eternal condemnation, forever under the just judgment of God.

This prophetic statement from Jesus began to be fulfilled in 70 AD when, as a judgment on the nation of Israel for rejecting Jesus Christ as God and Savior, the city was literally destroyed. People starved to death, and women weeping and wailing could be heard across the city.

Let me tell you this. We live in a day when it is vogue to have compassion for others and to have a sense of grief for their suffering, and that is all well and good, and Jesus doesn't discourage that in any way. But if you really are concerned about suffering, the most important suffering we must concern ourselves with is eternal suffering, eternal suffering of those who would die apart from faith in Christ, and that's what Jesus is talking about. It is one thing to weep for those who are suffering, but if we truly care, we want to eradicate eternal suffering. Some of you are trying to eradicate the suffering of others now. Also pay attention to the eternal suffering that awaits you if you reject him.

WHO WAS THERE: THE MEN

What about the men who were present? Many of the men who were present had the same false concept of masculinity and manhood that persists in our own day. We read of the men who were present at the time of Jesus' murder in Luke 23:26. "And as they led him away, they seized one Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, and laid on him the cross, to carry it behind Jesus."

We read more of other men in verses 32–49. "Two others, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. And when they came to the place that is called The Skull," or Golgotha, "there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. And Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.' And they cast lots," or threw dice, "to divide his garments. And the people stood by, watching, but the rulers scoffed at him, saying, 'He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!' The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine and saying, 'If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!' There was also an inscription over him, 'This is the King of the Jews.'

"One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, 'Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!' But the other rebuked him, saying, 'Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.' And he said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.' And he said to him, 'Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.'

"It was now about the sixth hour," around noon, "and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, while the sun's light failed. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!' And having said this he breathed his last. Now when the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God, saying, 'Certainly this man was innocent!' And all the crowds that had assembled for this spectacle, when they saw what had taken place, returned home beating their breasts." That is mourning. "And all his acquaintances and the women who had followed him from Galilee stood at a distance watching these things."

PASSIVE UNBELIEF

The women are weeping, and men are responding in various ways. There are some who act in unbelief, and their unbelief is passive. Their unbelief is passive. They don't oppose Jesus; they simply observe him. Perhaps that is some of you. You do not oppose Christianity. You do not hate Jesus. You also do not consider yourself a Christian, and you do not defend the cause of Jesus.

Instead, you are simply, merely an observer. You're passive in your opposition to Christianity. You watch. You come to church now and then, maybe observe the life of a few Christians, perhaps have your own internal judgments, but not say anything publicly. You're not divisive. You're not mean. You're not rude. You're not necessarily for or against Jesus Christ. You are, instead, passive in your opposition as an observer.

Many were in that place, including the men. They watched what happened. They didn't necessarily agree or oppose. They were indifferent. But here's the truth. Jesus says, "You're either for me or against me." And anyone who is passive and merely observing Christianity, is not for Jesus.

ACTIVE UNBELIEF

Others who were present and also in unbelief, they were active in their unbelief, and we have three examples: the sinner, the soldiers, and the scoffers.

1. THE SINNER

The first is the sinner who was crucified alongside of Jesus. It was prophesied in Isaiah 53:12, seven hundred years before Jesus was even born on the earth—because this is the Book that God wrote. Unlike every other book that's been written, this is the perfect Book that God wrote. Twenty-five percent of it was prophetic in nature, predicting the future around the person and work of Jesus, hundreds, thousands of years in advance, so that we would all know this is the Book that God wrote, and Jesus is the One that God sent.

And it was prophesied in Isaiah 53:12 seven hundred years before the birth of Jesus that he would be put to death with the wicked. And so Jesus was crucified between two guilty sinners. They were thieves. And one of them, who was active in his unbelief, he was opposed to Jesus publicly. As he hung alongside of Jesus, he mocked him, he scorned him. He basically said, "I am not impressed. If you are God, if you are Savior, save yourself; and while you're at it, save me."

Some of you would have that picture of Jesus. You would accuse him of not being good or having failed you. "Jesus, where is the love? Where is the provision? Where is the protection? All the promises that you make in your Word, I do not see in my life, so I am now very displeased with you." He was one who had active unbelief.

2. THE SOLDIERS

In addition to the sinner, there were the soldiers. They not only crucified him, they cast lots for his clothing. This means that Jesus was stripped, perhaps entirely naked. This was incredibly shameful for a grown man two thousand years ago, as it would be in our day. And so they took his garments, his last possessions on the earth, and instead of dividing them, they cast lots to see who the winner would be. These guys were tough, and they were bullies, and they were thugs, and they were jerks, but it wasn't to defend the weak and oppressed. It was to kill the Son of God.

They do something else that we just read in the Gospel of Luke, and many of you probably didn't even catch it, because it's mentioned momentarily, but it says they gave him what is called "sour wine." Some translations will equate it essentially with vinegar. Some of the other gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are all four biographical sketches of the life of Jesus—will add this additional information: that they took this wine vinegar, and they put it basically in a sponge on a stick, and then they shoved it in his mouth.

When I first read that as a student in college at the age of nineteen who was probably not yet a Christian—I was somewhere in the process of coming to know Jesus—I thought, "Well, that was nice. They gave him something to drink, as they're murdering him. At least they gave him a moment of respite and respect. So, there was a bit of compassion on their behalf." No, it wasn't.

A few years ago, I had the privilege of going to Israel with my family, my wife and five kids, and as we were touring the ancient city of Ephesus, we came across what was an ancient public restroom, a number of toilets made out of marble. And the way those work is that you would sit on the toilet, because there wasn't necessarily plumbing in all the homes, but more centrally located for the very affluent and rich. And as you would sit down, there would be a trough of water that would pass in front of you to cleanse yourself, and underneath the toilet there was an open place to put your hand.

Well, those who were very rich, they didn't want to clean themselves, so they hired the slaves. What the slaves then would do, they would take a stick with a sponge on it, and then they would clean you after you went to the bathroom. They would use this same sponge for multiple patrons, until they figured out that actually causes disease and infection among those who were using the public toilet.

Every time you go to the bathroom, and you look down, and you see the toilet brush, that's basically what it was. And so they decided to sanitize it. They would dip it in sour wine, so as to kill bacteria and germs.

And it became fairly common for soldiers to carry this stick with this sponge, as part of their gear, to cleanse themselves when they went to the bathroom, and that's what they shoved in the mouth of God. They couldn't get Jesus to shut up, saying things like, "Father, forgive them."

See, when we sin, we sin against God. That's why the psalmist says, "Against you only, Lord God, have I sinned." And God comes to earth. God becomes a man. God comes preaching love. God comes preaching forgiveness, and we murder him. We execute him, and soldiers crucify him. And even in that moment, he is crying out, "Father, forgive them!" And to shut him up, they take their toilet brush and shove it in the mouth of God, so that that is the last taste on the lips of the Creator of the universe.

3. THE SCOFFERS

Active unbelief for the sinner, active unbelief for the soldier, and active unbelief for the scoffers. "What kind of king is this? Homeless, broke virgin? What kind of king is he? What kind of kingdom has he brought and wrought?" Unimpressed. And some of you may be in that position. You don't think Jesus is that special. You're not that impressed. You were expecting far more.

And what does Jesus say to those who have unbelief that is both passive and active? He says, "Father, forgive them." That's amazing. That's

extraordinary that Jesus speaks not to them, but he prays for them, just as Jesus prays for you and me. He intercedes for you and me. And he says, "Father, forgive them."

Let me say this, friends, two things. Number one, it seems as if there is nothing you can do that Jesus can't forgive. If he can forgive his murderers, who just shoved their toilet paper in his mouth, with that taste in his mouth, if he can proclaim their forgiveness, he can forgive anyone of anything. It doesn't matter what you've done. Jesus answers his own prayer. He forgives those who sin against him and others. It doesn't matter how bad you are. It doesn't matter what you've done. He can and does forgive.

Number two, it's never too late. He's even providing this invitation to the two thieves that are ready to die at any moment on his right and left. Anyone and everyone can come to Jesus. I know that some of you have heard that Christianity is a narrow religion, and the truth is that Christianity is narrow, that all must pass through this narrow door of faith in the person and the work, the death, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And so it is exclusive. Not every religion leads to God. Not every path leads to forgiveness. But not only is Christianity exclusive, it is the most inclusive. Jesus welcomes everyone to repent of sin. Jesus welcomes everyone to trust in him. Jesus welcomes everyone to have every sin forgiven.

In this moment, these are not good people. These are bad people. They've not lived a good life. They've lived a bad life. One man, to his side, will receive him in faith. I'll show you that in just a moment. This man has lived his whole life doing evil, and he acknowledges it publicly. Yet, in the last moment, by the grace of God, Jesus forgives him, as well.

Jesus Christ is exclusive. There is no God but Jesus. There is no salvation but Jesus. There is no eternal life but Jesus, but he is incredibly inclusive: all languages, all nations, all tribes, all tongues, all peoples, all sins are all welcome to have it all forgiven by Jesus, who cries out, "Father, forgive them." And God has been answering that prayer for two thousand years.

BELIEF

Some of the men respond in unbelief, and some respond in belief. Among them are Simon, the soldier, and the sinner.

1. SIMON OF CYRENE

We read of this man, Simon. As Jesus is carrying his cross, it becomes too heavy for him to carry. I'll explain that in more detail in just a moment. But Simon is assigned to help Jesus carry his cross. In one of the most magnificent images of what it means to truly be a follower of Jesus, he himself later would say, "If you really are my disciple, pick up your cross and," what? "Follow me." And Simon was the first to do so.

Now, he was assigned. He was in the crowd, and they grabbed him and said, "Carry that cross for Jesus." Do you know what's amazing? After just a short time with Jesus, helping Jesus carry the cross and then watching Jesus be crucified, I believe this man Simon became a Christian. His name is Simon of Cyrene, which is modern-day Libya. I believe he became a Christian. Mark 15:21 says that he had two sons; their names were Alexander and Rufus. If you read the end of Romans 16:13, it mentions one of those boys as a leader in the church. I don't think they'd be in the Scriptures had God not worked in their life. Simon went from a guy who was just minding his own business, and then, all of a sudden, he was confronted with the person and work of Jesus, and he became a Christian.

Isn't that amazing? Simon would see Jesus get murdered and say, "I want to be like him." "You want to be murdered like him?" "Well, if that's what it takes. I want to be like him." And I believe he became a Christian, and he raised sons to know and love Jesus as Lord, God, Savior, and Christ. And so his sons are leaders in the early church at Rome.

See, the decision you make is not just for yourself! It's for your children and your children's children. See, the God of the Bible is the God of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob. That's one, two, three generations. The hope, the trust, the prayer is that the decision you make—and the most important decision you will ever make is not who you will marry. That's the second most important decision you will ever make. The most important decision you will ever make is who will you worship? Who is your God? Who will you trust in?

Some of you say, "I don't have a God." You do, and you greet them every morning in the mirror. You are the highest authority in your life. You trust yourself. You judge yourself. And here's the truth. You cannot save yourself. You cannot forgive yourself. You cannot rescue yourself. The key is to worship the right God, to marry someone else who also worships the only God, and then to raise children who will know, love, and serve that God, so that when you spend forever in the glorious kingdom of God, there are other people there with your last name, as part of your legacy of faith.

Some of your parents chose to walk with Jesus. You need to choose, as well, to continue in that legacy of faith. Faith is not borrowed, and the line to the kingdom of God is single-file. Some of you, your parents did not choose to walk with Jesus, and you will be patriarchs and matriarchs. You will be the first generation of Christian faith in your family, and the hope, and the trust, and the prayer is that in thousands of years, there would be a legacy, and there would be a lineage of people from your descendants who'd know, love, and serve Jesus. And when the story is told why, it would be that they heard about Jesus, and their lives were forever changed, and they made a decision that is echoed for generations into eternity.

2. THE SOLDIER

In addition, there was the soldier who believed, the centurion. This is a very powerful, strong, well-trained soldier. Think Special Forces, dude of dudes. That's a centurion. He's the kind of guy cage fighters sort of get a little uncomfortable around him, because he's scary. That's how tough he is. He doesn't just hurt people, he kills them. He's a man's man. He watches Jesus die. His job, as an executioner, is to murder men. That's what he does. He's basically a state-sponsored hit man. And he watches Jesus die, and he is so compelled by how Jesus conducts himself that he cries out, he says it publicly, "That is not just a mere man. He is without sin. That's the Lord." And he comes to faith in Jesus Christ.

This is an important part of our mission and message at Mars Hill. Christianity is for women—we see that here—and it’s for men, and it’s for the toughest men of all. And the toughest men can look at the Lord Jesus Christ, and they can see the strongest man who has lived in the history of the world, the God-man who endures betrayal, and beatings, and bloodshed, and does so without weeping, whining, or crying, and goes to the cross, and with full dignity intact, atones for the sin of the world.

3. THE SINNER

And lastly, one who comes to faith is the sinner at the side of Jesus. And as others are mocking Jesus, he says, “Have you no fear of God? Do you not know who this is?” He rightly proclaims the sinless nature of Jesus. “This man has done nothing wrong.” And then he says, “But I have.”

See, this is where Christian faith begins. It begins with an acknowledgment, an honest assessment, “I’m a sinner. I’m a sinner.” You can’t blame it on your parents. You can’t blame it on your culture. You can’t blame it on your genetics. You can’t blame it on your personality type. You’re just a sinner. I’m a sinner.

We sin in our thoughts. Aren’t you glad people can’t see what we’re thinking? We sin in our words. Have you said or typed something you really regret? We sin in our deeds. Have you done things you weren’t supposed to do? We sin in our motives. Do you do good things, but just to manipulate others and get praise? Do you get angry and upset when people don’t compliment you for the good things you did? We sin through commission. We do stuff we’re not supposed to. We sin through omission. We don’t do things we’re supposed to. We’re all sinners.

Some say, “Christianity is too easy. All you need to do is just tell God you’re a sinner, and tell Jesus you’re sorry.” You know what? It’s not easy. It’s hard, because it requires humility. We come to God not with hands full of all that we’ve done. “Here’s my life. Here’s my performance. Here’s my resume. Here are my good deeds and my bad deeds. Please put them on a scale and weigh them.” That’s not how it works. God doesn’t have good and bad people. He has perfect and imperfect. That’s why Jesus says, “Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” There are only two categories. Perfect—one person is in that category: the Lord Jesus Christ. And imperfect—everybody else. And the key is to acknowledge, “I’m a sinner. I’m in the guilty category. I’m among those who have broken God’s law.”

And here’s the truth, as well, friends. When we sin, it’s not just breaking God’s law; it’s breaking God’s heart. God is not just an impersonal force or a law by which we are judged. The Bible reveals him like a Father who cares. I’ve got five kids. I could tell you right now, if my kids do something that is sinful and harms them, it is a violation of the laws that I have, as their father. It’s also a devastation to the heart that I have as their father. Some of you need to know that your sin is not just breaking rules, but breaking the heart of God.

And this man acknowledges that. He says, “I’m guilty. I deserve it. They’re crucifying me, and I’m not even going to defend myself. But this Jesus, he’s done nothing wrong. He’s without sin. He’s not like us.” That’s right.

So he looks at the Lord Jesus, and you’ve just got to see this moment. Jesus is on the cross, and do you know what Jesus is not thinking about? Himself. He’s thinking about the people who are killing him. “Father, forgive them! Father, they’re going to go to hell for what they’re doing! Let’s forgive them. I’ll die right now, and that can be their forgiveness!”

And he’s having a conversation with a man at his side. “Jesus, forgive me.” Jesus looks at him and says, “Truly, truly, I say to you.” Jesus says, “I tell you the truth.” Do you know that Jesus tells the truth? Don’t question what Jesus says. Don’t look for alternative explanations to what Jesus says. He says more than forty times in John’s gospel alone, “I tell you the truth.” Jesus tells the truth, and he says, “I tell you the truth. Today, just a couple of minutes from now, you will be with me in Paradise.”

There was an ancient church creed that was revised and said that when Jesus died, he went to hell. He didn’t. He went to paradise. He went to the place where the people of God were held until he rose from death and ascended into heaven. Ephesians 4 says that he took them with him, which is why, today, if you die, and you belong to Jesus, Paul says, “To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.” You get to go to paradise. It’s a place of blessing in the presence of God.

CRUCIFIXION, HISTORICALLY

That is who was there. My next question is what happened to Jesus? What happened to Jesus? Because sometimes it is said, “Jesus died on the cross for all your sins,” and we don’t explain what happened. I want to explain to you what happened to Jesus. This has been a few years of study by me, culminated in a book called *Death by Love*. This includes medical journals that I’ve read on issues related to crucifixion.

And here’s why I think it’s important. The Bible doesn’t give us, as we just read in Luke’s account of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ—the Bible does not give us painstaking detail as to exactly what transpired at the cross of Christ. I believe that is, in part, because the original audience who received the writing of the New Testament, they had seen a lot of crucifixions, and so it didn’t need to be explained to them.

But because you and I have not witnessed public crucifixion—because, see, crucifixions in that day, they were overseen by the state, and they were done openly and publicly and shamefully as a form of state-sponsored terror. It’s as if in some nations today, if someone breaks the law, they cane them publicly, or they chop a finger or a hand off publicly, or they behead them publicly, and everybody sees it. Either they come out physically or they watch it digitally, and that is to tell everyone else, “Do not follow this leader. You will suffer their fate.” And so people saw crucifixion. We tend not to see it. So, I want to explain it to you.

Now, crucifixion was invented by the Persians, and it was perfected by the Romans. Crucifixion began with the Persians about eight hundred years before Christ was born, and it continued for more than a thousand years, up until the Roman emperor, Constantine, put an end to it after he presumably became a Christian in about AD 300.

It started with impaling. Crucifixion, historically with the Persians, insofar as we can tell, started with impaling, and this is that they would want to kill somebody slowly and painfully. So, they would take a long log, basically sharpened to a point at the end, and then they would run it through the person, and then the person would be impaled, and then they would take the stick, and they would slam it into the ground, and then the person literally would be impaled, sometimes for days, slowly bleeding to death. And they would leave them there, so that everyone who walked by would know, whatever they did, don't do that.

Now, this continued to be perfected, because people can be exceedingly cruel and sadistic, and they want to inflict as much pain as possible. And so when you hand this authority to kill someone over to the worst kind of men and soldiers, they find great joy in devising new ways to increase suffering and pain, and that culminated with crucifixion that has two parts. There's a *stipe*, which is the permanent post in the ground, and then there is what they call the *patibulum*, which is the crossbar. And so generally speaking, the primary post was affixed in the ground, and then they would bring the crossbar to the crucifixion site.

Now let me tell you about crucifixion. It was the most horrific, shameful, public way to die. The ancient historian Josephus, who himself was Jewish, he talks about it as the most wretched of deaths. Cicero said that decent Roman citizens shouldn't even speak of crucifixion because it was so barbarous and horrific, that Romans not only avoided crucifixion, it was for those who were foreigners. They shouldn't even speak of it. In Deuteronomy 21:22-23, God declares, "Cursed is anyone who is hung on a tree." So, for the Jews, it can't get any worse.

Crucifixion, however, happened all the time. For example, on the day that Spartacus fell in battle, six thousand people were crucified in one day, along roughly a 120-mile stretch of highway. If you could even imagine jumping on, let's say, I-5, and driving for two hours, and along the way on the shoulder of the road, there were interspersed six thousand bleeding, weeping, suffering, dying people. One day, six thousand people were crucified. They did this in public places, places that there was shopping, places where people were gathering, so that they could maximize the crowds.

Additionally, the worst people would come to watch these events. They would make sport. They would make light. They would make fun. Guys would have drinks. They'd place bets about whether or not they'd become incontinent and mess their pants or urinate. They'd place bets as to whether or not they would cry and whine. They'd place bets on the over/under for how fast they would breathe their last and die.

While this happened, people's mothers were there, their brothers and sisters and friends, and that was the case at Jesus' own crucifixion. He looked down, and there was his mom, and he spoke to her.

Jesus certainly knew what crucifixion was. He possibly even witnessed it as a little boy. Around the year AD 4, there was a Jewish uprising, and the Roman government put down that revolt with a massive crucifixion. Can you imagine what it was like for Jesus, as a little boy, an elementary school kid? Maybe out playing one day, and he sees a bunch of people crucified, and he realizes, "That's where I'm going. That's what it's going to look like. That's what it's going to feel like." And he kept going.

Crucifixion was, generally speaking, death by asphyxiation. As a man was crucified, he was crucified through the most sensitive nerve centers on the human body, the hands and the feet, with the equivalent of railroad spikes, the result being that the body would slouch on the cross, and then the man's lungs would eliminate the oxygen, and the man would pass in and out of consciousness.

See, sometimes women were crucified, but not generally; and when women were crucified, they were crucified backwards with their face facing the cross, because they didn't want to see a woman's face. But men were turned around. And unlike a lot of the pictures, men were generally not crucified high. They were crucified low, so everybody could look them in the eye and make fun of them.

So a man would pass in and out of consciousness. As he would pass unconscious, slouching on the cross, as the oxygen was exhaled from his lungs, he would then come to and push himself up on the cross. This could go on, history records, for as long as nine days: dehydration, delirium, off the body would be dripping blood and sweat, tears, urine, feces, because you couldn't even control your bodily functions.

Some people tried to hasten their death. They would just try and slouch, so they, insofar as we can tell, archeologically, they'd put a seat underneath their buttocks to hold them up to make it last as long as possible. After they died, the bodies were often just discarded. Some historians record that occasionally a stray dog would bring a foot or a hand home. Friends, this is what we did to God.

JESUS' CRUCIFIXION

BETRAYAL

How about Jesus? What exactly happened to Jesus? The Bible records that the night before, he was in prayer and in anguish, because he was betrayed by a friend, a pretend friend named Judas Iscariot. Judas had been with Jesus for three years. Jesus had fed him, and loved him, and taught him, and cared for him, and invested in him, and Judas betrayed him for thirty pieces of silver. It sounds like a lot. It's a couple of hundred bucks.

Jesus knew that he was approaching the cross, and so he spent time, as was his custom, in a garden called Gethsemane. I've been there. It's a real place. The Bible is not a bunch of philosophy. It's history.

And it says that Jesus asked his other friends to pray for him, and they failed him and kept falling asleep and that Jesus was in such anguish that he was

literally sweating drops of blood, which the medical reports will confirm only happens to those people who are under the most extreme emotional and psychological distress.

Jesus knew he was going to be crucified. He had been talking about it his whole life, and he knew what the pain would be. In fact, crucifixion is so painful that a word was invented to articulate its horror! So, the word “excruciating” literally means “from the cross.”

SCOURGING

Jesus was arrested. The Bible records that he was beaten by a mob of men. They blindfolded him, they beat him, and they blasphemed him all night, and then the Bible says simply, “They took him and had him scourged.” Now, scourging was such that it often simply killed the victim. Many men didn’t even live through the scourging.

Because Jesus was young, because he was strong, he was a construction worker, he’d walked a lot over what I have seen is very rough, dry, hearty terrain—Jesus was a young man in his early thirties. He was in good physical condition. He was strong. That’s why he lived as long as he did.

And what they would do for the scourging is they would take a man, and they would affix his hands above his head, usually in shackles, and tie him to a post or over a large stone. This would expose his neck, and his shoulders, and his back, and his buttocks, and his legs. They’d strip him possibly naked or nearly naked, and then two executioners would stand on either side of the man, and they would whip the man with something called a *flagrum* or a cat o’ nine tails, and it was a handle, usually made out of wood, that had protruding from it long straps of leather. Affixed at the end of each strap of leather was a ball made out of either metal or sometimes out of stone, and that would tenderize the human flesh as you would a piece of meat for a barbecue. And then also there were hooks at the end, usually out of metal, as well.

And so the *flagrum* would whip the man across the back, and all the leather straps would spread, and the flesh would be tenderized, and then the hooks would sink in deeply, and then the executioner would give a tug on the handle to ensure that all of the hooks were deep into the man’s body, and then he would literally rip the flesh off of the man’s body. And this would penetrate down to deep tissue. Sometimes, history records that a rib would break and come flying off a man’s body, and this would happen over, and over, and over, and over, and over, and over, and over. And the men would just take turns doing their job, inflicting as much pain as was possible.

Again, this too was predicted in the Word of God, in the book that God wrote. In Isaiah 52:14, it said that his appearance would be marred beyond human likeness; that had Jesus’ mother or brothers just walked up on him during his flogging, they wouldn’t have even recognized him. Perchance he didn’t even look like a human being, maybe a bloodied animal or just a pile of meat.

At this point, Jesus is bleeding profusely. His body is laboring to survive. He has been up all night. He has taken a beating while blindfolded and blasphemed from an angry mob of men for hours. And now his body is in absolute shock, and the process of death has begun.

A CROWN AND A CROSSBAR

What they then do is, in mockery, they give him a crown of thorns, and they make him carry a Roman crossbar. This crossbar would weigh upwards of a hundred pounds. Think an enormous railroad tie or the kind of beam that you would use to secure a roof in an ancient home. This was recycled timber. Other men had carried this. It was covered with their tears and their blood, and their urine, and their sweat.

Jesus was forced to carry it, and they laid it across his back. Can you imagine what that felt like? Your back is bloodied and traumatized. You’ve got wounds down to the deep tissue and organs, and they throw on your back—he was a strong man, he was a carpenter, he had carried this kind of roughly-hewn timber, but they threw it on his back to carry on a long walk through a place called the Via Dolorosa, the way of the cross. I’ve walked it. It’s real.

As Jesus is carrying it, he’s so exhausted and beaten and near death, that the Bible records that he fell facedown and collapsed under the weight of the cross, the crossbar. Now, the medical experts who have examined this in various non-Christian medical journals, they say that if, in fact, Jesus fell facedown with his hands over the cross, carrying it, that the weight and the pressure on the chest as he hit the ground, would’ve been the equivalent of a head-on high-speed car wreck. That’s exactly what it was like.

Imagine being in a car in a head-on collision with no airbag, and you were thrown into the steering wheel. What that does, that punctures around your heart sac because your ribs essentially break, and now you have massive internal hemorrhaging and bleeding. And if you don’t get immediate medical attention, you will die. That’s what happened to Jesus. That’s why Simon of Cyrene was appointed to help him carry the cross, because Jesus had now undergone what we would say medically was a deep chest contusion.

RAILROAD SPIKES

Nonetheless, Jesus concludes his walk to his place of crucifixion. And this carpenter who, himself, had driven many nails, has, again, the equivalent of railroad spikes driven through the most sensitive nerve centers on the human body, the hands and the feet, and the crossbar is affixed to the main post, and then he is lifted up and it is dropped into the ground, and his body shakes violently.

And looking him in the eye are all who are mocking him, and he sees his own mother. At that moment, Jesus could’ve called down a legion of angels. He could’ve called out to followers to fight! But he didn’t because Isaiah had predicted seven hundred years prior in the book that God wrote, “Like a lamb that is led before shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.”

SUBSTITUTE

Jesus cries out many things on the cross. "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" And in that moment, God the Father, the first member of the Trinity, turned his back on God the Son, the second member of the Trinity. In that moment, the God who became a man atoned for the sin of men.

Something happened in that moment. Something legal, something spiritual, something eternal happened in that moment. Jesus traded places with us. He became our substitute, and our sin was imputed, or reckoned, or granted to him, and he became cursed. He became damned. "Cursed is everyone hung on a tree."

What was more difficult for Jesus than the physical suffering was the spiritual separation, because, see, 2 Corinthians 5:21 says it perfectly: "God made him, who knew no sin, to become sin." What was worse than suffering was becoming sin, and our God took our place.

Because, see, here's what happens, friends. From our first father and our first mother, they, in the Garden, substituted themselves for God. They said, "We'll be God." And then God becomes a man, and he goes to the cross, and he substitutes himself for us and says, "The wage for sin is death. I shall die for you. Father, forgive them." And so Jesus cries out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" And that's when sin is atoned for. That's when Jesus' prayer of "Father, forgive them" is answered.

A (LITERAL AND FIGURATIVE) BROKEN HEART

And then he cries out, "It is finished!" in a loud, triumphant cry. See, again, I told you previously that when men died from crucifixion, it was generally a painfully slow death by asphyxiation. Jesus, however, died with his lungs filled with air, and it says he went out in a triumphant cry, in a loud voice, "It is finished!"

Jesus did not die by asphyxiation. I believe he died of a broken heart. I believe that as Jesus was breathing his last, and as Jesus was having a heart attack and literally dying of a broken heart and figuratively dying of a broken heart, that as his heart was giving way, he was crying out in triumphant victory that it was finished.

See, friends, that's why you don't need to do better. That's why you don't need to try harder. That's why you don't need to examine other faiths and religions to see how they stack up. You don't need to add anything to Christianity like baptism, or speaking in tongues, or believing in some particular secondary doctrinal matter. When Jesus said it was finished, everything was accomplished to appease the wrath of God and to forgive the sin of men and women. It's all finished.

That's why religion is a joke. That's why spirituality is false. And that's why people who think they're too good for Jesus are the worst of all. It's finished. I need you to know that.

And some of you would say, "But you don't know what I've done." He forgave the guys who killed him. He was willing to. The centurion came to salvation at the cross of the God that he murdered! God can forgive you.

Some of you say, "But I've wasted so many years." The thief on the cross, he wasted his whole life until the last moment. Don't do that. But it's never too late, so long as there's breath in your lungs. Most of us don't think enough about Jesus. We're too busy thinking about ourselves.

DEAD AND BURIED

We've looked at who was there. We've looked at what happened—and I just feel inclined to tell you this. Jesus died. Some would say he swooned. He didn't swoon. He died. Because then they took a spear, and they ran it underneath his ribcage so that it punctured his heart, so that what flowed out of his side? Blood and water. Blood and water.

That indicates he probably did die of a heart attack, because those two fluids are separated in the heart by a heart sac. I believe there was leakage from the chest contusion so that, ultimately, when it flowed out of his body it was intermingled because he died of a broken heart, and it was shattered by a spear.

Jesus was dead. A professional executioner declared him dead. Everybody knew he was dead. He was buried in upwards of one hundred pounds of burial linens and spices. He was placed in a cold hewn-out-of-rock tomb without food, water, or medical attention. A huge stone to guard the entryway was rolled over. The Roman seal was imprinted on it so that it would not be tampered with, and a guard was posted to ensure that no one touched the body. Jesus was dead.

WHY IS THIS GOOD NEWS?

We've looked at who was there. We've looked at what happened. The most important question is why? Why did the worst thing happen to the best person who's ever lived? What's amazing, as well, is, for the Christians who are with us, we call this what? The good news. That's gospel. The gospel, that means good news! This is the good news! "What?" "Yeah, the big day we celebrate every year is called Good Friday. Good Friday, we celebrate the good news!" "What, why?" We murdered God! You murdered God! His blood is all over your hands! You've killed God! You're that bad! You're that selfish! You're that evil! You're that corrupt! You're that condemned! The blood is on your hands! You killed God! Good news?

Here's why it's good news. He did it for you. He died for you. And the Bible uses this little word: "for." It tells us that Jesus died, and then it tells us that he died for us. See, if there's no "for," there's no good news. You killed God! That's not good news. And he died to forgive you, to love you, to serve you, to seek you, to save you, to adopt you! He did it for you!

I'll read it over and over and over. This is why the early Christians, they started discussing, "What are we going to use as a symbol? Should we use the dove?" That was the Holy Spirit descending on Jesus. "Should we use fishes and loaves?" Because Jesus fed a whole stadium with a little boy's Lunchable. "Should we do that? What are the options?" What did they decide, beginning with Tertullian, the early church father? They decided, "We're going to use the cross. We're going to make the sign of the cross. We're going to put the cross on our homes. We're going to put the cross out in front of our house, so everybody who walks in knows, 'Hey, Jesus' people are here.'"

The cross? Are you kidding me? The ancient hymn says it rightly: It's an emblem of suffering and shame. There was a second-century painting in a, I think it was in a cave; it was like a grotto. And it showed what non-Christians thought of Jesus and crucifixion. It had the body of a jackass with the head of Jesus, and then it had a guy worshipping, and it says, "Alexamenos worships his God." And the view of non-Christians was if you worship Jesus, you're worshipping a dead jackass. Good news? Yes, good news.

Isaiah 53:5—seven hundred years before Jesus was born, because this is the book that God wrote; it predicted the future: "He was wounded for transgressions," sins. Do you have any sins? That's why Jesus died! So, you don't need to say, "I'm a good person." You could say, "Jesus is a good Savior." You don't need to say, "I've lived a good life." You need to say, "I haven't lived a good life. Jesus lived a perfect life."

"He was crushed for our iniquities." What happened to Jesus is what happens to all who don't trust in him. They suffer in a horrific way. But, friends, here's the good news. If you trust in Jesus, God does not punish you. Don't think, dear friend, when you're suffering, that God is punishing you. Sometimes you reap what you sow. Sometimes it's cause and effect. The Bible does say in Proverbs and in Hebrews that just like a daddy who loves his kid corrects him, God will correct us, but he never punishes us. Right now, you need to know, if you're in Christ, God doesn't punish you, God hasn't punished you, and God won't punish you, because Jesus was punished in your place as a substitute for your sins, and it would be unjust for Jesus to be punished and you.

So, when you're suffering, don't run from Jesus; run to him. Don't ask, "Why are you punishing me?" Tell him, "Thank you for enduring my punishment. Please use this suffering to, number one, teach me about you; number two, to make me like you."

Paul says it this way in Romans 4:25. "He was delivered up for—" here's our word—"our trespasses," yours and mine. Here's what I don't want you to hear. "Mark's a good person. He gave a lecture on how to be a good person." No. "Mark is, by nature, an enemy of God, and God saved him, and loved him, and forgave him, and adopted him, and that's the grace of God, and Mark can't get over it, and Mark wants me to have the same thing." There is a hero. It's not you or me. It's always Jesus. We're always the villain; he's always the hero.

Here's how he says it in Romans 5:8, "God demonstrates his love for us in this—" You wonder if God loves you? "God demonstrates his love for us in this! While sinners, while rebelling, Christ died for us." You can look to the cross and say, "I know God loves me! He became a man. He lived without sin. He lived the life I've failed to live. He died the death I should've died. He gives the gift I cannot earn. I know God loves me, not just because he gave me health, or wealth, or comfort, or convenience. God gave me God! God gave me God! God gave me himself! God gave me his Son! God gave me salvation!"

God does love you so deeply, so passionately, so intimately, so perfectly that when he chose to give to you, he gave you himself. You're loved. You're loved in a way that nobody could ever love you, not with that perfect, unbroken, unyielding love.

And here's what's wonderful about the love of God, given through the death of Jesus. Because here's the truth. We're not undeserving. We're ill deserving. Because you didn't deserve the love of God, you can't un-deserve the love of God. Because you didn't take it—he gave it—you can't lose it. Here's the big idea. Once Jesus decides to love you, there's nothing you can do about it forever, and that's a good thing.

OF FIRST IMPORTANCE

First Corinthians 15:3, Paul says, "What I received of first importance I now pass on to you." Of all of the things that you could possibly know, of all of the blogs, and tweets, and books that you could read, of all the lectures you could hear, of all the advice you could receive, of all the conversations you could endure, of all of the shows you could observe or hear, of everything you could take in regarding information, which is doubling on the planet more quickly than every other year—you can get absolutely overwhelmed, deluged in all of the data and miss the good news. Of everything you've ever learned, of everything you could ever learn, what's the most important thing to learn? Paul says, "Of first importance is this: Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures." That Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures. It's the most important thing you need to know.

That's why I'm really honored to teach you. I'm really glad to be here. And you know what? We've been in this book for more than two years. This church is only one year old. I started teaching this book before this church was even meeting, before this building was open. In the providence of God, he knew that you would be here to hear the most important thing in the history of the world: that you're a sinner, and that Jesus is a Savior, and that the cross of Christ is your only hope.

See, we're at a sacred moment. We're at a divine moment. We're in a moment that God chose from eternity past. See, because the Bible says elsewhere that God determines the times and the places in which we live. We're not here by happenstance or circumstance. We're here by providence. God wants you. God knows you. God loves you. God's pursuing you. God cares for you. God's concerned for you, and God is waiting for you to respond to him by trusting in his Son, Jesus Christ. What I received, I pass on to you, of first importance: Christ died for our sins.

Dear friend, the murder of Jesus, the execution of Jesus, the crucifixion of Jesus, it's something done by you! You killed God! We killed God! Humanity is responsible for the murder of God! We stand together. We're all guilty. The murder of Jesus Christ, the execution of Jesus Christ, the

crucifixion of Jesus Christ, it's done by you, it's done by me. But here's the good news. It's for you, it's for me. There is not one person here who would turn from sin and trust in Jesus that he would turn away. There's not one person here who has sinned too much, who has strayed too far, who has rebelled too continually, who has protested too strenuously.

Not only did Jesus die, not only was Jesus buried, Jesus Christ rose from death! Jesus conquered sin! Jesus conquered death! After he was buried, three days later, Jesus walked into town on nail-scarred feet to eat breakfast and hug friends and to show nail-scarred hands. He appeared to crowds upwards of five hundred people at one time. He appeared over the course of forty days. His mother saw him alive and worshiped him as God. His brothers saw him alive and worshiped him as God. His friends saw him alive and worshiped him as God. Even those who doubted, like Thomas, saw him alive! And he fell down, and he proclaimed in worship, "My Lord and my God," to his friend Jesus Christ.

Even Jesus' most bitter, vicious, voracious enemies, they became Christians. They trusted in Jesus as the Savior for sinners. That includes men like Saul. He's the one who wrote, "He was delivered up for our trespasses. Christ died for us. Christ died for our sins." That's written by a man who hated Jesus, a man who hated Christians, a man that we first meet in the Bible when he is murdering an early church deacon named Stephen, and he encounters the risen Christ. He encounters the living Christ. He encounters the saving, seeking, serving Christ, and he is transformed, and he goes from Saul to Paul, from an enemy of Christianity to an author of the Bible, who himself dies for Jesus with no fear, knowing, "I will see him, and he will be proud of me, and I will be with him forever, and death cannot conquer me, because Jesus has saved me!"

Friends, you need Jesus! Whatever you're dealing with, first things first. What's most important? You and Jesus! He has done everything to love you, to forgive you, to pursue you! And when he said, with the last breath of his dying mouth, "It is finished!" he was telling you, "I love you! I invite you! I welcome you! Don't worry about what is to be done! All that could be done is now done!" And as his arms are extended, they're an invitation for you to run to a God who loves you!

PRAYER

I'm going to pray for you. My job is to tell you the truth. Your job is to make a decision. You have got to decide what you will do with Jesus. Like those who were present on that day, you can have passive unbelief, you can have active unbelief, or you can have belief. I'm asking you to trust Jesus. I'll pray for you, and then we'll explain to you how to respond.

Father God, I thank you for this sacred moment, God, that we would begin a series over two years ago, and that you knew, you knew that we'd all be here tonight, and you knew that other people would listen in at their time and place at Mars Hill or online, and that you knew that the message of the gospel is the power of God, and that, God, you would love these people so much that you would cause a building to be purchased, and your people to renovate it, and people to generously give so that we might have a place to hear the good news and that, God, you would bring people, because you love them, because you care for them, and because they're standing in the path of your wrath, and you have a plan by which Jesus could deliver them.

Father, we're overwhelmed by that. And, Jesus, we don't know what to say. Thank you is all we've got, that you would die for us, that you would use the most horrific evil in the history of the world to forgive sin and save people. It just shows how magnificent you are, how sovereign, and glorious, and good, and humble, and helpful you are. Holy Spirit, I ask you to take those who do not know the Lord Jesus and to give them faith, saving faith, deep faith, life-changing, legacy-altering, history-making, eternity-sealing faith.

Holy Spirit, I ask for those who are Christians, that they would be bold, that they wouldn't be timid cowards. It's not about Christianity. It's not about Mars Hill. It's not about them. It's all about Jesus. And, Jesus, you were willing to be naked, and beaten, and traumatized to stand with us. I ask for my friends to have the courage to stand with you, to stand with you in the classroom, to be mocked like you were, to stand with you in the workplace, to be mocked like you were, to stand with you with roommates, and family, and friends, and spouses, and children. Jesus, the worst that can happen is they kill us, and they send us to be with you, and you say, "Well done, good and faithful servant," and you put us into a kingdom that never ends, a place that you said to the thief on the cross is a paradise. So, Lord Jesus, thank you that because of your death and resurrection, the worst-case scenario is the best-case scenario.

God, I pray for those who have been borrowing faith. They're like some of the people in the story. They've been watching Christians. They've been watching Christianity. They've been watching the story of Christ, but they themselves do not believe yet. They haven't trusted yet. They haven't surrendered yet. They have Jesus as a part of their life, but they're still trying to control him, and use him, and manipulate him, and reduce him. Jesus, you are Lord. I pray for us all to acknowledge you as Lord, to enjoy you as Lord. Jesus, we feel the weight of our sin because of the conviction of the Holy Spirit. We thank you for that. But Jesus, we know that it's finished. The sin is forgiven. The wrath is taken. The path to hell has been redirected. That enemies have become friends and that you are a good God who loves well. And so, Holy Spirit, I'm asking you right now, you would grab people's hearts, and minds, and lives, and souls, and you would turn them to Jesus, in whose name we pray. Amen.

Note: This sermon transcript has been edited for readability.