

### **Gospel Reading: Luke 23:32-43**

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Luke.

**Glory to you, O Lord.**

<sup>32</sup> Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with [Jesus] to be executed.<sup>33</sup> When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals - one on his right, the other on his left. <sup>34</sup> Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.

<sup>35</sup> The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is God's Messiah, the Chosen One." <sup>36</sup> The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar<sup>37</sup> and said, "If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself."

<sup>38</sup> There was a written notice above him, which read: this is the king of the Jews. <sup>39</sup> One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!"

<sup>40</sup> But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence? <sup>41</sup> We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong."

<sup>42</sup> Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." <sup>43</sup> Jesus answered him, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise."

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

**Praise to you, O Christ.**

## Reading: Luke 23:32-43

### Theme: “Responding to King Jesus”

- Good morning. Let’s pray: *“May I speak in the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.” Amen.*
- It’s great to be back with you this morning, as we mark the end of the church calendar, by celebrating the Festival of Christ the King. And this morning, we will certainly be celebrating Christ the King as we explore this passage in Luke 23 together. King Jesus upon the Cross.
- The passage for this morning is extraordinary. Not only do we get insight into the **nature** of Jesus (“who he is”), but we are also given sneak previews of what it **truly means** to be a follower of Christ the King. The cost of following Jesus if you like. And a little spoiler alert: that includes doing some shockingly counter-cultural stuff! And if that wasn’t enough: King Jesus – our suffering Saviour – gives us all this insight while enduring the agony and utter humiliation of the Cross.
- So, let’s explore three extraordinary actions of King Jesus from the Cross, which show us as fellow believers how to live Christ-centered lives. First of all:

#### **1) King Jesus prays for his persecutors from the Cross**

- *“Two other men, **both criminals**, were also led out with [Jesus] to be executed. When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, **along***

*with the criminals - one on his right, the other on his left. Jesus said, “**Father, forgive them**, for they do not know what they are doing.” And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.” (vv.32-34)*

- Talk about practising what you preach. What did Jesus preach to the crowd in the Sermon on the Mount: *“Blessed are those who are persecuted, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:10).*
- Jesus is praying for those who are mocking him, for those who are torturing him, for those who are killing him!! And praying for God’s forgives for them. What??
- **Story:** When I’m driving in the car and someone cuts me off on the motorway, my first response *isn’t* one of: “Father, please forgive him, (and, yes, almost always it is a dude!) for he does not know what he is doing. No, my response is voicing my frustration by raising my voice somewhat and using a mixture of words most probably not suitable for church. Father, forgive me, for I do not know what I’m doing!
- And my teeny tiny issue of experiencing this kind of injustice, of maybe even feeling hurt, is **NOTHING** compared to what King Jesus had to agonizingly endure upon the Cross!! **NOTHING!!** And yet... he cares about *my* situation and *yours*. And yet... he prays for forgiveness for those responsible nailing him to this excruciatingly painful Cross. What? Why?
- I can’t even pray for someone who cuts me off on the motorway! In that very moment, I wish I was driving in a Bond car and I’d just fire a missile!
- This is what it means to truly follow Jesus: “loving your neighbor as yourself” might be easy to say, but as times, if we’re honest, is so hard to practice.
- The way in which Our Lord shows such love for his persecutors upon the Cross – and ultimately for all of us – is extraordinary. This truly is King Jesus.

**He prays for his persecutors from the Cross**

## 2) King Jesus reveals his identity upon the Cross

- *"The people stood watching, and **the rulers even sneered at him**. They said, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is God's Messiah, the Chosen One."  
**The soldiers also came up and mocked him**. They offered him wine vinegar and said, "If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself."  
There was a written notice above him, which read: this is the king of the Jews. **One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him:** "Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" (vv.35-39)*
- *"The people stood watching":* notice what the "people" (v.35) – the onlookers – are doing... nothing! Standing there, checking stuff out, watching these three men – including King Jesus – being crucified. Fun way to spend a Friday, right?!
- Irish philosopher and politician Edmund Burke said this: *"The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good people to do nothing."* You don't have to do evil for evil to triumph, you just have to do nothing! And unfortunately, history has certainly proven that to be true.
- That's exactly what's happening in this passage. Evil is happening and no-one seems to care or do anything about that. And our Gospel writer Luke certainly isn't letting "the people" off the hook here in their passive self-righteous role as bystanders.
- And then the insults begin; the threefold mockery commences. First of are "**the rulers**", meaning the Jewish leaders; members of the Sanhedrin. They "sneer" at Jesus, saying: "He saved others; let him save himself if he is God's Messiah, the Chosen One.
- Secondly, his executors, the **Roman "soldiers also [come] up and mock him**. They offer [Jesus] wine vinegar and say, "If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself."

- Luke further emphasises this mockery – Jesus' charge – by mentioning the written notice above Jesus on the Cross, "*which reads: this is the king of the Jews*."
- Thirdly, one of the two criminals crucified next to Jesus also starts hurling insults at Jesus: "*Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!*"
- Now, interestingly enough, these three mockeries give us **LOTS** of insight into the identity of Jesus. There is a real irony here: those who are insulting Jesus are actually revealing and affirming his true identity:
  - **1) Jesus is Saviour:** yes, that's correct. The word "save" is mentioned four times in these few verses. Jesus clearly "saved others"; it's what he did, it's what he does, it's what he will still be doing. Jesus saves.
  - **2) Jesus is God's Messiah:** yes, well done. Right again! Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah.
  - **3) Jesus is the Chosen One:** yes, right again. Jesus is the Chosen One. Language which echoes God's own words to refer to his son at his baptism in Luke 9: "my Chosen One".
  - **4) Jesus is the King of the Jews:** yes, well done. That's right again. He is the King of the Jews.
- The Gospel of Mark also adds: "*And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, saw how he died, he said, "Surely this man was the **Son of God!**" (Mark 15:39).*
- The way in which Our Lord endures such mockery from his persecutors upon the Cross – ultimately for all of us – is extraordinary. This truly is King Jesus.

## He reveals his identity upon the Cross

## 3) King Jesus offers salvation from the Cross

- *"But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence?"*

***We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.*** Then he said, ***“Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”*** Jesus answered him, *“Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”* (vv.40-43)

- I find these few verses amongst the most beautiful ones in Scripture. Here we witness a complete transformation of someone’s life when they put their trust in Jesus. The criminal is confessing his sins to Jesus: *“We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve”*.
- The criminal then acknowledges two key things:
  - 1) He believes Jesus is innocent. *“But this man has done nothing wrong.”*
  - 2) He believes Jesus has the power to save him. He turns to King Jesus and says: *“Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”*
- American NT scholar James Edwards writes this: *“For the unrepentant criminal, Jesus must come down from the cross to save; for the penitent criminal Jesus must remain on the cross and fulfil his divine duty to save. The petition of the penitent criminal is a witness that Jesus’ death is not a defeat, but a means of salvation.”*
- Does our Lord hear this criminal’s confession and respond by saying: “well, well, well...? You have done a lot of naughty things. Let’s thoroughly examine all of these and go over them one by one.” No, he loves the repentant sinner, this convicted criminal, this outcast from society, by saying: *“Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”*
- **Story:** Billy Graham, the American evangelist who died early last year, shared the following story. When he was driving through a small southern town, he was stopped by a policeman and charged with speeding. Graham admitted his guilt, but was told by the officer

that he would have to appear in court. When he appeared in court, the judge asked him, "How do you plead, guilty, or not guilty?" When Graham pleaded guilty, the judge replied, "That'll be ten dollars - a dollar for every mile you went over the limit." Suddenly the judge recognized the famous minister. "You have violated the law," he said. "The fine must be paid - but I am going to pay it for you." He took a ten-dollar bill from his own wallet, attached it to the ticket, and then took Mr Graham out and bought him a steak dinner! "That," said Billy Graham, "is how God treats repentant sinners!"

- That’s the scandal of grace! We don’t deserve it, we cannot earn it, from a worldly point of view, it makes no sense! When I trained for ministry at Ridley Hall in Cambridge, my New Testament lecturer gave me a helpful illustration to highlight the difference between mercy and grace. “Mercy is throwing a brick through someone’s window, and that person forgives you. Grace is throwing a brick through someone’s window and that person bakes you a 4-tiered cake!”
- The way in which Our Lord offers salvation from the Cross – ultimately for all of us – is extraordinary. This truly is King Jesus

### **He offers salvation from the Cross**

### **Conclusion: what’s our response?**

- My friends, what’s our response to King Jesus? Where are we in this story?
- Are we **the people in the crowd**, standing, watching, barely dipping our toes in the water; never really getting to know Jesus?

- Or are we like the **unrepentant criminal**, seeking further proof of who Jesus really is?
- Or are we like **the rulers, the Jewish leaders**, thinking we know best and have all the answers?
- Or are we like the **Roman soldiers**, quick to point all the blame and mess from our own lives onto Jesus?
- Or are we like the **repentant criminal**, believing in the power of Jesus to save us and fully accepting us for who we are, fearfully and wonderfully made, with all our frailties and weaknesses, our messing up time and time again, but coming back to our loving Father time and time again to experience his lavish love. Grace upon grace! It makes no sense. We cannot earn it, we don't deserve it, and yet... and yet... It is true!
- *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16)*
- The repentant criminal believes in Him, and does not perish, but is with Jesus that same day in "paradise".
- **Quote:** Let me close with this quote from John Newton, author of the well-known hymn "Amazing Grace". He said: "I am *not* what I *might* be, I am *not* what I *ought* to be, I am *not* what I *wish* to be, I am *not* what I *hope* to be; but I thank *God* I am *not* what I once *was*, and I can *say* with the great apostle, 'By the grace of God I *am* what I *am*.'
- Thank you, King Jesus! **Amen.**