

Luke 23:1-56

The Cross

Cedar Creek Church // Palm Sunday // March 29, 2026

Commission Greg Ziel

Greg walks out with me...

- He's been one of the elders here for 3 years...
- Celebrate him, thank him, pray over him...

Announcement: [start sermon clock]

Easter is NEXT WEEKEND! We want to leverage this time... It's the weekend most ppl are open to coming to a Church Gathering...

- Don't miss this opportunity to invite ppl to experience Jesus and His church!
- Grab some *invite cards* or a yard sign on the way out!

If you have your Bible, turn to Luke 23... Sermon notes on our app!

Build the tension... My brother was little... Practice balls vs. real ones... My brother hits a hard ball through the neighbor's window...

- Our neighbor was Hindu. It turns out my brother had hit the ball through his prayer room, and to make it worse, He was in there praying... *Bet he thought that was a divine moment!*
 - *Quiet and calm, and then CRASH!*
- On one hand, proud of my brother for hitting a line drive, but frustrated that he hit the wrong ball...
- My dad goes over there to make things right... Knocks on the door, goes to the room, has to take his shoes off before going in the room, idols everywhere in there, incense, the whole bit...
- My dad cleans everything up, looks at everything, and then gets to work on getting it **fixed and paid for**...

See, at the end of the day, **someone had to pay for that broken window**...

- The problem is that my brother didn't have the ability to... He had some toy cars and some change in his wallet... *Dad's anyway!*
- My dad stepped in and took care of it all, even though he wasn't the one who did it...
- He stepped in and did all the work to fix it and pay for it... My brother contributed nothing, how could he, he couldn't even have a conversation with the guy...

That is a picture of what the Bible says that God did for us... He stepped in when we couldn't, to do what we couldn't do...

I think the problem is that when it comes to spiritual things, we're always focused on how good we are... But we overlook the bad that we've done... We forget someone must pay for that...

- My brother could have been the perfect kid... *He wasn't*... But even if he was, none of that mattered; that one act had to be cleaned up and fixed...

The same is true for us; something has to be done about the bad that we've done... ***Someone has to pay for that***...

- Every religion acknowledges the deficiencies, but the problem is where they look for the solution...
- And most people are not ok with a solution that doesn't involve themselves...

At the core, I think it's because we want to be in control, we want to contribute... But what if that's all wrong... What if it's not about your control or contribution, what if it's about the one who is in control and His contribution on your behalf??

Setup:

- The triumphant entry into Jerusalem has happened...(Palm branches, Palm Sun) kicking off what is known as **holy week**...
- Jesus has taken the Passover with His disciples later that week on **Thursday evening**...
- After dinner that night, Jesus went to the Mount of Olives to pray...
- Judas, who was one of the 12, shows up with a mob...
- Peter got carried away and cut a dude's ear off... Jesus Healed it...
- He's been seized by the temple police and brought to the house of the High Priest...
- Jesus is beaten and mocked...
- Peter has denied Jesus 3 times before the rooster crows on **Friday morning**...
- That same morning, the Chief Priests and the Scribes questioned Jesus...

That leads us to our text this morning, **Chapter 23, verse 1**...

Luke 23:1-56

1 Then their whole assembly rose up [left the high Priest's house] and brought him before Pilate.

So they move from an internal among the Jews to external with Pilate works for Rome, He's the governor over the region of Judea-Jerusalem is the capital of Judea...

Verse 2: Here's their accusation against Jesus:

² They began to accuse him, saying, "We found this man misleading our nation, opposing payment of taxes to Caesar, and saying that he himself is the Messiah, a king."

What we have here is: 2 lies and a twisted truth...

- They said Jesus was misleading the nation: That's a lie...
- Opposing taxes: Lie... **Luke 20:25** (give to Ceasar what is Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's)

- Saying that He is the Messiah, a king: Twisted truth... True, but not in the sense they're saying it... They're holding this up as though Jesus were a revolutionary and a threat to Rome...

Reminder: Lies and deception are at the core of the things that oppose Jesus...

- Started this way in the garden and hasn't stopped...
- Beware, this world is woven with lies and deception that oppose Jesus...
 - Jesus is a kill-joy...
 - Jesus is too close-minded...
 - Jesus is irrelevant or outdated...
 - Jesus has a political party...
 - Jesus is not divine...
 - Jesus is a myth or legend...

Verse 3: ³ So Pilate asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" He answered him, "You say so."

Jesus answers with tactful affirmation... **IOW:** He is the King of the Jews, but **not** in the way that it was pitched by the religious elite...

He's not a revolutionary seeking to overthrow Rome... He's a **sacrificial King** that didn't come to be served, but to give His life as a ransom for many (**Matt. 20:28**)...

Verse 4: ⁴ Pilate then told the chief priests and the crowds, "I find no grounds for charging this man."

We see the innocence of Jesus that's declared by a Roman Governor...

⁵ But they [the religious elite] kept insisting, "He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee where he started, even to here." ⁶ When Pilate heard this, he asked if the man was a Galilean. ⁷ Finding that he was under Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who was also in Jerusalem during those days.

This is **Herod Antipas**, he's under the rule of **Pilate**, but he ruled over Galilee. He's the son of Herod the Great, and the one who had John the Baptist beheaded...

Verse 8: ⁸ Herod was very glad to see Jesus; for a long time he had wanted to see him because he had heard about him and was hoping to see some miracle performed by him.

This is a dog and pony show for Herod...

⁹ So he kept asking him questions, but Jesus did not answer him. ¹⁰ The chief priests and the scribes stood by, vehemently accusing him. ¹¹ Then Herod, with his soldiers, treated him with contempt, mocked him, dressed him in bright clothing, and sent him back to Pilate. ¹² That very day Herod and Pilate became friends. Previously, they had been enemies.

This is all a joke to Herod... He doesn't take Jesus seriously... He wants to "see the magic," and then he gets frustrated and, along with his soldiers, mocks Him, dressing Him up as an *amusement act*...

- Jesus is being degraded, and yet like a sheep being led to the slaughter, He doesn't open His mouth (**Isaiah 53:7**)...

Verse 13: ¹³ Pilate called together the chief priests, the leaders, and the people, ¹⁴ and said to them, "You have brought me this man as one who misleads the people. But in fact, after examining him in your presence, I have found no grounds to charge this man with those things you accuse him of. ¹⁵ Neither has Herod, because he sent him back to us. Clearly, he has done nothing to deserve death. ¹⁶ Therefore, I will have him whipped and then release him."

BTW: Notice the overwhelming innocence of Jesus again...

¹⁸ Then they all cried out together, "Take this man away! Release Barabbas to us!" ¹⁹ (He had been thrown into prison for a rebellion that had taken place in the city, and for murder.) ²⁰ Wanting to release Jesus, Pilate addressed them again, ²¹ but they kept shouting, "Crucify! Crucify him!" ²² A third time he said to them, "Why? What has this man done wrong? I have found in him no grounds for the death penalty. Therefore, I will have him whipped and then release him." ²³ But they kept up the pressure, demanding with loud voices that he be crucified, and their voices won out.

²⁴ So Pilate decided to grant their demand ²⁵ and released the one they were asking for, who had been thrown into prison for rebellion and murder. But he handed Jesus over to their will.

Jesus and Barabbas: Draw out the narrative...

Apply:

- A known convict, insurrectionist, terrorist, and a murderer...
- A man declared innocent on all fronts...
- Ironically, Barabbas actually did what Jesus was accused of...
- But: the guilty one is set free, and the one who has done no wrong is condemned to die a criminal's death even though He is innocent...

Jesus and Barabbas are a picture of you and me...

GOSPEL... Jesus traded places with us and paid the price that we deserved...

After Jesus is handed over to be crucified, **Matthew, Mark, and John** tell us that Jesus was beaten and mocked again by Pilate's men after Jesus was handed over...

This is the 2nd time Jesus was beaten, and the 3rd time He was mocked...

- They put a crown of thorns was placed on His head...
- Stripped off His clothes and put a purple robe on Him...
- Slapped Him...
- Spit on Him...
- Hit Him on the head with a mock staff they had given Him
- Mocked Him by saying hail the King of the Jews, getting on their knees, laughing in His face...

After doing this for some time, they took Him away to be crucified...

Verse 26: ²⁶ As they led him away, they seized Simon, a Cyrenian, who was coming in from the country, and laid the cross on him to carry behind Jesus.

I love how Luke includes this... Details like this show the validity of what's happening, it's with **real people who are known to the point of where they are from...**

Simon is a Cyrenian... This is a city in North Africa that's today known as Libya... So here you have this African man who plays a key role in God's sovereign plan... Helping get Jesus to the cross...

- This is a powerful role that God ordained for such a time as this...
- Because he will forever be **the tangible expression of Jesus' call to follow Him...** Take up your cross...
- Pretty cool, huh?!

Verse 27: ²⁷ A large crowd of people followed him, including women who were mourning and lamenting him. ²⁸ But turning to them, Jesus said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and your children. ²⁹ Look, the days are coming when they will say, 'Blessed are the women without children, 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?"

We saw earlier that the whole city of Jerusalem had just participated in the fate of Jesus...

- What Jesus does here is recall back to His warning about the coming fall of Jerusalem, that's an act of God's judgment for their rejection of Him...
- This highlights the continuity of everything that Jesus has been saying about Jerusalem...

Verse 32: ³² Two others—criminals—were also led away to be executed with him. ³³ When they arrived at the place called The Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals, one on the right and one on the left.

³⁴ Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, because they do not know what they are doing." And they divided his clothes and cast lots.

³⁵ The people stood watching, and even the leaders were scoffing: "He saved others; let him save himself if this is God's Messiah, the Chosen One!" ³⁶ The soldiers also mocked him. They came offering him sour wine ³⁷ and said, "If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself!"

³⁸ An inscription was above him: This Is the King of the Jews.

³⁹ Then one of the criminals hanging there began to yell insults at him: "Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!"

⁴⁰ But the other answered, rebuking him: "Don't you even fear God, since you are undergoing the same punishment? ⁴¹ We are punished justly, because we're getting back what we deserve for the things we did, but this man has done nothing wrong." ⁴² Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

⁴³ And he said to him, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise."

Such a powerful encounter: shows simple faith and simple belief...

- **Fear of God**- reverence for God...
- **Acknowledgment of sin...**
- In the midst of his sin as he serves a just sentence, he has the **faith to lean into Jesus...**

And Jesus responds to him and says, **salvation granted!** WOW! This is incredible!

What we see is that the thief's entry into Paradise **isn't** based on his works... The thief didn't have any...

- It was based on simple, desperate faith in Jesus!

The thief on the cross is such a key reminder for us: **Alistair Begg...**

- Would love to find that guy...
- He didn't know anything other than Jesus...
- Love to ask, *how did that work out for you??*
- *Angel said what are you doing here: I don't know...*
 - *What do you mean you don't know... Get the supervisor angel...*

○ A few questions:

- are you clear on the doctrine of justification?
Never heard of it in my life!
- Are you clear on the doctrine of scripture?
- Do you understand atonement?
- Frustrated: On what basis are you here?
- **The man on the middle cross said I could come!**¹

The age-old question: **why should I let you into the kingdom of God?**

- If we answer in the first person, we're wrong...
- Man on the middle cross...

This is it, this is the answer that changes all of eternity for you! It's that simple...

- Yet you never get past it... This answer is what defines your life!

The gospel isn't the start of the Christian life, it is the essence of the Christian life!

Alistair Begg: Without preaching the cross to ourselves every day, we will revert to faith + works= faith....

If we don't preach the gospel to ourselves every day, then we will begin to take our eyes off the cross we will begin to trust in ourselves...

- We end up with lip service, but live as though our salvation is dependent on me!
- And it will lead to despair... Or to arrogance... ²

It's not about what you know, it's not about what you've done, it's about the **man on the middle cross** who said you could come in based on His work and not yours...

- There is hope in this... That even when we sin, we can look to the man on the middle cross...

¹ Alistair Begg, *The man on the middle cross*.

Example: Playing in a golf tournament with Trey...

- His score gets written down... I have to remember that every hole esp. When I shank one in the woods... *Oh no! Thank goodness!*
- I can play horribly, but the score that goes down is His!

BTW: last thing here...

- **Christian:** What we see here with the thief on the cross should also be encouraging for when you share the gospel... Simple, clear, true...
- Don't overcomplicate the gospel!

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

Flesh out: The significance of this moment when the veil was torn... We now have access to God, not based on what we do, but based on what's been done... Only God could make a way, and He did!

Verse 50:

⁵⁰ There was a good and righteous man named Joseph, a member of the Sanhedrin, ⁵¹ who had not agreed with their plan and action. He was from Arimathea, a Judean town, and was looking forward to the kingdom of God. ⁵² He approached Pilate and asked for Jesus's body. ⁵³ Taking it down, he wrapped it in fine linen and placed it in a tomb cut into the rock, where no one had ever been placed. ⁵⁴ It was the preparation day, and the Sabbath was about to begin. ⁵⁵ The women who had come with him from Galilee followed along and

² Ibid.

observed the tomb and how his body was placed. ⁵⁶ Then they returned and prepared spices and perfumes. And they rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment.

This is where we will end **today**, Jesus has **died** and been confirmed dead by many at this point...

- But here's the thing, we know it doesn't end this way!

*But it had to happen this way because **someone had to pay**... God provided a way: **Jesus in our place**...

Conclusion

Illustration: The righteous king...

- Stolen from...
- It's His mom...
- Justice is served, but He takes it on Himself...

Some of you need to surrender to Jesus... I want to give you the chance to do that this morning...

*Do you believe that what Jesus did counted for you today in a way like you never have before...

- Can't explain, but cannot deny!
- If that's you, today is the day of salvation for you!

You need to truly celebrate Easter for what it is next week for the first time!

- You need to be baptized next weekend on Easter as a marker of your new life!

Christian: Your salvation can never get old...

- Challenge to invite people to Easter to hear the gospel!
- The degree to which you grow in the Christian life is contingent on the degree to which you view your salvation... Not just back then, but how it impacts you every day...

- The message of the cross is as true today and tomorrow as it was 2000 years ago...
- You lean into that, and you will be compelled deeper into the Christian life!

Communion [VAMP]

Here's how we want to respond together as a church... We want to remember the sacrifice of Jesus through one of the important things that Jesus has given His church, and that's **communion**...

Communion is something Jesus tells us to do in remembrance of Him... It's a tangible *and* physical expression of **Jesus payment in our place**...

Fence the table: Here's the thing, God's Word shows us that this special ordinance of Communion is something that's only for those who have surrendered their lives to Christ.

- *If you're here and you're not a Christian, we just ask that you refrain from partaking of these elements...*
- *You don't need these elements this morning; you need what they point to, and that's Jesus!*

So here's what we're going to do, our teams are going to begin getting in place, and in just a second, I will dismiss you to the tables around the room to receive the elements...

- Grab them and come back to your seat, and we will take them together...
- As you wait, reflect on Jesus, repent of sin, prepare your heart!

Lead the church in Communion

Let's stand and continue to worship together!