

Jesus' Remarkable Conduct In His Crucifixion.

Text: Luke 23:33-37

1) Jesus Prayed For His Enemies

Suggested Hymns:

2) Jesus Refused To Save Himself

243, 323, 55, 211 ALHB, 65

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Luke 23:33–37, ³³ *And when they had come to the place called Calvary, there they crucified Him, and the criminals, one on the right hand and the other on the left.* ³⁴ *Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do."*

And they divided His garments and cast lots. ³⁵ *And the people stood looking on. But even the rulers with them sneered, saying, "He saved others; let Him save Himself if He is the Christ, the chosen of God."* ³⁶ *The soldiers also mocked Him, coming and offering Him sour wine,* ³⁷ *and saying, "If You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself."* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Jesus was crucified on Calvary. Calvary is the Latin word for the Hebrew Golgotha, which means the place of a skull. It was a rounded hill which from a distance somewhat resembled a skull.

Travellers who have been in the Holy Land tell us that to the north of the city of Jerusalem, on the way that leads to Damascus, not very far from the city wall, there is a rounded hill which is bare on the top, without any vegetation, and, on the one side has two black openings that lead into a cave.

Seen from certain points in the city of Jerusalem the resemblance to a human skull is said to be most striking. Here Jesus was put to death in the most cruel manner. He was crucified. It was the Roman way of putting to death those criminals whom they wanted to dishonour and put to shame in the execution.

The culprit was divested of all his clothing, and nothing but a short apron was tied around his loins. We, therefore, have the note in our text that the

soldiers “*divided His garments and cast lots,*” which, unknowingly, they did in fulfilment of the twenty-second Psalm where the eternal Son of God said in view of His crucifixion, “*They divide My garments among them, And for My clothing they cast lots.*”¹

In the same Psalm the Son of God also predicted the mode of His execution, saying: “*They pierced My hands and My feet.*”² In the crucifixion His hands and His feet were pierced with nails. And, to add to His shame and reproach, He was placed in the middle of two criminals who were crucified with Him, as an indication that He must be considered the worst of the three.

Now, remarkable as was Jesus’ conduct on other occasions in His holy Passion, so here in His crucifixion. Let us consider with the help of God’s Holy Spirit, *Jesus’ Remarkable Conduct In His Crucifixion*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. Jesus Prayed For His Enemies.

We read, ³³ *And when they had come to the place called Calvary, there they crucified Him, and the criminals, one on the right hand and the other on the left.* ³⁴ *Then Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.”* What remarkable conduct of Jesus!

As His arms are stretched out on the cross and the nails are driven through His hands and feet, He fixes His eyes heavenward and says, “*Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.*” If Jesus had been an ordinary man, would He have said any such thing? Would He not rather have loudly protested His innocence, and fought His tormentors, and, perhaps, cursed them for committing such a vile act on His person?

But there is the meek and gentle Jesus, practising his own precept, as written in Matthew 5:44, ⁴⁴ *But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you.*

Here is the meek and gentle Jesus, allowing Himself to be led like a lamb to the slaughter. Here is the meek and gentle Jesus, praying for the soldiers who willingly and mercilessly caused Him the most excruciating pains.

And for the judge who had condemned Him, innocent as He was, to such a disgraceful death. And for the chief priests and elders who had brought about all this.

And for all who took part in this terrible act, praying for them that God would forgive them because they did not know that they were laying their hands on the Lord's Anointed and putting to death the Prince of life.

If anything discloses to us the very heart of Jesus, it is this prayer which He uttered when nailed to the cross. What a merciful Saviour Jesus must be! His heart is filled with compassion toward all. Against no one, not even against the greatest sinners, does He bear ill will.

He desires God's forgiveness to be extended even to those who committed a crime of which there has not been a greater crime committed upon this earth, the murdering of God's own Son. Who, then, can say, I am too great a sinner, there is no forgiveness for me, I am cast away, Jesus will not have me?

If your sins are as scarlet and red like crimson, in Jesus you have a Saviour who to this day makes intercession for you before the throne of His heavenly Father and prays for you that your sins might be forgiven.

Do not your sins stand as a barrier between you and God. Come to the Saviour Jesus in true faith; for He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.³

We read in 1 John 1:7 that *the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.*

By this prayer on the cross Jesus has shown that He is the promised Redeemer. Among the predictions concerning the suffering and dying Messiah in the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah we also find this notable prophecy that He should make *intercession for the transgressors.*⁴

Did not Jesus make intercession for the transgressors when He prayed, "*Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.*"? Did He not thereby show plainly that He must be the Servant of God of whom Isaiah speaks?

Finally, Jesus has given us a fine example in this prayer, an example how Christians should act toward those that wrong them, ill treat and persecute them.

They should banish from their hearts all thoughts of resentment and revenge. They should not retaliate and pay back in the same coin.

They should not render evil for evil, or railing for railing. They should not avenge themselves, but rather heap coals of fire on their enemies' heads by returning good for evil and wishing them well.⁵

This is what Stephen, the first Christian martyr, did. When an infuriated Jewish mob stoned him to death because he had borne testimony of Jesus, ***“he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not charge them with this sin.”***⁶

2. Jesus Refused To Save Himself.

Another remarkable part of Jesus' conduct in His crucifixion is His refusal to save Himself when repeatedly and by different parties He was urged to come down from the cross.

Four different parties called up to Jesus in a mocking way, as He was hanging on the cross, that He should save Himself and step down from His lofty position, if He was the Son of God.

Our text says, ³⁵ ***And the people stood looking on. But even the rulers with them sneered, saying, “He saved others; let Him save Himself if He is the Christ, the chosen of God.”***

So here we have, in the first place, the people, among whom, perhaps, were some of those who only a few days ago sang, ***“Hosanna to the Son of David”*** as they escorted Jesus on His triumphant entry into the city of Jerusalem.

Now, that Jesus has been condemned to death, they have no more use for Him. They wag their heads and say, ***“You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross.”***⁷

The second party of those who mocked Jesus are the religious rulers, namely the chief priests, scribes and elders. They do not address the Lord directly like the common people. They speak among themselves under the cross within Jesus' hearing. Perhaps their conscience was beginning to trouble them, and so they looked for an excuse for their vile deed.

They said among themselves, *“He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him. ⁴³ He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now if He will have Him; for He said, ‘I am the Son of God.’”⁸*

The third class of revilers were the soldiers, of whom our text says, ³⁶ *The soldiers also mocked Him, coming and offering Him sour wine, ³⁷ and saying, “If You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself.”*

The fourth class were the criminals. We read in Matthew 27:44 ⁴⁴ *Even the robbers who were crucified with Him reviled Him with the same thing* as what the rulers said. We also read in Luke 23:39 that *“one of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed Him, saying, “If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us.”⁹*

Different as were the motives of these four parties, the common people declared the loss of their faith in Jesus as the promised Messiah. The religious rulers insinuated that His miracles were performed with the help of the devil.¹⁰ The soldiers made sport of such a miserable would-be king. And the criminal thinks of his own deliverance.

However, they all agreed in this one point that if Jesus was really who He claimed to be, He would show it by coming down from the cross.

Now is it not most remarkable that Jesus did not respond? What an impression would this miracle have produced upon all, had Jesus stepped down from the cross! What a change of sentiment would such an act have brought forth!

Why did Jesus who saved others, as the religious rulers themselves had to admit, who healed the sick by the thousands, who raised the dead, who quieted the winds and the waves, whom all the powers in heaven and on earth had to obey — why did He not now make use of His divine power and save Himself?

The answer we find in Christ’s own words when Peter drew the sword in an attempt to liberate his Master in the garden Gethsemane. Jesus said at the time, as we read in Matthew 26:53–54, ⁵³ *Or do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels? ⁵⁴ How then could the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must happen thus?”*

Yes, how would the Scriptures have been fulfilled, all that had been prophesied of the Saviour's painful suffering and bitter death for the sins of the whole fallen human race, if Christ had given heed to those appeals that He should come down from the cross?

How would the salvation of the whole sinful world have been accomplished, had Jesus not brought this willing sacrifice of His life?

Let us not, then, be offended in Christ for the reason that He did not make use of His divine power while He was hanging on the cursed tree. Let us understand that in this way He humbled Himself for our sakes and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

Let us conclude with the words of the hymnist¹¹

Thou alone art all my treasure,
Who hast died that I may live.
Thou conferrest noblest pleasure,
Who dost all my sins forgive. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Psalm 22:18

² Psalm 22:16

³ 1 John 2:2

⁴ Isaiah 53:12

⁵ Romans 12:20

⁶ Acts 7:60

⁷ Matthew 27:40

⁸ Matthew 27:42-43

⁹ Luke 23:39

¹⁰ Matt 12:27

¹¹ Hymn 211 ALHB