

# The Word of the Cross

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 15 November 2015

Preacher: William Philip

[ 0 : 00 ] Turn now to our Bible readings and you'll find that in Luke's Gospel, chapter 23. If you have one of our church visitors' Bibles, that's page 884.

And we're back to this last section of Luke's Gospel. And a fortnight ago we looked at the trials of Jesus and the sentence passed on him.

And today we pick up the story at Luke 23 and verse 26, reading to the end of the chapter, the story that takes us right to the cross of Calvary.

I'll start reading at verse 25. Pilate released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, for whom they asked. But he delivered Jesus over to their will.

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. And they followed him a great multitude of the people and of women who were mourning and lamenting for him.

[ 1 : 13 ] 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, 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's dry? 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, 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 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.

And 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.

[ 2 : 24 ] One of the criminals who was 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. And it was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, while the sunlights failed.

And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. And 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. Literally, this man was righteous. And all the crowds that had assembled for this spectacle, when they saw what had taken place, returned home beating their breasts.

[ 3 : 38 ] And all his acquaintances, and the woman who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance watching these things. And there was a man named Joseph, from the Jewish town of Arimathea.

He was a member of the council, a good and righteous man, who had not consented to their decision and action. And he was looking for the kingdom of God. This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.

And he took it down and wrapped it in a linen shroud and laid him in a tomb cut in stone, where no one had ever been laid. It was the day of preparation, and the Sabbath was beginning.

The women who had come with him from Galilee followed and saw the tomb and how his body was laid. And then they returned and prepared spices. And ointments.

Amen. May God bless to us this, his word. Well, if you would turn with me to Luke's Gospel, chapter 23, page 884 in the Church Bibles.

[ 4 : 46 ] And we're looking today at the word of the cross. This book of Luke that we've been studying for a long time now is a gospel. That is, it's an announcement of good news, the good news of the kingdom of God and the great salvation that Jesus brings.

And Luke tells us in his opening lines of the book that he writes so that people may have certainty about these things. Both the revelation of God's glory through Jesus, who comes down from heaven's glory to earth to reveal God to the world ultimately, but also certainty about the road to glory that Jesus alone can lead us on.

The whole second half of his book, as we've seen, has been about that road. And Jesus has been walking on the road to glory with his followers and teaching them again and again what that road really means.

And he's told us it is the way of rejection on earth. It is the way of suffering and death. The road to glory is the road to the cross. And now we're very near the end of that road and Jesus has been very explicit in explaining to his followers what his death is really all about.

And Luke's great concern is for all of us that we should understand these things. What Jesus shows in the upper room that his death is as a Passover lamb, that his blood is shed, that his people may go free from the bondage of sin forever, liberated by that new covenant in his blood.

[ 6 : 23 ] And Luke shows us again, as we saw last time through all the trials that Jesus faced, that his death was as a perfect substitute, the righteous for the unrighteous to lead us to God.

That was wonderfully displayed even in the drama right around the trial of Jesus where innocent Jesus is delivered to death and guilty criminal Barabbas is set free in his place.

And now finally, as we come to Jesus' crucifixion, we see everything is just as Jesus said. The scripture must be fulfilled in me, he said.

What is written about me finds its fulfillment. And everything is under his sovereign control.

Everything has been purposed right from the beginning of his life, indeed, from the beginning of time.

Look at verse 25 here that we began with. Yes, he was delivered over according to the will of evil men to be crucified. And yet, as Peter says on the day of Pentecost, all this was part of the determined plan and foreknowledge of God.

[ 7 : 38 ] And that's what Jesus himself said as he prayed in Gethsemane. Do you remember? Thy will be done. Man's will is done, but all around it and in it and through it, it only accomplishes the perfect, powerful, saving will of God.

Sin is real, yes. Satan is real and powerful, we've seen that. But God is sovereign over all. and all will serve his will in the end.

Yet, of course, whether you consciously serve his will by serving God or seeking to serve against him is of great importance. Remember, as C.S. Lewis said, it makes all the difference to you whether you serve God's purposes as a Judas or as a John.

Where you stand and how you stand in relation to the cross of Christ makes all the difference, all the difference for eternity. And we see that again so clearly in these verses that Luke speaks to us here.

They are telling us what Paul, the phrase Paul uses, the word of the cross. Foolishness and weakness, yes, to many people, but to those who are being saved, the power of God and the wisdom of God.

[ 8 : 59 ] And he calls it the word of the cross because what Luke is writing here is not just historical events. He is telling us that story, but he is explaining it very carefully so as we are left with absolutely no misunderstanding.

And indeed, Jesus shows us himself at doing that in his own words here. Verse 28, for example, don't weep for me, says Jesus, you don't understand what this means.

You need to understand. So Luke's purpose is not in telling this story to lead us just into devotion and emotion. No, he wants to lead us to doctrine, to the evangel, the gospel, the truth, the great good news that the word of the cross speaks to our world.

So I want us to see this morning how Luke records precise events and gives us a powerful explanation and also shows us what that means for the personal experience of frail human beings. So first of all, look carefully at what is written so carefully about precise events. At the cross, we find a certain witness to history.

[10:18] Now, time and again, we've seen Luke's claim to have written a carefully ordered account is proven true and that is certainly so here. Notice how this whole account of the cross is bracketed at the beginning and the end by a paragraph that relates to a particularly named man and a group of women.

That's how it begins in verse 26 and in the last paragraph beginning verse 50. The Simon of Cyrene. We know his name, we know his hometown. Cyrene is near Tripoli, by the way, in modern Libya.

It's an unusual detail, isn't it? It's there to be verifiable. And then there's Joseph of Arimathea. And all his associations, all his public status. He was a member of the council.

But he had dissented from that decision back in chapter 22 verse 66 to try Jesus. So no doubt he was a marked man. He was a man who stood out. No one will forget Simon Joseph of Arimathea. Again, it's a verifiable public witness. This is precision history. Of course, there's no doubt more reason than history that Luke records these details.

[11:23] You can hardly help but think, can you, when you read that name, Simon, of the other Simon, Simon Peter, who just hours ago had been saying to Jesus, I'm ready to go with you right to the death.

But no beloved Simon, Jesus' friend, is nowhere to be seen at the cross. So it's Simon the stranger who must help Jesus by compulsion. Striking, isn't it?

It's very easy in the zeal of the moment to make great vows of commitment to Christ, isn't it? And sadly, it's all too common that the burden falls on others when the real cost of that, the cost of real Christian service hits home.

But if verse 26 should make every Christian disciple think soberly, surely verse 52 should gladden our hearts because here's a good man, here's a genuine seeker of Christ's kingdom and at last he seems unable to take a public stand with Jesus.

It's John's gospel that tells us that he had followed Jesus secretly for fear of the Jews. No doubt he was fearing what it would be like to have to openly stand with Jesus and yet here he is at the point of Jesus' greatest apparent failure and shame and Joseph at last becomes truly his.

[12:38] That is a wonderful testimony, is it not, to the power of the cross? But you see, Luke's chief point is clear. All of this is precise, verifiable historical detail and in fact the whole account is full of that.

So notice verse 49 and verse 55. These women who witnessed everything around the cross were Galilean women. That is, they were those who knew Jesus and had followed him right from the very beginning of his ministry in Galilee and so there was no chance, was there, that they mistook who Jesus was and a different body was followed to the tomb.

Of course not. Look at the detail in verses 53 and 54 which were the exact day, the exact time, the place, even the description of the tomb and all these other things.

This is verifiable witness to real history. There was no chance of a mistake about Jesus' burial. He wasn't buried in a mass grave along with all the other criminals.

There was no possibility of a swap of the body on the cross which is what Muslims are taught.

That's just incredulous when you see this. In fact, look at verse 56.

[13:50] There's simply no question at all that there was some plot of foul play to concoct some story about a resurrection and so stealing Jesus' bodies away for the simple reason that none of Jesus' followers remotely expected a resurrection.

Despite all Jesus' words and teaching, they had no expectation, did they, of anything other than death and decay and bodily decomposition. That's what they prepared their spices and ointments for, a rotting, decaying body.

Now, these are just a few details but if you look through your account, the whole account, you'll see the whole thing is full of detailed reportage. The two criminals, the name of the place of execution, the casting lots for his clothing, the inscription on the titulus, never mind the extraordinary signs like the darkness which could never be forgotten or the ripping in two of the curtain temple.

All of these things, they read like the lines of a news report. And with such a range of witnesses and evidence, it would simply be impossible to concoct a story like that without it being immediately refuted in many, many counts.

witness. It is historical witness. And yet, apparently, a recent poll in Britain just the other week showed that 40%, 40% of people in this country don't even believe that Jesus Christ was a historical figure at all.

[ 15 : 23 ] Despite the mountainous evidence that far outweighs the evidence for the lives of virtually every other figure in ancient history. Well, it may say more, sadly, about our education system than anything else.

But also, surely, it says something about the tragic failure of the church in this country to proclaim very clearly the historic reality upon which the whole of the Christian faith is founded.

Not on myth, but on historic truth. Christianity stands or falls upon verifiable history. Well, Luke wants us to see and he writes the precise verifiable record of events to enable us to be certain.

Certain that at the cross we find certain witness to history. That Jesus Christ suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried.

And of that we can be certain. But of course, on its own, that does not make a gospel of good news. that Christ died, well, any educated person ought to know, notwithstanding 40% of our countrymen.

[ 16 : 39 ] The Jews know that and believe that. Atheists who are educated know that and believe that. But of course, that doesn't make them Christian. Now, as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15, Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures.

it is the explanation of the death of Christ that is all important. And all through the gospel, Luke has shown us Jesus teaching what must be in his coming death.

And now, the cross itself, through God's sovereign ordering of events and through Jesus' own words and his actions, we are given again unmistakably and clearly the word of the cross.

And I want us to see that powerful explanation. In the cross, we find a certain word to humanity.

If you have read the other gospel writers' accounts of the cross, you will of course find a great deal of overlap in detail, naturally. But of course, each writer is telling the story his own way and with his own particular purpose and with his own audience in view.

[ 17 : 43 ] So naturally, he will tailor his account appropriately. When I was in India last week, I was teaching in the Pastors Conference on Luke 17-19 and of course, my message was the same as when I preached these verses to you here.

But I had to modify it for a different culture, for different people. Some things that you say will work better in one situation than another. And that's what the four gospel writers are doing. That's why they're a little bit varied.

It's just four different preachers telling the same gospel their own way for their own particular situation and people. You listen to me this morning, you come back this evening and listen to Edward, you'll have the same gospel, the same substance.

They're just a different style. Well, Luke's account shows his particular love of structure but also his great interest in people. He includes, for example, this interaction with the women of Jerusalem that others don't and with the two criminals.

And he seems to focus on particular words of Jesus that the other gospel writers don't focus on.

They quote other sayings of Jesus that Luke doesn't. Now you'll see if you look carefully, I hope in your Bibles, it's quite clear in the church Bibles that this falls into five paragraphs the section we read.

[ 18 : 57 ] And the first two and the last two actually both all begin with a very similar construction and indicate a new movement in place or in time. And then in the very middle there's this little cameo in verses 39 to 42 which is unique to Luke about the two criminals.

We'll come back to that but in each of the first four paragraphs I want you to notice that there is a word of Jesus. Obviously not in the last one which is about his burial. I want to see that Luke is focusing on these events and shaping them around Jesus' own explanatory words to give powerful explanation of what everything that is going on actually means.

Surely in the first paragraph Jesus' words in verse 28 proclaim loud and clear that at the cross we see that God's punishment is real.

That in Jesus' own unequivocal words from the cross he is telling us that God's judgment God's wrath against sin is real and unavoidable for those who persist perversely in rejecting the Son of

God who came in order to save people from their sins.

So he says weep for yourselves you women and your children because you are calling down terrible judgment on yourselves because of what you are doing to me.

[ 20 : 25 ] Jesus is just saying what he has said repeatedly through Luke's gospel at least seven times we've read him saying to Israel to that generation and warning them of judgment.

Most recently in chapter 20 do you remember in the parable of the tenants where at the end of it he warns about this terrible coming destruction because the cornerstone of God's kingdom Jesus himself has been rejected by his own people.

Then explicitly do you remember in chapter 21 he spelled out the utter destruction for Jerusalem that would happen before that generation was complete. You remember those dreadful words he uttered then woe to those women who are pregnant and nursing infants in that day for there will be great distress wrath against this people.

Now those are Jesus' words and so are these Jesus' words and we can't avoid these words. Better in these days he says to be barren than to have the added agony of seeing what happens to your beloved children and to your babes in arms when the besieging enemies of Rome come and flatten Jerusalem.

And the history books you know will tell us that the dreadful destruction that happened then in AD 70 was terrible and none suffered more greatly than women and children.

[ 21 : 50 ] There are reports of women even resorting to eating their children. So great was the starvation in that siege. Can you imagine it? It will be so terrible Jesus says that people would rather be crushed to death by a landslide.

Look at verse 30. Mountains fall on us and Jesus says that is surely coming and he quotes this proverb if things look terrible now and there's still the living tree of your king and savior among you how much more terrible will it be when he has departed when all that remains is the utter dead wood of a people rejected by God.

What a terrible word what an awful thing for anyone to hear and for anyone to utter and yet this is Jesus' own word from the cross judgment and God's wrath against sin and rejection of his son is real it is terrible and it's unavoidable for those who will go on persistently rejecting the glory of God in Christ and rejecting the mercy that is offered in Jesus Christ.

Now Jesus' words of course were directed directly to that generation as we've seen all through his gospel it is richly deserved and yet his words also constantly make a demand on every generation don't they?

Every person in the world look again at verse 30 and listen to what John says in his vision of the coming of the Lord Jesus when he will come to judge the earth on that great day in Revelation chapter 6 John sees all the earth doesn't he?

[ 23 : 28 ] The greatest to the least cowering from the presence of the Almighty and calling he says to the mountains and the rocks follow on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb for their great day of wrath has come and who will stand?

You see in that judgment in history upon Israel as a nation that Jesus promised and which was fulfilled in terrible reality if that is real when the green tree of hope and mercy is still abroad in the world before the end then how much more terrible will be the judgment that must come when all time for hope and mercy is gone friends the word of the cross is that judgment is real and terrible we see it in the dreadful horror of judgment that falls on Jesus himself as the Passover Lamb as the righteous for the unrighteous in darkness and shame as he the green tree of life himself bears the wrath of heaven but Jesus words can't be missed if we will not have him as savior how much more does there await us the terror of his wrath and a judgment that is forever sometimes sometimes people question whether it can be just that God's judgment on sin could be everlasting when sins committed by mortals are within the span of our mortal life and are time bound how can that merit eternal punishment well I think the answer to that really is twofold first that we haven't begun to understand just how much greater our involvement in sin and rebellion against God is merely than the sins that we realize that we commit it's about our being not just about our doing it's what we are deep down deep down within and unless we are rescued from what we are unless we are transformed and remade by the spirit of God then we will remain forever rebellious and sinful and God hating and we will go on incurring righteous judgments eternally and secondly of course we haven't yet understand the magnitude of a crime that it has to do with the greatness of the one against whom we sin and scorn if I spit in the face of a mere man well that sin is merely temporal

and human but if I spit in the face of the everlasting God and that becomes a sin which is vast and unmeasurable and everlasting and eternal and so Jesus says if you willingly refuse and crucify the son of God weep not for him but for yourself and for your children because one day you'll discover just how terrible a thing that is God's punishment is real it's terrible it's unavoidable for those who reject Jesus Christ but there is another word from the cross that Jesus gives in the very next paragraph in verse 34 and it tells us that God's pardon is real forgiveness is real and possible even for those who put the son of God on a cross father forgive them for they know not what they do they're astonishing words aren't they for one being unjustly murdered by sinful soldiers and it's to them principally that Jesus utters this prayer isn't it as David Gooding says false sentiment mustn't lead us to extend the scope of his prayer beyond his intention because some there knew very well what they were doing and were quite unrepentant about it and remained unrepentant as alas did the bulk of the Jewish nation so what Jesus says here doesn't negate what he said in verse 28 nor alas did it stop those words being fulfilled but his words do surely affirm that even in the midst of the coming terrible judgment of God upon the sin of man forgiveness of sins is real and is possible and it is the very thing that he came to do I came to call sinners to repentance he said I came to seek and to save the lost the son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins that's the word of the cross of Jesus Christ that's why after Pentecost in Acts chapter 3 Peter said to the crowds in Jerusalem you acted in ignorance in crucifying Jesus so repent notice ignorance is no excuse it must be repented of it is culpable sinful ignorance but if you repent says Peter you can be forgiven because in his death is forgiveness for you how can Jesus death and his cross save sinners well not in the mistaken way of the world verse 35 by a spectacular display of saving himself and others physically he came he came not to save bodies like that but to save everlasting souls from sin and that can only be if Jesus does not save his own bodily life because he must pay the price of forgiveness of sins you know don't you that forgiveness of a great wrong can never ever be free that forgiveness the kind of forgiveness that brings real reconciliation when a relationship of deep love has been ruptured by terrible unfaithfulness that is always always a terribly costly thing you know that if you ever tried or ever had to forgive somebody really you must bear the pain you must absorb that pain you must wrestle with the pain of betrayal and overcome it if ever there's going to be real forgiveness but it can't ever be real forgiveness if you save yourself from bearing that cost can it just as the Passover lamb must itself be sacrificed to bear the wrath of the destroying angel in that judgment on Egypt and so lead people to freedom so now God himself becomes that Passover lamb in the person of his son to bear the wrath to pay the price of sin that we might receive forgiveness that is real if he spared himself that sacrifice there could be no forgiveness no redemption no new covenant in his blood but it's because in the midst of that crescendo of temptation to avoid the cross to come down from the cross that Jesus resisted and was obedient to the last that forgiveness that God's pardon is possible only because the perfect lamb died and shed his precious blood may his people be redeemed in him we have redemption the forgiveness of sins says Paul and it's the certainty of that great reality of redemption long promised now accomplished that Jesus last cry on the cross bears witness to in verse 46 indeed the whole of the last paragraph is telling us that in the cross

[ 31 : 29 ] God's purpose and plan at last is fulfilled and that God's faithful son is vindicated Luke doesn't record Jesus cry of dereliction but he does give this last word which is a great cry of trust indeed John also doesn't he records Jesus saying it is finished it's accomplished and Jesus last words here quoted by Luke are from Psalm 31 and they carry exactly that meaning listen to that Psalm as King David's words take on a new meaning a richer meaning on the lips of his greater son you are my rock and my fortress and for your name's sake you lead me and guide me you take me out of the net that they have hidden for me for you are my refuge into your hand I commit my spirit for you have redeemed me oh Lord faithful God they scheme together against me and plot to take my life but I trust in you oh Lord my times are in your hand rescue me from the hand of my enemies and persecutors oh Lord let me not be put to shame for I call upon you blessed be the Lord for he has wondrously shown his steadfast love to me the Lord preserves the faithful be strong let your heart take courage all you who wait for the Lord you see

Jesus' own words are crying out it is done I've fulfilled my task I've been obedient to the last I've done the will of my Father and now into your hands I commit my spirit knowing that you will honor my sacrifice and it also records for us the affirmation and vindication of God's perfect offering of his

son both directly from heaven and from earth itself so verses 44 and 45 are a direct revelation from heaven first the miraculous darkness that shouts aloud surely to all Israelites who know the scriptures that God's day has now come to pass as the prophet Joel spoke on the great and awesome day of the Lord the sun will be turned to darkness and yet on that day comes salvation for all who call on the name of the Lord there's not just cosmic disruption there's cultic disruption the curtain of the temple is torn into verse 45 says that curtain that separated all but the high priest just once a year from going into the presence of God and never without sacrifice it's torn away because it's the end of the temple's age it's both a judgment on Israel's apostasy and its religion but also if they could only see it it's a fulfillment at last of everything that the temple ever stood for because now as the apostle says in Hebrews chapter 10 now a living and open way is opened up forever into God's presence through the curtain of Christ's body that temple curtain which could only ever be entered by sacrifice it was an emblem of the true curtain

Jesus himself and as his body was torn in sacrifice so that old shadow just fell away forever and now through him not only do we all have access to God but so also the glory of God's presence has broken out from Jerusalem to go to Judea and Samaria and the ends of the earth in the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ God's great saving purpose for the world is fulfilled at the cross of Jesus that's the response that heaven is giving and also on the earth there's great affirmation of that fulfillment in the acknowledgement that yes it is so the righteous holy son of God the perfect obedient one has died as the lamb of God that's the centurion's witness isn't it in verse 47 certainly notice the word certainly this man was innocent was righteous surely it's also the testimony of the conviction of the people in verse 49 they beat their breasts just like the tax collector in chapter 18 acknowledging the shame of what had been done the innocent man the obedient one the perfect holy lamb of God has died among the criminals among the transgressors

Jesus said back in chapter 22 verse 37 this scripture must be fulfilled in me that he was numbered among the transgressors that comes as you know from Isaiah chapter 53 he poured out his soul unto death and was numbered among the transgressors yet he bore the sin of many and makes intercession for the transgressors God's purpose and his plan of salvation fulfilled at last and so although punishment is real and sin must be judged his promised pardon is also real and there can be forgiveness even for transgressors that's the word to humanity that God speaks in the witness to history that we see at the cross of Jesus Christ and that's what makes Luke's gospel a gospel a word of hope and joy and wonder and love what does that really mean though for me and for you does that mean anything really personally to us as individuals we've spoken about

God and humanity and great plans and purposes and time and eternity and so on you can all seem a bit abstract can't it a bit a bit removed from me and from my life friends as we close I want you to see that that is absolutely not so indeed nothing could be further from the truth because right at the very heart of Luke's story here is the certain reality of a message that is personal and wonderful in fact essential for every single human being who will one day have to face the truth about our lives and this world that we're mortal and that every one of us will face death look at the central paragraph there of Luke's whole account in verses 39 to 43 where Luke points us unmistakably to what all this means for personal experience and his message surely is this that through the cross we can all find a certain welcome to heaven that in the midst of the mockery and the reviling and the hatred we're given here an extraordinary personal picture of the great division that the cross of Jesus does force and must force upon all people that Jesus hangs among the criminals at execution one of them we're told rails at him literally blasphemes him while the other wonderfully receives him and blesses him as savior the first criminal pictures for us doesn't he the pride of autonomous man there was no fear of God despite his desperate situation save yourself and us if you're the

[ 39 : 04 ] Christ he sneers at him save our skin and then I'll believe you see he wants rescue doesn't he from the consequences of his sins well of course he does doesn't everybody but crucially he does not want rescue from the cause of his sin which is his own evil and rebellious heart doesn't show any sign of repentance he's proud he's scornful he is a personal example isn't he in the flesh of all around us who utterly reject God as he really is revealed in Jesus Christ the only God he wants is a fairy godmother God a get out of jail free card for all his wrongs in life heal my body Lord I'll sort out my love life Lord sort me out from that terrible mess that I've caused then I'll believe in you anything but change my sinful heart and change my sinful mind Lord and bow my knee before you otherwise it's just a very very commonly held belief about God isn't it still if people have any thought about God in their mind just imagine for a moment though if God did do that and answered

his request offering a gospel with no consequences for sin and selfishness a God who said yes live live as you like do exactly as you please and I'll sort it all out so there's no consequences for you what kind of world would that be where all moral consequences are eliminated where selfish human hearts reign freely and autonomously that's the world that

Satan offered to man in the Garden of Eden wasn't it and it turned out not to lead to paradise on earth turned out to be the end of paradise on earth didn't it that's the world that gave us the dreadful happenings of this weekend and the continuation of that world forever would indeed be hell on earth forever would it not though the salvation that Jesus offers on the cross is the very antithesis of that and the second criminal you see came to see that seems that at first he too probably scorned Jesus in Matthew's gospel we're told that but somehow his experience of Calvary changed him was it Jesus demeanor was it his prayer of forgiveness forgiveness I'm sure it was everything that he saw and heard hanging there on the cross but through the cross this man came to understand his own sin verse 41 and to know that his punishment was just and right for his crimes he made no plea did he to be saved from that no plea to save his skin but rather he cried to

Jesus to save his soul remember me his words show don't they the death of pride and the dawning of real penitence as he confesses sin as he throws himself on the Lord Jesus Christ as his savior as his king remember me when you come into your kingdom can't help but recall Jesus words in the upper room can you about his body and his blood and the new covenant and saying this do as a remembrance to me well this man would never eat the bread and drink the cup on earth but that day he certainly understood the message and he ate and drank of its truth remember me Lord let me share in your glory and he received then and there Christ's certain promise of a welcome into paradise restored the cross and all its power to save became real and personal to him and powerful forever right there and then and he received from

Jesus himself the assurance of pardon and acceptance and admission into his kingdom and you see what that tells us it tells us that the cross of Jesus can become indeed it must become the personal experience of every one of us because through the cross and only through the cross can we have a certain welcome to heaven and to the glory of his kingdom and surely this passage tells us we can have that even if our life has been utterly black and full of sin and guilt even if it's deserved punishment from this world's authorities never mind the justice of God and even if we've got nothing much to offer in the future because our life is nearly at an end and there's no time for long and fruitful service if ever we needed proof that the grace and mercy of God's salvation is by grace and mercy alone surely this is it the cross of Jesus

Christ declares to the world it declares to you and me personally that through the cross we can find a certain welcome to heaven not notice escape from from the pain of mortal suffering or from the process of death this man did breathe his last but far far greater deliverance from the fear of death and from the great terror of the judgment of God there is as the old chorus says a way back to God from the dark paths of sin there's a door that is open and you may go in and at Calvary's cross is where it begins when you come as a sinner to Jesus that's what Luke is telling us you may go in but friends you must go in and the only way in is kneeling humbly at the cross of Jesus the door to Christ's kingdom is low you have to stoop to enter it you can't enter the kingdom of the Lord [ 45 : 21 ] Jesus Christ walking proudly and tall in your own self only broken and low in real penitent faith like this thief confessing your sin and crying out Jesus remember me there were two guilty men crucified with Jesus but only one of them was saved and Luke means us to ponder that and never to forget it Bishop J.C.

Ryle said one thief was saved that no sinner might despair but only one that no sinner might presume to the one the word of the cross was folly it was to be scorned and blasphemed but to the other it was the power of God unto salvation and it was the pledge of life everlasting and my prayer for everyone here in this building this morning is that that might be so for you the Lord says today if you hear his voice do not harden your hearts but listen and respond to the word of the cross of Jesus let's pray our heavenly father as we gaze upon the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ we see the horror of our sin and the wonder of heaven opened by your mercy remember us remember me Lord Jesus Christ when you come into your kingdom amen amen God I behold my Lord Jesus in peace I did of myself