

# Receiving and Responding to Christ's Substitution (Part 2)

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Date: 31 August 2025

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, we're going to turn now to our Bible reading this morning, and we come once again to Luke's Gospel and to chapter 23. If you don't have a Bible and you need one, there's Bibles that the stewards will be glad to bring you. There's plenty around just outside and we'd love you to be able to follow along.

Luke's Gospel, chapter 23, on those Bibles, the Vistos Bibles, I think it's page 884. And it's the penultimate chapter of Luke's Gospel, and we come to, indeed, literally the crux of his message in Luke's account of the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus.

So Luke 23, at verse 26. As they led Jesus away, they seized one Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, and they 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. And 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. And they will begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us, and to the hills, cover us.

[ 1 : 34 ] 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's 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.

[ 2 : 33 ] 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. And it was now about the sixth hour.

And there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. Well, the sun's light failed. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two.

And 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.

[ 3 : 41 ] 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 the spectacle, when they saw what had taken place, returned home, beating their breasts.

And all his acquaintances, the women 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 yet been laid.

It was a 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.

[ 4 : 48 ] Then they returned, and prepared spices, and ointments. Amen. May God bless to us. His word.

Well, do turn in your Bibles once again. Let's go to the second half of Luke, chapter 23. Now, there is no image more central to Christianity than the cross.

It is, quite literally, the crux of the Christian faith. We see crosses everywhere. On churches, on jewelry, tattoos, greetings cards.

And yet, because it is so familiar, we must be all the more careful to be clear. If we misunderstand the cross, we'll misunderstand Jesus himself, who he is, and why he stepped down, and stooped down into our world.

Now, of course, the Bible speaks of the cross in many rich and varied ways, but our task this morning is to not exhaust every doctrine of the cross, but instead, we want to hear what Luke wants us to hear.

[ 6 : 04 ] In this passage, as Jesus, the Passover lamb, is finally sacrificed, Luke, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, has a message to press home to us.

And notice this. Luke doesn't dwell on the event of the crucifixion. His description is startlingly brief. Verse 33 simply says, there, they crucified him.

Then in verse 46, he breathed his last. That's it. A matter-of-fact record. Why so little detail?

Because Luke is more concerned with the explanation of the cross, not the mechanism, but the message. Already, we saw last week that Luke has shown us that the cross is a substitution, a great exchange.

Though declared innocent again and again, Jesus, the spotless lamb of God, is condemned so that the guilty might go free. The governor's proclamation of Jesus' innocence becomes the basis of God's pardon for our iniquity.

[ 7 : 14 ] And so Luke gives us not just the facts, but a vivid picture of what the cross achieves. And in our passage today, he goes further. He shows us how people respond to the cross.

The narrative unfolds in five movements, five different groups or individuals, each revealing something vital about what the cross means. In the first four, we hear Jesus' own words bringing clarity to the message of the cross.

And then the final scene after Jesus' death, there's a focus on Joseph of Arimathea, one of Luke's living illustrations of what it looks like to respond.

And Luke highlights two unique incidents found only in his gospel, the weeping women of Jerusalem, and at the very heart of this passage, the two thieves, the two criminals.

And that middle scene becomes the hinge and the heart of all that we see here. It gives us a profound picture of what the cross does in the lives of those who reach out with the empty hands of faith.

[ 8 : 22 ] But before we hear those responses, Luke gives us, verse 26, Simon of Cyrene. He literally takes up the cross and follows behind Jesus.

Do you remember? Ever since chapter 9, Jesus has been teaching his disciples that to follow him means to take up the cross. And here, Luke begins with a living picture of that calling.

And yet, Simon was forced. Do you see? Seized by the soldiers, compelled to carry the cross. And the reality is, that's how the kingdoms of this world operate, by force, by compulsion.

But not so in the kingdom of Christ. God's kingdom does not drag people kicking and screaming against their will. Judas, Pilate, Herod, the religious leaders, even Satan himself, all acted freely in doing what they wanted to do, in killing Jesus.

And yet, at the same time, a sovereign God is working out his sovereign purposes. And so, Simon begins here as a contrast alongside the operation of God's sovereign will is the will of man.

[ 9 : 37 ] And God doesn't force people into evil that they do not want to do. But he also doesn't force people into his kingdom who would be begrudged to be there.

And so, from the beginning of this passage, what all this means is that our response to the cross truly matters. And so, we see, firstly, in verses 27 to 31, that at the cross, judgment is pronounced.

At the cross, judgment is pronounced. The cross displays to the world the grim reality of God's just judgment on all that contributes to Jesus' death.

Rejection of Jesus, the King, can end in only one place, judgment. The cross was not simply the scheme of sinful men.

It had to happen because of the presence and power of sin, the sin that lives in each of us. For whilst Jesus is going to face the wrath of God, whilst Jesus is on his way to have judgment fall upon him, those who refuse Jesus, those who do not turn to him in repentance and faith, they too will face that same terrible wrath of God.

[ 10 : 52 ] The reality is that the cross itself is not only a sacrifice, it's also a sentence. It proclaims judgment. All evil, all sin, all rebellion against and refusal of God will be judged.

The cross makes that plea and it has to happen. But that judgment will either fall on Jesus at the cross or if we refuse him, that judgment will fall upon us.

That's what we see here with the wheeling, weeping women. Jesus has a prophetic word for them. Notice verse 28. They're called daughters of Jerusalem. Why?

Well, because Jerusalem was a city that should have been at the heart of God's kingdom and worship, well, it has instead hardened itself against God's grace and rejected God's king.

They are the ones who forced through the death of the innocent one. And so judgment has already been pronounced on them. We've already seen that from Jesus about the temple. And it's even possible that some of these women who are now weeping had been among the crowds calling, crucify him, crucify him.

[ 12 : 06 ] Their weeping here seems less like genuine repentance and more like a shallow emotional response. But Jesus is not interested in our sympathy. He calls for our submission.

Think about it. If Luke had lingered on the gory details of the crucifixion, many readers would have been moved to tears of sympathy. If we really understand the brutality of the cross, it would move us to tears and sympathy.

I wonder how many people have been emotionally stirred by things like the film The Passion of the Christ seeing this in all of its detail. Emotionally stirred by the gore that Jesus faced.

But stirred without ever buying to Christ as king. Passing pity is not saving faith. Jesus doesn't want our sympathy.

He demands our surrender. And that's why his words here are so supering. Verse 28, he says, do not weep for me. Weep for yourselves and for your children. Judgment is coming.

[ 13 : 13 ] And it will be so terrible that verse 29, people will say it would have been better never to have had children. Better to be barren. Better to have never lived. Better to be crushed by the mountains than to face what is to come.

How awful must such judgment be that it is more desirable to verse 30. Say, mountains fall on me and crush me. Now, we knew that Jesus' warning pointed first to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, a judgment that history records in all of its horror.

But as we've seen previously, Jesus has a second horizon in view. For a real judgment in history is the judgment of the last day casting its shadow backwards into history.

And so the cross says to us that there is a terrible judgment, a judgment that is to come. And if we're to be found on the side of those who refuse Jesus, then listen to Jesus' words.

Hear Jesus, the prophet, reaching out with grim words, but gracious words. If such wickedness happened whilst Jesus is with them, verse 31, whilst the wood is green, and Jerusalem and its daughters' wickedness is worthy of judgment, even then, well, what will happen when the wood is dry, when Jesus isn't around, when he withdraws his gracious presence and blessing, withdraws his word of warning and of mercy?

[ 14 : 42 ] Well, we can only take it that when he does withdraw, then greater judgment will indeed be heaped up. Jesus' grim words are gracious words.

They're meant to awaken us, not simply to frighten us. They press the question, have you taken seriously the reality of God's judgment?

Are you merely giving him your sympathy or are you giving him your submission? you see, the only safe place on the day of judgment is at the cross itself, trusting the one who bore judgment in your place.

Don't walk away with stirred feelings alone. Walk away with surrendered faith. And so Luke asks us in the light of the cross, are you prepared for the very real judgment of God?

are you? Well, secondly, Luke shows us that at the cross forgiveness is possible. Verses 32 to 38, at the cross forgiveness is possible.

[ 15 : 53 ] You see, the cross reveals that there really is forgiveness even for the worst of sinners. Jesus is led to the cross and we're told that two other criminals are with him and Luke returns to them in a bit.

But first, Luke draws our attention to those who crucified Jesus. Verse 33 tells us they crucified him. And it's the soldiers who are in view here, those who are overseeing the executions.

And in verse 34, they cast lots to divide his garments. And that detail links directly to Psalm 22. Now, unlike the other gospels, Luke does not record Jesus' cry of abandonment from that psalm, but instead turns our attention to his utter helplessness.

Psalm 22 depicts David enduring extreme suffering with death looming, culminating in his garments, even his garments being taken and shared, left utterly helpless, a picture of being totally at the mercy of your enemies, powerless before them.

Verse 35 highlights the scoffing, something that's also present in Psalm 22. Verse 36, the soldiers mocking him and giving him sour wine, perhaps a little echo of the bitter cup he's to drink.

[ 17 : 11 ] Verse 38 shows a further assault on his kingship through the mocking inscription. That's the scene before Jesus. But then we see his words, which are at the heart of this movement.

We see, we've seen his prophetic words, his words of warning, but now we see his priestly words. Luke uniquely records Jesus' prayer in verse 34.

Father, forgive them, for they knew not what they do. Do you see? Jesus, even at the mercy of his enemies, at the hands of those killing him, Jesus prays for them.

These are words of intercession, words of forgiveness. Words just so in keeping with all that we've seen of Jesus and his mission. Do you remember Luke 15? Jesus is the one who goes after the lost.

Luke 19 tells us that the Son of Man came to seek and see of the lost. And so what we see here is that forgiveness is possible, even in the face of shameful sin.

[ 18 : 18 ] Luke clearly frames this prayer for the soldiers. They're the ones in focus. We mustn't broaden that out, beyond the narrative. And in Jesus' words toward these soldiers, something significant emerges.

The soldiers didn't know what it was they were doing, what they'd been forced into. They're taking orders. But ignorance does not remove culpability.

Forgiveness is still needed. In Luke's second volume in Acts, in Acts chapter 3, Peter tells the crowds in Jerusalem, you acted in ignorance in crucifying Jesus.

But repent so that your sins may be wiped out. Do you see? Ignorance, but repentance remains necessary, even when there is ignorance. Luke also connects Jesus' prayer for forgiveness with the future preaching of forgiveness in his name.

The soldier's ignorance represents humanity's blindness to God's work. But even such blindness can be met with the mercy of God when there is repentance.

[ 19 : 23 ] repentance. And you see, this forgiveness is possible only because verse 35, Jesus was fully committed to saving others, not himself. He saved numerous others throughout Luke's gospel.

It's full of that. The mockers would be aware of that. But Jesus means to save people not just from earthly blights, but eternal ones.

God's and so here he doesn't save himself so that he could really and truly save others. Jesus can pray this prayer of forgiveness for the soldiers because he bears the cost of that forgiveness.

forgiveness. What grace on his part to intercede for those hammering knees into his hands and feet that they might be forgiven for barbarism, for blasphemy.

But Jesus' priestly prayer flows from his priestly sacrifice. While the cross proclaims grave judgment, it also makes forgiveness possible, allowing Jesus to continue interceding and offering pardon.

[ 20 : 32 ] The cross tells us that forgiveness is possible and will never cease needing that reminder. Many of us here will be acutely aware of the ways that we've been treacherous to Jesus. perhaps even recently. We know the messes we've made, the sins we committed, all the things that necessitated his death.

Perhaps we're in the midst of such a mess of sin right now, but Luke shows us that at the cross, forgiveness is possible. Jesus refused to save himself. And the beauty of Jesus' character is that he intercedes even for those responsible for putting him on that cross.

So do not let your sin keep you from him. He didn't let it pull him down from the cross. He didn't save himself because his intent was to save you, to save me.

If only we'll come to him in faith. If Jesus could pray for the men who mocked him and stripped him, hammered nails through his hands and his feet, then do you really think that your sin could possibly put you beyond the reach of his mercy?

[ 21 : 47 ] If forgiveness is possible for the executioners, because Jesus would bear the cost of it, then forgiveness is possible for you. But only if you come to him.

Jesus did not save himself so that he could save you. And that's what we see thirdly. Verses 39 to 43, at the cross forgiveness is proclaimed and pictured.

At the cross forgiveness is proclaimed and pictured. You see, Jesus is the king who really does welcome into his eternal kingdom all those who come to him in faith, no matter how late.

And so here, the possibility of forgiveness becomes the proclamation of forgiveness, pictured vividly in a criminal being set free from his guilt. These verses are again unique to Luke and show what the cross truly achieves.

Verse 39, one criminal mocks and we mustn't overlook his presence here because Luke is showing us the faith that saves, the faith that takes hold of Jesus' substitution and receives the benefits of the cross.

[ 22 : 56 ] And we might be tempted to think the second criminal is merely hedging his bets. He's about to die. What's he got to lose? Perhaps he's looking for comfort at the last moment, clinging to religion as a crutch in the face of death.

But Luke shows us that that is not the case because the first criminal faces the exact same grim prospect and he is unmoved, anything but penitent.

He wants nothing to do with Jesus. Really? And this shows that there's more at play here than deathbed opportunism. True faith is at work here through this second criminal.

And so look at the real faith that we see in him. Look at the essence of his profession. Verse 40, he rebukes the first criminal for parroting the mockery of the soldiers. He can discern evil and recognize that opposing Jesus is wrong.

Verses 40 and 41, he has a sense of justice, acknowledging that both he and the first criminal are rightly condemned. But also, verse 41, he recognizes Jesus' innocence.

[ 24 : 06 ] Verse 42, he speaks to Jesus about his kingdom, acknowledging Jesus' kingship, but also the life to come. He understands that death is not the end.

And verse 42, he trusts in Jesus' character, asking simply, remember me when you come into your kingdom. Do you see, real faith grasps who Jesus is, grasps our own guilt, it understands that there is a world to come, and it sees in Jesus someone who can save, someone who's willing to save.

But don't miss this. Real faith also then responds to that. It cries out to Jesus, remember me. That's the same plea that we echo every time we partake of communion here and sing, Lord, remember me.

That's our only hope. The criminal makes no case for himself that he deserves to be in Jesus' kingdom. He doesn't downplay his guilt and sin. He doesn't say, look at the other criminal, clearly I'm more deserving than him.

His sole plea is, Jesus, remember me. Not, look, Jesus, oh, well, I remember you, what you've done. Not hear how clearly I can articulate the gospel, not look at my religious credentials, my doctrinal positions.

[ 25 : 26 ] No, he grasps who Jesus is, he knows he's guilty, he cares about eternity, and he throws himself completely at Jesus' mercy. That's faith.

And notice Jesus' response. It is immediate and unhesitating. Today, you'll be with me in paradise, verse 43. There's no delay, no testing period, no limbo.

Jesus delights to grant his people assurance. And listen to the assurance he grants here. Jesus speaks of something that can happen presently, today. Jesus doesn't toy around with us, he doesn't tease us.

We don't have to be on tenterhooks about where we stand with him. You see, real faith, faith that casts oneself completely at Jesus' feet, seeking his grace and mercy, real faith like that changes our future from today.

Responding in faith to the cross can be the hinge of life, so that there is all that has come before, perhaps that is very dark indeed, but Jesus' cross can change things presently so that from now on the future is very bright indeed.

[ 26 : 41 ] But notice too that this future is personal. will truly be with Jesus, not whisked off to some sort of eternal isolation, some interminable waiting room, no, with Jesus.

And the promise is concrete. He'll enter paradise. It's to a place that will be truly wonderful, it's to Jesus' kingdom, to the place where there is no darkness, the place where sin is no more, the place where anything and everything that would bother us and break us and burden us in this world, that will be no more.

Jesus delights to give his people assurance. And so if you're a believer here today, this is for you. Your future is secure. You do not need to wonder or fear.

Let these words of Jesus grant you restful sleep. We do not have to be up all night racking our brains and worrying about whether we're going to be okay at the day of judgment. Jesus says to those whose plea is remember me, he says today you'll be with me in paradise.

If Jesus is our hope, heaven is our home. If you're not a believer, you'll hear this as well. It's not too late.

[ 28 : 00 ] Today could be your day. Today Jesus could say to you, you will be with me in paradise. All you have to do is come to him.

With the empty hands of faith saying, Lord, remember me. The cross proclaims forgiveness vividly and powerfully. The king who did not save himself is prepared to save you.

No matter how hopeless or far gone your life may seem, Jesus offers pardon. Even at the height of his suffering, Jesus is now tasting and enacting his victory. For here at the cross, faith is sprouted.

salvation is savored. And he invites us to share in it. Because it is a victory. And that's what we see fourthly, verses 44 to 49.

You see, at the cross, forgiveness is provided for. At the cross, forgiveness is provided for. Jesus' death is vindicated as a sacrifice pleasing and acceptable to God.

[ 29 : 05 ] And we see this vindication, this justification through two supernatural signs showing that heaven itself testifies that Jesus' death is not abandonment but accomplishment.

And through two human responses showing that the world also declares his death a fulfillment and not a failure. As Jesus dies, the first supernatural sign appears, verse 44, darkness over the whole land for three hours, from midday to three o'clock.

Some have tried to explain this away as an eclipse or some sort of natural event, but the timing and the calendar in relation to Passover would make that wrong, and three hours is far too long for an eclipse.

This was a supernatural event, one even recorded by historians. Josephus records the darkness. He attempts to explain it away, but he records it nonetheless.

This happened. It was a real sign in history, but a supernatural one. And darkness in the Bible is a cosmic sign. Amos 8 portrays it as a picture of judgment falling.

[ 30 : 12 ] Or Joel 2 shows darkness heralding the great day of the Lord. And Jesus' death signals both. Judgment falls on the innocent one. And the great day of the Lord, a day of judgment and salvation has dawned.

But I take it also that this darkness here in creation is creation itself marking the significance of this event. For three hours of darkness in the middle of the day the normal order of the cosmos is disrupted because something occurs that will see creation's groaning fixed.

Something is happening that will one day bring about a new creation without any corruption without any creaking. And so here this darkness tells of judgments!

in the day of the Lord and it shows us that an momentous occasion has happened that is significant for the future of creation itself. And then we have a second supernatural sign, the tearing of the temple curtain, verse 45.

One commentator notes there's a cosmic sign, the darkness, and now a occultic sign. And the double curtain, some 90 feet high, separated the holy of holies. It was inconceivable that destruction signals the end of the temple as the exclusive place to meet God.

[ 31 : 39 ] Judgment has fallen upon it. But more than judgment on the temple, the torn curtain signifies abundant access to the Father. Listen to Hebrews 10.

It tells us, we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is through his flesh.

You see, at the cross, a new day has dawned, direct personal access to God through Jesus. Thus, at the cross, amidst mockery and wheeling, God is here present.

That's the picture, supernatural signs show that God is here present and pleased with his son. The heavens display vindication. Jesus' death is not forsakenness, it's fulfillment.

It's doing what it was meant to do. God's hand is upon it. He's pleased with it. But Luke emphasizes that heaven is not alone in declaring this truth.

[ 32 : 39 ] You see, first, verse 47, it shows us the centurion confessing Jesus' innocence. The centurion, a Roman centurion, acknowledges that the Lamb of God is pure, spotless, righteous, even in death.

Here is further vindication for Jesus, further justification. Jesus' victory extends beyond the Jewish criminal who professed faith.

Here we have a Gentile also declaring that Jesus is righteous. And secondly, verse 48, shows the crowd's contrition.

They head off beating their breasts in grief and in shame, acknowledging their part and what has happened. And so Luke is carefully framing this around four instances of vindication, darkness over the land, the torn temple curtain, the centurion's confession, the crowd's contrition, to confirm to us that Jesus' substitutionary death has been effective.

Judgment fell on him, yet his sacrifice accomplishes its purpose. He bore the curse of sin, faced the wrath of God, and in dying, he's defeated it.

[ 33 : 52 ] Heaven and earth testify to that. But once again, at the heart of this movement are Jesus' own words. Verse 46, he prays, Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.

And so here we see not just the innocent one, but the model believer. Here is Jesus the believer, confident in God's help, defiant against fear, secure in divine deliverance.



His prayer models the ultimate posture of faith, entrusting everything to God, even life and death itself. Jesus prays in confidence that God will not let his soul see corruption, trusting that God will see Jesus vindicated.

And so the heavens and the earth and Jesus himself testify, mission accomplished. Jesus is vindicated, forgiveness now fully provided for.

And so friends, here is greater assurance still. When we fear that our faith might fail, when we reach out, when we reach our darkest and bleakest pit in this life, when everything feels like it's pressing upon us, when we fear that the life itself is being squeezed out of us, we can share in Jesus' prayer.

[ 35 : 16 ] When our faith is in the king of Calvary, just like the criminal, then these words can sound forth from our lips with genuine confidence. Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.

I trust you for deliverance. We trust you to deliver us even from death, even from its dark shadow. And we trust you that because of Jesus you will deliver us from judgment and will justify and vindicate us.

For here at the cross, God's plan of redemption is completed. Jesus is affirmed and the curtain of salvation is opened for all. And so here we have the message of the cross.

It preaches to us that judgment is real. It preaches to us that forgiveness is possible and that it paves the way to paradise. All because Jesus' death is the great provision for God's plan of redemption.

But then notice how Luke finishes fifthly and finally. We see that in light of the cross, real faith is paramount. Verses 50 to 56, in light of the cross, real faith is paramount.

[ 36 : 28 ] The cross demands that we respond with whole lives given over to Jesus. These closing verses of Luke chapter 23 are doing two things. First in verses 55 to 56, they lay the groundwork for the resurrection.

The stone, the tomb, the woman who witnessed Jesus' burial, the same woman who will see the empty tomb, they're all eyewitnesses of the reality of Jesus' death and later his victory.

But we'll return to there when we're in chapter 24. The second thing that these verses are doing and where our focus lies, these verses show us that faith must be lived out in this world.

The criminal was converted at the very last, but Luke doesn't want there to be such a delay. He wants today to be the day for all who hear his gospel.

And if we were left here with only the example of the criminal's faith, then we mightn't fully grasp what it looks like to respond to Jesus today when death isn't imminent for us.

[ 37 : 34 ] And so Luke's preaching of the cross lays out the fundamentals. Jesus the prophet brings gracious revelation of judgment. Jesus the priest shows that forgiveness is real, forgiveness is possible. Jesus the king who welcomes into paradise, into his kingdom.

And Jesus the believer who's vindicated makes way for our justification. But Luke, like any good preacher, doesn't end simply by teaching the meaning of these things.

He means to press home the implications. The cross forces a decision on all humanity. Remember Simon of Cyrene. Jesus doesn't force those who are unwilling into his kingdom.

Our response really does matter. And so here Joseph, notice, was, verse 50, a member of the council. This was the same council that declared Jesus a blasphemer and pushed Pilate to crucify him.

So we knew the company that Joseph kept. But, Joseph was a good and righteous man. Verse 51, he hadn't consented to their decision.

[ 38 : 40 ] His heart wasn't hardened to Jesus. Indeed, he was looking for the kingdom of God. And so Luke is telling us that Joseph is a believer. But here's the thing, it isn't enough to dissent in private when Jesus is being ostracized and opposed.

That's a challenge, isn't it? Real faith isn't merely internalized. What will we do with Jesus? Will we gladly seek his destruction?

Or will we publicly name ourselves as his? Those are the only two options. doctrines. It doesn't do to simply hold the right doctrines, the truth.

Real faith is to be worked out in the world and lives that show loyalty to Jesus. And so verse 52, Joseph goes to Pilate and asks for Jesus' body.

And receiving it, he honors Jesus in the way that he could. He tends to Jesus' body, places it in the tomb. And in so doing, Joseph kneels his colors to the mast.

[ 39 : 47 ] You see, the council, everyone would have known of his descent, of his taking Jesus' side. This was a costly thing to do. Here was a public profession of faith.

Here was Joseph going outside the camp with Jesus, being pleased to embrace his shame and to carry his cross. You see, it wouldn't have been enough for Joseph to merely dissent in private to the actions of the council.

No, real faith is not only saying to Jesus, remember me. It's also saying I belong to Jesus, saying it publicly, even when it's costly.

Joseph was seeking the kingdom of God, and how clear and firm was he at what would happen to Jesus as a matter of speculation? We don't know whether he was aware of an impending resurrection.

We're not told. But still, we see in Joseph warm-hearted devotion. Maybe there will be circumstances that confound us, and our faith is pushed, and we cannot answer and see the way forward.

[ 40 : 53 ] Maybe our grasp on the future may be faint, but what we see here is an act of costly love, and Jesus always receives such devotion as faith. And so Luke's challenge, the challenge of the cross, is what will we do with Jesus?

That's where he ends. Are we prepared to throw a lot in with him? You see, the cross is the great divider of humanity. And so before the cross, where are we standing?

Where are you standing? Is your approach to Jesus nearly sentimental, so that you're like the weeping woman whom Jesus warns of terrible judgment?

Or do we find ourselves among the mockers, the first criminal who see in Jesus a Christ not to their liking? Or are we like the second criminal?

There at the cross, all too aware of our own guilt, and prepared to throw ourselves completely upon the mercy of God, seeing in Jesus one who can, one who is willing to save us.

[ 42 : 08 ] Friends, there's nothing more important in this world. And we cannot let such a decision rest upon the consensus of this world. Do you see, if we stand with Calvary's convert, the criminal, we must also stand with Joseph, who broke ranks and displayed publicly that the kingdom of God is what matters above all else.

Jesus longs to say to us, today you'll be with me in paradise. And so will our plea, in light of the cross, will it be, Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.

Will our plea be, Lord, remember me. for there's nothing else, no other hope that will do.

Lord, remember me. Let's pray. Lord God, we have no plea before you but Jesus.

No prayer but remember me. And so we ask now that you would grant us great reassurance that in this plea we truly have everything.

[ 43 : 35 ] And grant us the grace and courage and the faith that we need to make it our great privilege to be named and shamed alongside Jesus.

We're conscious of the challenges this brings, so help us and keep us. For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.