

# CAPITOL STUDIES

APRIL 16, 2025 • WEEK 14



## LUKE FOR LEGISLATORS

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### *Theme Verse*

**Luke 19:10**

For the Son of Man has come to **seek** and to **save** that which was **lost**.



## Calvary's Three Crosses



LUKE 23:33 SAYS, “When they came to the place called the skull, there they crucified Him and the criminals, one on the right and the other on the left.” The executioners led the men to a place the locals had nicknamed “the Skull” (*Golgolet* in Hebrew, *Golgotha* in Aramaic, *Kranion* in Greek, *Calvarius* in Latin, and in English, *Calvary*). Crucifixion was a horrific death, devised by the Romans to cause excruciating pain and torture. “The soldiers laid the crossbeam on the ground and attached it to the top of the post. Each condemned man was placed on top of the wood with arms outstretched and feet pressed flat against the face of the upright. A sharp spike was driven through each wrist near the base of the palm and through the crossed feet. The soldiers then tilted the cross up and dropped it into a hole,”<sup>1</sup> often painfully ripping bones out of joint. Luke relates little of the details. “The Description of Jesus’ crucifixion in the Old Testament is far more detailed than it is in the New Testament”<sup>2</sup> (Cf. Psalm 22; Isaiah 53). It is probable that Jesus was placed on the cross intended for Barabbas. If that was the case, the two criminals on either side of him would likely have been his accomplices in theft, murder, and insurrection. Under Roman law, theft alone was not punishable by crucifixion. Our Jesus, the innocent, hung between the guilty.

Pastor Arin Hess  
Chaplain, Capitol Studies



## INTRODUCTION

“By his own admission, old Joe was not a religious man. He had never gone to church. He lived a pretty wild life. He drank too much, gambled a lot, swore without even thinking about it, and was not above lying and cheating when it was to his advantage. He thought that Christians were missing out on all the fun in life. He never thought much about God. Not until recently, that is. Joe had retired and was looking forward to doing a lot of fishing. He had been having some stomach troubles. Probably too much beer, he thought. But then the doctor’s report came back: cancer. It had spread to several organs. There wasn’t much they could do. Joe might have six months to live, maybe less.

“Joe had a nephew who was a Christian. One day his nephew’s pastor dropped by the hospital and began to talk to Joe about spiritual things. For the first time in his life, Joe listened with interest. What the pastor was saying seemed to make sense. It dawned on Joe that he had lived his whole life in a selfish, sinful manner. He knew that if he died, he would face God’s judgment. But the pastor said that Jesus Christ had died on the cross to pay the penalty that he deserved. He offered forgiveness of sins and eternal life as a free gift if Joe would receive it. Joe prayed to receive Christ. He died in peace shortly after, a deathbed conversion.

“Whenever we hear stories like that, we’re glad and hopeful. But we always have the nagging question, ‘Was Joe’s conversion real?’ Was he *truly* saved? Can a person live his entire life in sin, but get saved at the very last moment? Are deathbed conversions possible? Of course, we never can know another person’s heart. We can look for evidence of conversion, but the troublesome thing about deathbed conversions is that the person often does not live long enough to give much evidence of true conversion. So, we might be inclined to doubt the possibility of deathbed conversions and give up sharing the gospel with those like Joe.

“To calm our doubts and to encourage us to share the gospel with those on the brink of death, the Bible includes a story of a genuine deathbed conversion. The dying thief on the cross asked Jesus to remember him when He came into His kingdom, and Christ assured him that he would be with Him that very day in Paradise. The story has much to teach us not only about deathbed conversions, but about any conversion.”<sup>3</sup>

## I. CROSS OF REDEMPTION

*Luke 23:34*

*But Jesus was saying, “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.” And they cast lots, dividing up His garments among themselves.”<sup>4</sup>*

“While the executioners carried out their gruesome duty, Jesus interceded for them before His Father. The imperfect tense of the verb ‘was saying’ suggests He prayed throughout the process.”<sup>5</sup> His tormentors “were blind to the light of divine truth, ‘For if they had understood it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory’ (1 Cor. 2:8). Still, their ignorance certainly did not mean that they deserved



forgiveness, rather their spiritual blindness itself was a manifestation of their guilt (John 3: 19). But Christ's prayer while they were in the very act of mocking Him is an expression of the boundless compassion of divine grace."<sup>6</sup>

It was customary for "executioners" to have the right to the clothing of the deceased as a part of the spoils of the job. So, the soldiers "cast lots" for Jesus' clothing, "probably by using marked pebbles or broken pieces of pottery."<sup>7</sup>

*Luke 23:35-37*

*And the people stood by, looking on. And even the rulers were sneering at Him, saying, "He saved others; let Him save Himself if this is the Christ of God, His Chosen One." <sup>36</sup>The soldiers also mocked Him, coming up to Him, offering Him sour wine, <sup>37</sup>and saying, "If You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself!"*

Many Old Testament prophecies were remarkably fulfilled that day:

*He was crucified — Zechariah 12:10.*

*He was placed between two criminals — Isaiah 53:12.*

*Lots were cast for His clothing — Psalm 22:18.*

*Onlookers mocked and sneered — Psalm 22:7; 109:25.*

*He was given sour wine — Psalm 69:21.*

*Luke 23:38*

*Now there was also an inscription above Him, "THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS."*

"The crime for which a condemned man was executed was written on a wooden board, which was fastened to the cross above his head. Jesus' inscription was written in Latin, Hebrew, and Greek (John 19:20). Since Pilate had repeatedly declared Jesus to be innocent of any crime (Luke 23:4, 14, 15, 22), he ordered this inscription written for Him. While Pilate's intent was probably neither to mock nor to honor Jesus, he certainly intended it as an affront to the Jewish authorities who had given him so much trouble. When the outraged Jewish leaders demanded the wording be changed, Pilate bluntly refused"<sup>8</sup> (John 19:21-22). God again directed eyes to the fact of who His Son truly was. The fact that the inscription was placed above Him "suggests that this cross was in the familiar shape with an upright protruding above the transom, and not the T-shaped cross that was also sometimes used."<sup>9</sup>

*Luke 23:44-45*

*It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness fell over the whole land until the ninth hour, <sup>45</sup>because the sun was obscured; and the veil of the temple was torn in two.*

Luke calculated in Jewish time, where hour number one began at what would be 6:00 a.m. in our present world. For three hours, from noon to 3:00 p.m., the sun "was obscured," causing the whole country to be plunged into darkness. "This could not have been caused by an eclipse, because the Jews used a lunar calendar, and Passover always fell on the full moon, making a solar eclipse out of the question. This was a supernatural darkness."<sup>10</sup> The temple veil was also torn from top to





bottom (see Matt. 27:51), which no man could have done. Clearly God did it. “The referent of the term [veil], *katapetasma*, is not entirely clear. It could refer to the curtain separating the holy of holies from the holy place (Josephus, J. W. 5.5.5 [5.219]), or it could refer to one at the entrance of the temple court (Josephus, J. W. 5.5.4 [5.212]). Many argue that the inner curtain is meant because another term, κάλυμμα (*kalumma*), is also used for the outer curtain. Others see a reference to the outer curtain as more likely because of the public nature of this sign. Either way, the symbolism means that access to God has been opened up. It also pictures a judgment that includes the sacrifices.”<sup>11</sup>

*Luke 23:46-48*

*And Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, said, “Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit.” Having said this, He breathed His last. <sup>47</sup>Now when the centurion saw what had happened, he began praising God, saying, “Certainly this man was innocent.” <sup>48</sup>And the whole crowd who came together to that sight, seeing what had been done, beat their breasts and returned.*

Jesus’ work was finished. The price for sin was paid. He “shouted a prayer of faith in God taken from Psalm 31... ‘Into Your hand I commit my spirit; You have ransomed me, O LORD, God of truth.’ As Jesus breathed His last, Satan’s doom was secured.”<sup>12</sup>

“Seconds after Jesus breathed His last, a centurion—a Gentile—‘praised God.’ The Greek word is *doxazo*, which means to ‘influence one’s opinion about another so as to enhance the latter’s reputation.’ He declared Jesus ‘a righteous [innocent] one,’ ...The secular Greek idea of ‘a righteous one’ is a man or woman who fulfills the requirements of civic duty, someone who is a virtuous citizen. And in the strict legal sense, which the centurion undoubtedly intended, it is the status of one not guilty of a crime and, therefore, not deserving punishment. In declaring ‘not guilty’ the man he had just put to death, the centurion repented of his sin. Luke suggests the centurion said aloud what everyone was thinking.”<sup>13</sup>

## II. CROSS OF REJECTION

*Luke 23:39*

*One of the criminals who were hanged there was hurling abuse at Him, saying, “Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!”*

**One thief died *in* sin.** Even in his final moments, this thief went along with the crowd and mocked Jesus. How sad that he refused to recognize the One who truly could have saved him!

## III. CROSS OF RECEPTION

*Luke 23:40-42*

*But the other answered, and rebuking him said, “Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? <sup>41</sup>And we indeed are suffering justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our*



*deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.”<sup>42</sup> And he was saying, “Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!”*

**The other thief died to sin.** “The criminal has absolutely nothing to gain by declaring Jesus innocent. He has nothing to gain, and yet he has everything to gain. As he hangs next to the blood-soaked rabbi from Nazareth, gasping for breath, he pushes up on the nails in his ankles. Like Jesus, he speaks in short gasping phrases. ‘Remember me,’ he whimpers. In that luminous moment, he sees two simple truths: his guilt, and Jesus. And that seeing becomes his salvation.”<sup>14</sup>

“The penitent thief’s prayer reflected his belief that the soul lives on after death; that Christ had a right to rule over a kingdom of the souls of men, and that He would soon enter that kingdom despite His impending death. His request to be remembered was a plea for mercy, which also reveals that the thief understood he had no hope but divine grace, and that the dispensing of that grace lay in Jesus’ power.”<sup>15</sup>

*Luke 23:43*

*And He said to him, “Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise.”*

“Jesus welcomed the criminal’s faith and promised him a place in ‘Paradise.’ This Greek term was borrowed from Persia and appears throughout the Septuagint as ‘garden.’ This offers a tantalizing hint that believers go to a place of delight after death and exist there before the end of days and consummation of God’s kingdom on earth.”<sup>16</sup> “The only other places this word is used in the NT are 2 Cor. 12:4 and Rev. 2:7.... In all three NT uses, it speaks of heaven.”<sup>17</sup>

## CONCLUSION

### *Verse 1*

On a hill far away stood an old rugged cross,  
the emblem of suffering and shame;  
and I love that old cross where the dearest and best  
for a world of lost sinners was slain.

### *Refrain*

So I'll cherish the old rugged cross,  
till my trophies at last I lay down;  
I will cling to the old rugged cross,  
and exchange it some day for a crown.

### *Verse 2*

O that old rugged cross, so despised by the world,  
has a wondrous attraction for me;  
for the dear Lamb of God left his glory above  
to bear it to dark Calvary.

### *Verse 3*

In that old rugged cross, stained with blood so divine,  
a wondrous beauty I see,





for 'twas on that old cross Jesus suffered and died,  
to pardon and sanctify me.

**Verse 4**

To that old rugged cross I will ever be true,  
its shame and reproach gladly bear;  
then he'll call me some day to my home far away,  
where his glory forever I'll share.

*George Bennard, 1913*



Chaplain Arin Hess

**FOOTNOTES**

1, 5, 12, 13, 16. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Luke*, Zondervan, 2012, pg. 508-513.

2, 14. Michael Card, *Luke: The Gospel of Amazement*, InterVarsity Press, 2011, pg. 255-256.

3. Steven J. Cole, Lesson 110: *A Deathbed Conversion* (Luke 23:39-43), July 2, 2000.

4. All Scripture quotations, unless noted, are taken from the *New American Standard Bible*, 1995 Update.

6, 8, 9, 10, 15, 17. John MacArthur, *MacArthur Study Bible*, pg. 1449, 1500, 1564-1565.

7, 11. Biblical Studies Press, *The NET Bible First Edition Notes* (Lk 23:34-44), 2006.



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**WEEKLY BIBLE  
STUDY**

Meeting during the  
109<sup>th</sup> Legislature's  
First Session

**SENATORS**

6:45 – 7:45 A.M.  
Wednesdays  
Capitol Office #1004

**STAFF**

12:00 – 1:00 P.M.  
Wednesdays  
NE State Office Building  
Morrill Room