

## Mark 15:26-32

<sup>26</sup> And the inscription of His accusation was written above: **THE KING OF THE JEWS.** <sup>27</sup> With Him they also crucified two robbers, one on His right and the other on His left. <sup>28</sup> So the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "*And He was numbered with the transgressors.*" <sup>29</sup> And those who passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads and saying, "Aha! *You* who destroy the temple and build *it* in three days, <sup>30</sup> save Yourself, and come down from the cross!" <sup>31</sup>

Likewise the chief priests also, mocking among themselves with the scribes, said, "He saved others; Himself He cannot save. <sup>32</sup> Let the Christ, the King of Israel, descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe." Even those who were crucified with Him reviled Him.

Have you ever been misunderstood? Have you ever been hated by people who have not taken the time to know you or understand you? Have people ever taken someone else's word about you and therefore thought less of you or despised you?

We'll take whatever you have experienced, increase it a thousand fold, and you have what Christ was facing in our text.

Now in our cases it isn't that we really **deserve to be respected**. In fact all of us have displayed actions and attitudes that are worthy to be despised. We have all done things worthy of the greatest dishonor. But our enemies rarely focus their attentions on those areas. They tend to hate us for things we **haven't** done. So for us, it isn't that we are thoroughly **worthy of respect**. We just wish sometimes our enemies would only disrespect us accurately.

But with Christ, He truly **was** worthy of **the greatest respect**. Here is a man with no regrets. Can you imagine that? A life lived with no regrets? Young people. Listen to this well. David explained this kind of life to us. He said this.

## Psalm 119:9

<sup>9</sup> **How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word.**

The word for cleanse is interesting. It means translucent. How can a young man live in a way where his life is **translucent**? Another interpretation is **innocent**. So how can a young man live in such a way that he can afford to be **see-through**? How can a young man live in such a way that he does not need secrets about his thoughts or actions? Another way to say this is, how can a young man live without regrets? How can you live without looking back on your life and dreading or regretting something you have done? There is only one way. It **isn't** by following your heart. It **isn't** by doing what you feel like doing. The way to live without regrets is to incorporate God's Word into every area of your life. It is by looking at what **God** says **before** figuring out what **you** want to say. It is by

looking at what **God** says to do **before** figuring out what **you** want to do. That is the only way to live translucent.

There are **some** regrets I have about **the way** I have **obeyed God** in my life. Because I didn't understand what He **really** wanted done and how to do it. So I obeyed what I thought God wanted but didn't really do it right. But those things can't hold a candle to the regrets I have where I disobeyed God fully knowing I was disobeying Him. Translucent living comes only from knowing and obeying God's Word.

Christ was Holy. Christ was wisely and completely obedient. Christ never had an action he regretted. What an amazing translucent life. And yet here He is with godless people sneering and mocking Him. If you think you have ever been mistreated by a mindless crowd, Christ was treated a million times worse and did nothing to ever deserve it.

<sup>26</sup> **And the inscription of His accusation was written above: THE KING OF THE JEWS.**

We find from the other gospels that the full plaque says **This is Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews**. John tells us it was written in Aramaic, Hebrew and Greek. So here it was for the whole world to see. It was intended as sarcasm but they were wrong. It was reality. Here truly is the King of the Jews. And one day He will wear a crown and govern not only the Jews but the whole world.

<sup>27</sup> **With Him they also crucified two robbers, one on His right and the other on His left.** <sup>28</sup> **So the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "*And He was numbered with the transgressors.*"**

Mark, in his normal fashion, skips right through this incredible story.

First we need to consider what Mark says. Then we will visit what he leaves out. Here is Christ, the King of the Jews. And how is He crucified? Is he singled out in His death as **an exceptional person**? Is he crucified as **the main show** on this day with all attention drawn to Him? No. He is placed between two robbers. The word here for robbers does not mean a common thief. No. These are fierce bandits who plundered and stole and probably left a trail of abused people in their wake. Maybe they were part of the Barabbas insurrection.

Verse 28 is not in the oldest texts. So it may have been added after the fact. But it is true none the less. Isa 53:12 says

**Isaiah 53:12**

<sup>12</sup> **Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, And He shall divide the spoil with the strong, Because He poured out His soul unto death, And He was numbered with the transgressors, And He bore the sin of many, And made intercession for the transgressors.**

Pilate decided to crucify Christ surrounded by common criminals.

To get the rich story on the criminals we need to look at Luke's gospel.

### Luke 23:39-43

<sup>39</sup> Then one of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed Him, saying, "If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us." <sup>40</sup> But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, "Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation?" <sup>41</sup> And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong." <sup>42</sup> Then he said to Jesus, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom." <sup>43</sup> And Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise."

Don't you just love this story? Doesn't it inspire hope in you? Look at what this man's salvation is based on. Consider it deeply. Let's look at this.

Here are two criminals who deserved death on the cross. This is a picture of justice. Often the Roman system **did** carry out justice. And here is one example of it. These guys had committed hideous crimes. They were guilty. They were **found guilty**. And they were **sentenced**. And they were given a **just** sentence in all likelihood. So here they are exposed in their guilt on the cross. Here are two souls headed for hell and they had an appointment that was very soon.

Now, one of the criminals vents his mockery. We see that he was **blaspheming** the Son of God. He was robbing Christ of His proper glory. So we can know that this was not a sincere question. Here he is, guilty **of** sin and guilty **as** sin, he is going to be ushered into eternity in minutes. And He looks upon the Son of God and chooses to mock Him. In this robber's final minutes he chooses to live as he has always lived. It is a dreadful truth, but most people die the same way they have lived. There are very few deathbed conversions.

So this robber looks on Christ and spews out his poison. He has only a few hours to live and he spends it spewing out the same poison he had dealt with all of his life. He says "**If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us.**"

Now we must understand that this is not a sincere request for escape or salvation. He is voicing the deep cynicism he has been developing all of his life. We have all met people like this. And we have all had the danger of **becoming** like this man. We see evil. We experience evil. We see very few people who are truly changed by God. Even in people **who claim to know God**, we can often guess what they are going to do based on their previous history and selfish motives. And it is so sad but so often **we are right**. So we get cynical. We begin to think that people do not change. We think that no one will do the right thing just because it is the right thing to do. No one will **love us** when **taking advantage of us** would grant them something that they want. We begin to **expect** the worst and **project** the worst. This robber put Christ into the position of himself. He viewed Christ as being just like he was. He projected himself into Christ. He figured Christ had an angle for saying what He said. But now the jig is up. Christ's deception didn't pay off. And this robber is just trying to make Christ pay for

being a fraud. And this man had learned to believe that anything that claims to be spiritual **is** a fraud. In many cases this man would have been correct. But this day he was dead wrong. His cynicism and disbelief would be his undoing. He projects selfish motives onto Christ and assumes that if Christ is not doing anything to preserve himself, it is because **he cannot**. It is because he is **impotent**. It is because He is **a fraud**. He cannot see with the eyes of faith because he has no faith. He is just **cynical**. And in his cynicism He mocks the only hope for His condition. The world is full of such people. These people may see a lot of truth. But they have lost the ability to discern truth that **points in a direction of hope**.

In the end they **expect** a hopeless condition and they **end in** a hopeless condition. So this man puts up a test to Christ that Christ has no intentions of meeting. But not for the reasons he thinks. This man never really expected Christ to save himself or the robber. It was just poison coming out of Him to make Christ pay for making the claims he made. Here is humanity punishing holiness for being holy. Look at this man. This man represents every man who has encountered Christ but responds in disbelief or mockery. It is every man who projects his own motives onto Jesus Christ. It is every man who evaluates Christ through human wisdom. It is every man who looks at Christ and chooses against Him. But every now and then God pulls someone out of this blindness, out of this cynicism, out of this lostness. And we have a wonderful picture of that this morning.

<sup>40</sup> **But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, "Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation?"** <sup>41</sup> **And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong."**

Every now and then we will run into people who **the truth penetrates**. They may be cynical. They may have learned hard lessons at the hands of evil people. They may not even be people who are known **for honesty** at all points. But somehow they get pierced by a simple truth. And they won't back down.

Rest assured. When you see that, you are looking at a miracle. That does not happen **to** mankind **from** mankind. Only the hand of God produces that.

So the other robber rebukes the first robber. Look at this. The first thing this man does is defends Christ. And look at **how** he does it.

He speaks to the first mocking robber. And he says, **do you not even fear God?** Essentially he is saying it is clear by **our** lives that we have done what **we** wanted to do. We haven't cared the least about our fellow humans. We have lived selfish lives. But this is something different. This is a new level. We are now talking about eternal things. Aren't you at all afraid as you sit in the precipice of death? You are teetering on the edge. You are going to die.

This robber is telling a truth that we all need to hear. Every single one of us is teetering on the edge. Every single one of us is going to die. These robbers knew they would die that day. We don't know what day we are going to die. But we do know that we will die. And worse yet, we deserve it. We have sinned. Scripture tells us that the soul that sins will die. It says the wages of sin is death. We have sinned. We **should** die. Every one of us in this room this morning are in the same boat. We all deserve to die. But look at the insight this man had. He says this.

<sup>41</sup> **And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong."**

Notice this quality in the rebuking robber. He accepts **full responsibility** for his sin. He recognizes the justice of God in his condemnation. He is essentially saying, fellow robber, don't you get it. We deserve to die. We deserve punishment. In fact, we deserve eternal punishment. Oh what a sweet and wonderful thing when **we accept the responsibility for our sin**. What a good thing it is when we come to ourselves and we say, yes, **I am the sinner**. Finally the truth. Finally the realization of who **we really are**.

Let me ask you this morning. What do you think the due reward of **your** deeds is? What do **you deserve** for the way you have lived? It is very simple. And the second robber would have answered this question correctly. We deserve judgement. We deserve damnation. This is a wonderful quality in the second robber. He sees himself as a sinner. He sees himself worthy of condemnation. He deserves what he is getting. Oh how hard that truth is on our pride. But how true it is none the less. How do **you** see yourself? Do you **deserve condemnation** apart from Christ? If you do not see yourself that way, you cannot be saved. It is only as you come to a **realization of that truth** that you can call upon Christ for salvation. This second robber had it right. He got the point. Then he goes on. **but this Man has done nothing wrong."**

Here is the supernatural revelation in its positive sense. First the second robber recognized his **own sin**. Second the robber recognized the **righteousness of Christ**. We don't know how this happened. Had he heard more of the story? Did God grant him supernatural wisdom? We don't know. But this man was certain that while both of the robbers **deserved to die**, while both of the robbers **deserved damnation**, Christ was innocent. He did not deserve to die. He did nothing wrong. Maybe this man knew that this statement was true in its deepest sense. This man truly has done NOTHING wrong. EVER. If this robber didn't know it, we do. Christ did nothing wrong. He never ever sinned. Ever. He had done nothing that deserved death. He was the one man who justly earned the right to live forever. But He took upon Himself **our** debt. He was willing to supersede his own justice by taking upon Himself **our** penalty. We don't know how the second robber knew this. But somehow he did.

So this robber saw his own sin and he saw the goodness of Christ.

<sup>42</sup> **Then he said to Jesus, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom."**

This is the wonder of wonders. This robber calls out to Christ. I think it is very likely that this man had been in one of the crowds where Jesus had been teaching. He had heard the words of Christ. Somehow this thief knew that Christ was teaching about **the kingdom of God**. Maybe he heard Jesus preach the sermon on the mount. Maybe he was in the crowd that day. Maybe he saw Christ feed the multitude. We don't know. But what **we do know** is that on this day this man cried out for Christ to **do for him** what **he could never deserve**. Do you see that this man did nothing different than any person who ever truly comes to Christ? There are two parts to what he did. First he confesses his own unworthiness. He confesses that he is a sinner worthy of this horrible punishment. He admits that he is guilty of crimes worthy of death. That is the hardest part for most humans. We don't like to admit our unworthiness. We want to **see our goodness**. We want to think of ourselves as being **worthy**. But we aren't. And when we really face the truth about ourselves we realize that **we are not worthy**.

Then this robber calls upon Christ go give him what he could never deserve. He depends upon the grace of God to grant him a salvation that he was **completely unworthy of**. Could it really be that simple? Could eternal salvation really be as simple as repenting of our sin and calling out to Christ to save us?

Yes. A million times yes. It is that simple.

This man didn't know all the theological terms. He couldn't describe sovereign grace or divine election. But he knew he was a sinner and he knew he needed Christ to save him. And that is all he needed to know.

So Jesus said to the thief on the cross, well I will save you, but if I do you are going to need to win people to me, you are going to need to tithe, you are going to need to join a church. I need to get something for my trouble.

No. This is what Christ said.

<sup>43</sup> **And Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise."**

I thank God for the thief on the cross. He is the perfect example of how God saves people. This man never gave tithe. He never went on a missions trip. He never had devotions. He never joined a church. He didn't learn theology. He didn't have a single thing to offer Christ. He never took communion. He didn't even dedicate his life to Christ. And think about this. He never even got baptized, the first thing that Christians are told to do. He only did one thing. He called out to Christ in the faith that God had supernaturally given him. He called out to

Christ, believing that Christ would show him grace. That is all. And that is at the heart of salvation.

We can't lose sight of this. Sure, if Christ saves us and we continue to live on, it is going to change everything about us. We will want to please Him. We will obey Him. It might take a while for our lives to look like it should. But we will love Him and because we love Him we will do what He says, even when it is the hardest thing we can imagine. We will join in fellowship with those who love Christ. We will represent Christ to those who don't know Him. We will love those who Christ loves. Yes. All those things are true. But we don't do it **to win anything**. We have **already gotten** the things that matter the most by grace. No. We will do them because we have the resurrection power of Christ in us.

This thief did none of the things that Christians are instructed to do once they begin to follow Christ. And yet still Christ said to him- **today you will be with Me in Paradise.**"

This thief was as saved as it is possible for a person to be. Now, the translation of this verse could be that either **I say to you that today you will be with me in paradise** or **today I say to you, that you will be with me in Paradise**. Either way it is amazingly good news. His eternal destiny is certain. Christ is telling this man that Christ has responded to this man's prayer of faith.

I can't help but emphasize this this morning. It doesn't matter who you are. It doesn't matter what you have done. You can call out, just like this thief on the cross. Just confess to Christ that you are a sinner unworthy of Him saving you, and ask Him to save you, and He will. It really is that simple. If you will trust Christ for salvation, Christ will grant it. Because if you are driven to call out to Christ in a sincere faith, it is Christ who has already worked in you to do such a thing.

Isn't this an amazing encouragement? Christ saves people even when those people can do nothing to even **serve** Christ. Christ saves people because it is like Him to save people. That is the bottom line. Praise God for His indescribable gift. Now Mark tells us what else was happening

<sup>29</sup> **And those who passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads and saying, "Aha! You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, <sup>30</sup> save Yourself, and come down from the cross!" <sup>31</sup> Likewise the chief priests also, mocking among themselves with the scribes, said, "He saved others; Himself He cannot save. <sup>32</sup> Let the Christ, the King of Israel, descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe." Even those who were crucified with Him reviled Him.**

Remember the so called triumphal entry of Christ into the city? This is more than likely some of the same citizens who lauded Christ on his entry into Jerusalem. Never trust the commitment or promises from people who have not demonstrated **love for Christ** by **obedience to Christ**. There are lots of people

who say that they are for Christ. But watch them. If they keep doing those things that are against Christ, you have no reason to expect that they are His.

This crowd was not spiritually **committed**. They were spiritually **interested**.

There is a huge difference. They are as fickle as can be. When Christ didn't live up to their expectations, when Christ didn't provide the life they wanted, when Christ didn't provide the happiness they expected, when Christ didn't provide the status in life they demanded, Christ suddenly went from Savior to heel.

We read this and we think this is awful. But what about us? **What do we do when we lose those things that are precious to us?** Our health? Our treasured relationships? Our loved ones? What happens to the Lordship of Christ when Christ doesn't produce as expected? What do **we** do? Are we not often like this fickle crowd? How often do we refuse to say, like Job, that though He slay me, yet will I trust Him? What foolishness on our part. What fickleness. Oh that we would be people who **God could count on**. Oh that He could count on us, even when our flesh cries out for what it wants. When our selfishness rises up and makes its demands. Oh for the man who stands up and says I will honor God. I will obey God. Christ died for me. Obeying Him is the least I can do.

Look at this crowd.

<sup>29</sup> **And those who passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads and saying, "Aha! You who destroy the temple and build it in three days,"<sup>30</sup> save Yourself, and come down from the cross!"**

Look at the mockery. Oh how wise these sceptics would have appeared as they mocked God. Because Christ was **not** going to come down from the cross. How they must have been proud of their logic. They look at the promises of God, they look at the current circumstances, and they **use the circumstances** to prove that the promises of God are not true and cannot be trusted. Nothing has changed.

This is still the reasoning of unbelief. They look at temporary situations and conclude eternal situations. And they are wrong. Because they have no idea about the will of God. They have no idea what God is trying to accomplish. They can't see the big picture and they really don't want to.

Wagging heads is a gesture of hatred and scorn. That is the attitude they had. And even in their mockery they are quoting the very truth that they are about to see in three days. Christ had no intentions of coming down off the cross. Anyone who had listened closely would have known that. But He did intend to rise in three days. And that could not be stopped, no matter how man mocked.

<sup>31</sup> **Likewise the chief priests also, mocking among themselves with the scribes, said, "He saved others; Himself He cannot save."<sup>32</sup> Let the Christ, the King of Israel, descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe." Even those who were crucified with Him reviled Him.**



Here we have the top brass religious officials. And they join in. But they don't jeer at Christ. They stay in their own smug religious circles slapping each other on the back for how wise they have been in this process. Look, they say. Here is Christ. He claimed to be the Messiah. But He can't even get off the cross. And here they require a sign. They make this their proof point. If Christ gets Himself off the cross, we will believe in Him. If Christ does not, we won't.

We listen to this and we think, that is awful. How faithless.

But who here has never done the same thing? Who has never held God to an expectation of our own making? Who has never said, God if you love me you will do such and such? When we make these demands that are not based on what God has promised, we are just like this crowd. And we are in great danger of being lost. Christ was not going to live up to the manmade expectation of Him removing Himself from the cross. And He is not going to live up to the manmade expectations of you and me just because we can dream these things up. God is God. He holds His own counsel. We do well to find out what **He says** and what **He wants** and adapt accordingly. Mockers won't do this. Faithless won't do this. They will always evaluate Christ on their human created expectations. But those in whom God has infused faith will trust Christ to do what He has promised. Don't ever hold God to a test that you create. Don't ever decide you will only love Christ if he provides for you those things you desire. That is one of the most dangerous things you can do. We must simply trust Him to do what He has said. Period.

There is something very important to learn from this event. Life events are fleeting. They are temporary. It may have looked like Christ was **impotent**. It may have looked like Christ was **cursed**. It may have looked like Christ was **defeated**. It may have looked very dark for heaven's hero on this very dismal day. But all those things are simply temporary appearances. They are not ultimate reality.

Jesus Christ was only placing Himself in the position to do the most important work in freeing His people from sin that would ever be done. He was about to shine the brightest light that would ever be shone by a human being. Jesus Christ was about to win the greatest victory ever to be won for mankind. Christ was about to conquer sin and death. And most of the world had read it completely and thoroughly dead wrong. They thought Christ's situation was reason for mockery. But faith believed that Christ's situation was a reason for ultimate celebration.

### **1 Corinthians 1:20-31**

**<sup>20</sup> Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? <sup>21</sup> For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through**

the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. <sup>22</sup> For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; <sup>23</sup> but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, <sup>24</sup> but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. <sup>25</sup> Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. <sup>26</sup> For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, *are called.* <sup>27</sup> But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; <sup>28</sup> and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, <sup>29</sup> that no flesh should glory in His presence. <sup>30</sup> But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God--and righteousness and sanctification and redemption-- <sup>31</sup> that, as it is written, "*He who glories, let him glory in the LORD.*"