

Title: **LESSONS FROM CALVARY**
 Text: Luke 23:32-43
 Date: Sunday Evening — June 18, 2006
 Tape # Y-99b

Introduction:

(Luke 23:32-43) “And there were also two other, malefactors, led with him to be put to death. (33) And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left. (34) Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots. (35) And the people stood beholding. And the rulers also with them derided *him*, saying, He saved others; let him save himself, if he be Christ, the chosen of God. (36) And the soldiers also mocked him, coming to him, and offering him vinegar, (37) And saying, If thou be the king of the Jews, save thyself. (38) And a superscription also was written over him in letters of Greek, and Latin, and Hebrew, THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS. (39) And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us. (40) But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? (41) And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss. (42) And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. (43) And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.”

Let’s go once more with our blessed Savior to that horrible scene of sin and woe, that blessed, glorious scene of mercy, love and grace, just outside the city of Jerusalem. I have before my mind’s eye the scene of three crosses, three criminals, soldiers, priests, a religious crowd, all gathered to slaughter the Son of God! Scattered among the others, I see a few weeping women, and in the distance, one or two heart-broken men. There is much to be seen here on the very surface. But there are other things hidden beneath the surface and unobserved by men. **I see before me...**

- something of the character of God,
- much about the character of man,
- a great display of substitution,
- God’s great salvation,
- a tremendous picture sin pardoned,
- a sad picture of sin unpardoned,
- a Savior despised,
- a Savior embraced,
- a sinner forever lost,
- and sinner forever saved.

I have found a few lessons in this passage that I pray the Spirit of God may be pleased to graciously apply to our hearts. If you are taking notes, the title of my message is, — **LESSONS FROM CALVARY.**

1. How deep, bitter, universal, and vile is the hatred of the human heart for God!

(Romans 8:7) “Because the carnal mind *is* enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.”

Oh, how fallen man hates God! We see it in the priests and the scribes! We see it in the soldiers and the people. Hatred echoed through Pilate's judgment hall. Malice rang in Herod's court. Envy was the motive behind every word and deed performed on that infamous night by wicked men.

The arrest, the scourging, the mockery, the spitting, the smiting; the cries, "Crucify! Crucify him!" the wagging the head, the drunken songs, the nailing, the thieves' railing, everything was but the outpouring of man's utter hatred for God.

Here we see what is in every human heart by nature. The heart of man is enmity against God. Man declared his heart in the crucifixion of God's darling Son! Here I see fallen man showing himself openly, making an unconscious confession of his hatred of God.

- His Being,
- His authority,
- His character,
- His law,
- His grace,
- His Son!

It was man who erected the cross, and nailed the Son of God to it! God gave the wild ass's colt his reins, and seems to have said, "Vent the feelings of your heart." And he did, taking God by the throat, as it were, man snatched the only begotten Son of God from his Father's heart, and crucified him with hellish delight!

Reckoning the death of the cross the worst of all deaths, man says, "This is the best way to show my contempt for God. This is exactly what I think of the Son of God!" Thus, the enmity of the natural heart speaks out, and man not only confesses publicly that he is a hater of God, but he takes pains to show the intensity of his hatred! He glories in his shame, crying aloud, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!"

The cross interprets what is in man's heart. The cross rips the mask of pretended religion off of the face of our. The cross of Christ exhibits man's heart and a cesspool, overflowing with the malignity of hell!

You may say, "Pastor, I don't hate God! I may be indifferent to Him. He may not be in all my thoughts; but I don't hate Him!" Is that so? Then explain your daily crucifixion of the Son of God!

- What is your willful unbelief, but the crucifying of the Son of God afresh?
- What is your rebellion to Christ, but the crucifying of the Son of God afresh?
- What is your blasphemy, but the crucifying of the Son of God afresh?
- What is your mockery, but the crucifying of the Son of God afresh?

Will you dare look at your hands? They are red, dripping with blood? Whose blood is that? It is the blood of God's own Son! Blood you shed continually in your heart, because you hate God, because you really want to be God yourself!

You may think I am being harsh. You may cry, "How dare you judge me!" I am not judging you. It is the cross that judges you. I am asking you to judge yourself by it. It is the cross that interprets your purposes, and reveals the thoughts and intents of your heart!

Oh, what a revelation of man the cross is! — Man hating God, and hating most, when God displaying his love most fully! — Man acting like the devil, taking Satan's side against God! Yes, the cross was a public declaration of man's hatred for God and His Son. The cross is proud man spitting in God's face

and saying, "I am holy. I need no Savior. To hell with God and His Son!" Our Savior asked, "*What think ye of Christ?*" Man's answer was, "*Crucify Him!*" Man's heart, his hands, his tongue, all combine to scream out hatred for God and his Son. — Everything I see in man on Calvary's hill is hatred, utter hatred for God, the hatred of the human race to the God! Sinners, hear me, that is what your unbelief is — hatred for God and his Son!

(1 John 1:7-10) "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. (8) If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. (9) If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (10) If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us."

(1 John 5:10) "He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son."

2. **What a horribly evil thing sin must be, if it takes the blood of God's own Son, the death of heaven's darling to put it away!**

What must sin be when, in order to expiate it, the Lord of Glory must die upon the cursed tree as an outcast, a criminal, a curse! What a horribly evil thing sin must be! It is rebellion against God, treason against his throne, man's attempt to rape and defile the holy Lord God, to drive the Almighty from his throne, to murder the Eternal. Sin is the expression of fallen man's enmity against God, the display of our natural heart hatred of God. Sin is that which makes us obnoxious to the holy Lord God. Sin is the defilement of our race. Sin has brought us under the curse of God's holy law. Sin has put us under the sentence of death, eternal death. Sin shuts the door of hope upon all the human race.

It is no easy for sin to be put away. No carnal sacrifice can put away sin (Heb. 10:1-7).

(Hebrews 10:1-7) "For the law having a shadow of good things to come, *and* not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect. (2) For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins. (3) But in those *sacrifices there is* a remembrance again *made* of sins every year. (4) For *it is* not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins. (5) Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me: (6) In burnt offerings and *sacrifices* for sin thou hast had no pleasure. (7) Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God."

"Not all the blood of beasts
On Jewish altars slain
Could give the guilty conscience peace,
Or wash away the stain."

- **No work of man** can put away one sin.
- No amount of **repentance** can put away sin.
- Not even our **faith** can put away sin.

"Not all the labors of my hands
Can fulfill Thy law's demands;
Could my zeal no languor know,

Could my tears forever flow,
All for sin could not atone;
Christ must save, and Christ alone!"

- **Even God himself** cannot, in his pure, absolute character as God, put away sin.

If sin is to be put away, it must be put away by the sin-atonement death and substitutionary sacrifice of the incarnate God, the God-man Mediator, the Lord Jesus Christ. But his sacrifice was enough. He died but once; but once was enough! That is the meaning of these words. — “*Now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.*” Christ’s sufferings and death for sin are of infinite value, merit, and efficacy. Therefore, he suffered for sin only once. He appeared once, in the end of the world to put away sin; and he has done it!

- Our Lord Jesus Christ put away **the guilt** of sin by his atoning sacrifice.
- He put away **the punishment** of it by his sufferings and death as our Substitute.
- The incarnate Son of God put away **the penalty of the law** by his satisfaction of divine justice.
- He put away **the consequences** of sin by his obedience unto death.
- He puts away **the dominion** of sin in his people by the power of his grace in the new birth.
- He puts away **the filth** of sin by his sanctifying grace.
- And he shall put away **the very being** of sin in resurrection glory.

This work of putting away sin was accomplished by him bearing our sin in his own body upon the cursed tree. He carried it and took it away. **This is what was pictured in the Old Testament type of the scapegoat.**

The Lord Jesus has **removed** sin from us as far as the east is from the west, by finishing and making an end of it. He **disannulled** and abolished it, in so far as the law and justice of God is concerned. When he paid our debt, he **cancelled** it in one day, by his one sacrifice. In one great day, the whole work was done (Zech. 3:9). **Our sins, being forever, effectually put away by the sacrifice of Christ, shall never be found and can never be charged to us again** (Jer. 50:20; Rom. 4:8).

(Romans 4:8) “Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.”

(Jeremiah 50:20) “In those days, and in that time, saith the LORD, the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and *there shall be* none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found: for I will pardon them whom I reserve.”

“My sin, (O the bliss of this glorious thought!)
My sin, not in part, but the whole,
Is nailed to His cross, and I bear it no more. --
Praise the Lord! It is well with my soul!”

3. **How immeasurable and infinite the love of God in Christ is!**

(John 3:16) “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

(Romans 5:8) “But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”

(1 John 3:16) “Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down *our* lives for the brethren.”

(1 John 4:9-10) "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. (10) Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins."

I see in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ love to the uttermost; unquenched and unquenchable! Man pours floods upon this love to quench it, but it grows more intense. What patience with man's utmost malice; what forbearance with his sin! "*Father forgive them; for they know not what they do.*" Was ever love like this? So vast, so free, so overflowing. Sin abounding, grace did much more abound! — O how he loves!

(John 13:1) "Now before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end."

(Ephesians 3:14-19) "For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, (15) Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, (16) That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; (17) That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, (18) May be able to comprehend with all saints what *is* the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; (19) And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God."

4. **The purpose of our great God and Savior is unalterably fixed, relentlessly pursued, and perfectly executed.**

Our Savior came here to do a work (Matt. 1:21), a work appointed to him and purposed by him from everlasting (Ps. 40; Heb. 10), and he was determined to accomplish it, "*straightened,*" as he put it, until it was accomplished. It shall be accomplished. It shall be finished. He had come here to accomplish death; and it shall be accomplished (Luke 9:30-31).

(Luke 9:30-31) "And, behold, there talked with him two men, which were Moses and Elias: (31) Who appeared in glory, and spake of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem."

How will he do it? By what means shall the holy Lamb of God be sacrificed?

- The altar shall be built, — built by man's enmity.
- The sacrifice shall be slain, — slain by man's enmity. The work shall be done, done by man's will.
- The work shall be done, — done exactly according to the purpose of God!

(Psalms 76:10) "Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain."

(Acts 2:23) "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain."

5. **How willing, how anxious the Lord Jesus Christ is to save poor, lost sinners!**

The cross of our Lord Jesus Christ is a vivid declaration that "*where sin abounded grace did much more abound!*" What is the meaning of the cross? Why was our Lord Jesus nailed to the cursed tree? Behold the dying thief and hear the answer. — The Son of God came into the world to save sinners! — Christ came to seek and to save that which was lost! **The dying thief is a true specimen of God's elect.**

- This man appears to have done nothing but evil all his life.

- We know nothing about him, except that he was a thief, a thief who had executed his crimes with violence.
- A thief who continued to blaspheme, even as he was being executed.
- A thief who was loved and chosen of God!

(1 Corinthians 1:26-31) “For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, *are called*: (27) But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; (28) And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, *yea*, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: (29) That no flesh should glory in his presence. (30) But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: (31) That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.”

Why was Immanuel’s blood poured out at Calvary? To wash away sin. Here I see it washing away the sins of one like myself, whose heart and life were as black as hell! **Why did Christ suffer and die?** To pardon the most guilty. Not merely to save us from hell, but to open Paradise to the chief of sinners,—to open it at once; not after years of torment, but “*today*.” Today “*with me*.” **Yes, the Lord Jesus went back to heaven with this saved thief in his hands!**

- What an efficacy there is in the cross!
- What grace!
- What glory!
- What cleansing!
- What healing!
- What justice!
- What blessedness!

By his death upon the cursed tree the Son of God delivers and saves his people from their sins! Satisfying the justice of God, he plucked us as brands from the burning, conquered hell, and defeated the devil and cast him down to hell! The first sinner saved by the cross, after it had been erected upon Calvary’s hill, was a wretched, justly condemned thief; and the Son of God went up to heaven with him to join in that joy that is in heaven over one sinner who repents!

6. **How near a person may be to hell, and yet be saved!**

That thief was, as it were, upon the very brink of hell. He had one foot in the pit. Hell was in his heart. Hell had been his life. Soon, hell must be his portion forever! He had done nothing but evil continually all the days of his life. In the very last hour of his life, he is heard blaspheming and railing against the Lord Jesus. Yet, he was plucked from the fire by omnipotent mercy! Saved by the Son of God! He was just about to step into everlasting damnation, when the omnipotent hand of the Son of God seized him and lifted him up to Paradise!

Oh, what grace is here! What boundless love! What power to save! Who after this need despair? Truly our Lord Jesus Christ is mighty to save!

7. **How near you may be to Christ, and yet be lost forever!**

The other thief was as near the Saviour as the one who was saved. Yet, he perished. He went to hell from the very side of the Son of God, from the very presence of Immanuel!

There are two men. Both are thieves. Both are damned. Both are lost. Both are without God, without Christ, without hope! Both are in the immediate presence of the crucified Christ. One is taken up to glory. One is taken up to heaven. The other is cast down to hell. What made the difference? Turn to Romans 6, and I will show you.

(Romans 6:23) "For the wages of sin *is* death; but the gift of God *is* eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Throughout the Word of God we are constantly assured of these two facts. *First, if anyone goes to hell*, it is his fault, his own responsibility, altogether the result of what he has done, and that for which he alone must bear the blame forever. *Second, if anyone is saved*, if anyone goes to heaven, it is God's fault, altogether the result of that which God has done, and that for which God alone must have the praise forever.

"The wages of sin is death!" — Sin is **what we all are** by nature; and sin is **all that we do** in a state of rebellion against God. It is as impossible for a sinner to do good as it is for water to be dry. Our corrupt nature corrupts all our thoughts, feelings, words, and deeds. As a corrupt fountain only brings forth corrupt water, so a corrupt heart only brings forth corruption. That means that the very plowing of the wicked is an abomination to God, and even our righteousnesses are filthy rags in his sight (Prov. 21:4; Isa. 64:6). Sin is also **our choice**. We all drink iniquity like water (Job 15:16). And that which sin **deserves is death**, eternal death, which is eternal separation from God and the eternal vengeance of his holy wrath. Death is the debt God owes to sin. And God always pays his debts. The one thief went to hell because he ate the fruit of his own way!

"But the gift of God is eternal life!" — Eternal life comes to guilty sinners not as a debt, or a reward for something we have done, but as the free grace gift of God. The new birth, which is the beginning of eternal life in the soul, is the gift of God. Faith in Christ is the gift of God. Heavenly glory, which is the consummation of eternal life, is also the gift of God. Death, hell, and judgment are things we earn by sin. But grace, life, and heaven are things freely given to sinners *"through Jesus Christ our Lord!"*

Christ, having paid the debt of sin for his people by his death upon the cross, has made it right and just for the holy Lord God, who must punish sin, to give eternal life to all for whom he died. Through the merits of Christ, through his blood and righteousness, God gives eternal life to everyone who believes on him. Even the faith by which we receive this gift is the gift of God and the result of his operation of grace (Eph.2:8; Col.1:12). Faith in Christ is not the cause of God's gift, but the result of it. If you now believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, God has given you eternal life! It is altogether his work! *"Salvation is of the Lord!"*

How fearful! What a lesson, what a sermon is here! Was there ever such a warning given to us! Can any of you be nearer to Christ than that thief was? Looking at Him, hearing Him, speaking to Him! He was lost after all! Be warned! Outward nearness, religious duties, familiarity with the Word of God, baptism, eating and drinking the symbols of the Savior's body and blood, none of these things can save! You may be very near Christ, and yet not be in Christ. Salvation is not being near Christ. Salvation is being found in Christ!

8. **Because he save others, the Lord Jesus Christ could not save himself.** — *"He saved others; himself he cannot save"* (Matt. 27:42; Mark 15:31).

That is the very essence of the gospel! The Son of God died as our Substitute. Because he saved us he had to sacrifice himself!

(Hebrews 10:9-14) "Then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second. (10) By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once *for all*. (11) And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: (12) But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; (13) From henceforth

expecting till his enemies be made his footstool. (14) For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.”

(1 Peter 3:18) “For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit.”

(1 Peter 1:18-20) “Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation *received* by tradition from your fathers; (19) But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: (20) Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you.”

(1 Peter 2:24) “Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.”

9. **Here I see the law of the Nazarite fulfilled in the true Nazarene, our great King.**

(Luke 23:38) “And a superscription also was written over him in letters of Greek, and Latin, and Hebrew, THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.”

(John 19:19) “And Pilate wrote a title, and put *it* on the cross. And the writing was, JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS.”

In the light of all these things, my heart cries, — “*God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.*”

Amen.