

Luke 23:44-49
Death That Delivers

Intro: There are a few things that make being a disciple of Jesus Christ difficult.

- 1) Being a disciple places a huge demand on your life. It's a whole-hearted commitment. God calls his people to a radical change agenda.
- 2) Being a disciple means believing everything that God says in his Word. Big miracles and hard sayings.
- 3) Being a disciple finally means you spend a lot of time focused on death—not our own death, but Christ's death. The hero of our story hangs on a cross. For centuries God's people have sung about it, studied it, taught it, shared it, and risked their lives for it. Followers of Jesus shape their entire lives around Christ's death.

It's not just that that he died, or the way he died (being heroic), but *what his death achieved*.

There are several things Jesus *achieved* that are the focus of this passage— redemption, reconciliation, deliverance.

We begin with one people often miss: judgment.

Jesus's death and judgment (v44)

- The first thing we note is a time reference. Hebrew timekeeping was different than ours. There were 12-hour increments of daylight, 3 watches of the night each lasting 4 hours.
- Sixth hour was midday, ninth was mid-afternoon. Jesus's crucifixion began early morning— 3rd hour (cf. Mk 15:25)—darkness covers the land at the sixth (noon-3pm).
- God works *in time*. Time matters. It's how God has ordered his creation to function. He works with time, yet unlike us, he is not ruled by the clock (i.e. never in a hurry or late).

(Gal 4:4-5) ⁴But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, ⁵to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

- There is another detail: darkness. Not normal, but supernatural darkness.
- Darkness in the Bible is a symbol of judgment (Amos 8:9).

- The darkness reminds us of another critical time in Israel’s history: The Exodus story—A time when God showed his awesome holy power to redeem.
- In order to save his people Israel from bondage, God sent plagues over the land.
- Exodus 6:6 ‘I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will *deliver* you from slavery to them, and I will *redeem* you with an outstretched arm and with great *acts of judgment*.

** Notice some of the key words that describe God’s action: deliver, redeem, act of judgment.

- Before the final 10th plague of striking down the firstborn son, God sent a plague of darkness (Ex 10:21). “Then the Lord said to Moses, stretch out your hand toward heaven, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, a darkness *to be felt*.”

Imagine a darkness like when you are in a cave and turn your flashlight out.

- The point of this darkness is *judgment*.
- But it’s also setting up for the final act of God’s redemption. In Exodus, the 10th plague is the *death of the firstborn*.

To get redemption right, we need to get judgment right. The Exodus story teaches that it foreshadows Christ’s redemptive work. *God redeems through acts of judgment*. Egypt had to be judged so Israel could be set free.

On the cross, Jesus had to be judged so that his blood-bought people could be set free. Salvation always and only comes through *judgment*. Judgment is a necessary part of salvation. That’s why it’s not right to focus our attention on a God of exclusive love who lacks judgment—no salvation there.

Judgment reminds us of our *human condition*. Yes, our sin is really that awful. We are not some decent people who make a few mistakes and blunders from time to time. We are not like that cute toddler who throws a temper tantrum and we still think it’s cute. No, we are deeply rebellious, even the smallest sin in our eyes makes us utterly detestable in God’s sight and unfit to stand before him.

Sin must be judged. The truth is, we either have our sin judged on the cross, or we take it to our grave and it will be judged eternally in the torment of hell.

Judgment is not the only word.

Jesus's death and reconciliation (45)

- The temple curtain is torn; it was probably about as thick as our hand.
- This act of God shows two things:
- First, again, judgment. Judgment seems to fit the context of what was happening with cosmic darkness. Jesus spent time in the temple and was overall rejected by the leaders. There is judgment on the temple and people.
- But also, Jesus is the *new temple* according to Jn 2:19-21. Jesus replaces the temple.

In other words, God's true temple, His Son, is judged—Jesus's death opened up a new way to God.

Just think of a theater. There is a curtain for obvious reasons, so the audience does not see all the craziness happening behind the scenes. Curtains conceal, hide, restrict access. But that all changed on that Good Friday. *The cross moves from restricted access to reconciliation.*

(2 Cor 5:17-18) “¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. ¹⁸ All this is from God, who through Christ *reconciled* us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation;”

To be part of God's new creation in Christ means reconciliation. The relationship that was once fractured has been mended, healed, and restored.

Illus: I fractured my arm at 11 on a skateboard. It was really painful. But at the hospital the Dr. told me he would need to cause more pain to set the arm back in place. Yet the pain was essential to get my bones mended. I had to *trust* his intentions and special care.

When we look at the cross, we need to trust the Father's intentions, his reconciling work.

Jesus's death and redemption (v46)

- This verse shows us what the final moments of Christ look like.
- Even though he is bearing the full weight of God's judgment for our sin, he is still praying, still trusting.
- From the lips of our Savior comes a quote from Ps 31:5a.

One of the final pictures we have of Christ before he dies is trust. Jesus shows us what it looks like to die with an intimate trust in God the Father.

Jesus trusted that death was not the final word in his life.

I can't help but think there is a model here of what it looks like to die with faith. Jesus dies in total submission to God and *full of peace*. Are you prepared not just to live by faith, but die in faith? Dying with faith means entrusting our souls to God. We can call on the Father who controls all things. God will be merciful; he can be trusted at death.

Christian friends, in our dying moment we can rest in God our Father. Dying faith also means clinging in hope to the Word to the very end. Another reason why we should have much scripture hidden in our heart. If Jesus needed it on the cross, we need it on our deathbed.

- But Jesus is not mainly a model of dying well. He is the One who brings redemption. The cross is a work of redemption.
- This redeeming work is anticipated early in Luke 2:38 by the prophetess Anna. When Jesus is presented in the temple, Anna spoke about him “to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.”

Def: Redemption simply means to deliver from some sort of evil by *paying a price*.

In the NT, it focuses in two areas:

1. Redemption is God's work of delivering from spiritual bondage to himself.
2. Redemption also means the end time deliverance and return of Christ and resurrection.

(e.g. Rom 8:23) “we groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.”

—We can say redemption looks back and looks ahead.

There is a place to discuss the second type, but I want us to focus on the first. Redemption is God delivering from spiritual bondage to himself. To be a Redeemer you must have the ability to do two things: pay the price and have the power. Jesus has both. Power and price.

He pays the price with his blood. *When Jesus breathes his last breath, that's what he does: his death is the payment price for the church.*

(Eph 1:7) “⁷ In him we have *redemption* through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace,”

+Christ has the *power* to be a redeemer.

- Keep this in mind, biblical redemption is being redeemed from, *away* or out of something.
- For example, Israel is redeemed from slavery;
- Redemption is an “out of” work—Jesus redeems out of sin and death.
- He is the only One who has the power.

A slave could not redeem another slave. He is powerless to do it. Likewise, a man tainted with sin and under a death sentence could not redeem. But the Son of God can.

(Titus 2:14) “our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, ¹⁴ who gave himself for us to *redeem* us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.”

(Rev 1:9) “To him who loved us and *freed* us from our sins by his blood.”

Blood brings freedom. The cross is a death that delivers.

The testimony of countless Christians is how God set them free from a past life enslaved to sin. There are some here today that sin is still your master. Do you like it? Do you want to continue in that life? There is freedom though the cross.

Also, a reminder to all fellow believers, we’ve been set free!

Sin no longer has the dominating control of us, Christ is Master and Lord!

Jesus’s death and God’s glory (47-49)

- So how do we respond to the cross? The final few verses show us.
- Working backwards from v49 Jesus’s followers were watching. This would confirm their testimony that he truly died before he rose.
- Others were mourning—fulfilling Zech 12:10—they shall look on the one pierced and mourn for him.
- But then there is the Roman centurion (officer of the Army).

He praises and professes (v47)

Lit: He began glorifying God and declared Christ is innocent—or righteous.

Several things are striking:

1. These words come from an unlikely person. He is literally a Christ-killer. But from what we've seen in Luke, God is often at work in the unlikely. The first person after Jesus dies, glorifies God and confesses truth about Jesus – it is a *surprise*. Grace surprises.

2. It's a picture of what our takeaway from the cross should be.

When you hear about the cross, about judgment, reconciliation and redemption, what does it move you to do?

The truth of the cross should move us to glorify God and exalt Christ's righteousness.

In other words, the cross is never mainly about us, it's all about him. We receive the benefits, but God's glorious grace is praised!

We've truly comprehended the cross when we turn our eyes away from ourselves and turn them to him. Turning our eyes to him we fall to our knees and praise him for glorious grace!