

THE THREE CROSSES

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Introduction

In Glacier National Park, there is a place called triple divide peak. Rain falls on this peak and gets separated into three different directions, and thus end up in one of three oceans (Arctic, Pacific, Atlantic). Depending on where the raindrop lands, it could end up a world apart from the raindrop it falls next to.

When it comes to deciding who Jesus is, depending on what side of the line you decide to go down determines the direction of where our lives will go.

Luke 23:32-43, "Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. 33 When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left. 34 Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing. And they divided up his clothes by casting lots."

CONTEXT OF THE CROSS:

The Romans perfected the art of execution. Dying on a cross meant your pain and death was prolonged for the maximum amount of pain for the longest amount of time in the most shameful way possible.

Insurrectionists, the ones who shook their fists at the ones in power, who were the Romans, were the ones who were crucified.

JESUS IS SAYING SOMETHING UNEXPECTED:

Forgive them. This was so radical and so unexpected. In Matthew's gospel it looks like both criminals were hauling insults. So there appears to have been a change in heart in one of them in Luke's gospel.

We live in a day of both praise and mockery towards Jesus.

Luke 23:35-37, "The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is God's Messiah, the Chosen One." 36 The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar 37 and said, "If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself."

Jesus was not going to allow the pain he was experiencing to be minimized. He was going to take the full weight of the punishment.

Luke 23:38, "There was a written notice above him, which read: this is the king of the jews."

The acrostic of "The King of the Jews" was YHWH. This is why the people were upset that Pilate had this written above Jesus. The reality is Jesus is King, and He has a Kingdom.

Luke 23:39-43, "One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" 40 But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence? 41 We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong." 42 Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." 43 Jesus answered him, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise."

Jesus did not die alone. Jesus died as He lived: By keeping company to those society would marginalize.

700 years before Jesus was crucified, *Isaiah 53 said, "He was numbered among the wicked."*

[Sistine Chapel Picture]

In this picture, God is the one reaching out to us. We tend to focus on the point where the fingers come together. But if you pan out, you get more of the gospel.

The first Adam God was reaching too. But if you look around the left arm of God, we see Mary and we see God's left hand touching a baby (who is Jesus). Even as He is reaching the first Adam, He has a plan with the second man (Jesus). Jesus would be the sinless lamb of God who would willingly give up His life.

We see at Jesus' death God coming between two horrible people and saying "I can give you life."

WE'RE GOING TO LOOK AT ALL THE RESPONSES OF THE MEN.

The first man says "aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and save us!" This man's conviction is this: "Messiahs are not supposed to die. They are supposed to conquer. If you are really God, get me out of my jam." Sometimes we bargain with God. It is a qualification that basically says that "I want a God who can do what I want, take directions, but not have his own thoughts about my life." We treat God like a tool, like a tire iron. We don't love the tire iron, but we love the car. We love God not as an end, but as a means to an end.

The second man says, "Don't you fear God since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." This guy recognized that he needs to change what his life has been centered on. He now wants to have God at the center of his life. He had a little faith, but he said "Jesus, you are King, please remember me." It is a "I trust you" statement. Jesus said to Him "Today," because the criminal wanted Jesus to not forget him.

Isaiah 49:15-16b: "Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! 16 See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands;"

For eternity, you will serve a risen savior with nail scars in His hands. He can't forget you! His scars are a sign that He will not forget us.

Jesus didn't come to save Himself. He came to save us.

God always has the final word. Through Him, we get to enter into the Kingdom life not just in the future when we die, but today.

On the basis of our relationship we have with Jesus, we get to have access to the Father's Kingdom.

Salvation is immediate ("Today") and it's relational ("you will be with me").

Even as we await for the fullness of what's to come, we live free and live eternal life now. The Holy Spirit comes into our life as a down payment of what's to come.

The resurrection validates what happened on the cross.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Where do you see yourself in this story?
2. What can it look like to live the eternal life offered in Jesus today?
3. What is your story of what life was like before you committed your life to Jesus? If you are not a follower of Jesus, what hesitations, questions, fears keep you from following Jesus?
4. When have you felt as if God had forgotten you?
5. What would it look like for you to always remember that God never forgets you ("I have engraved you on the palms of my hands.")?