

“The Third Cross”

(Luke 23:39-43)

Dr. Richard S. Koole
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I. Introduction

A. The song, “Oh Glorious Day”

1. The theology in the chorus

Living, He loved me
Dying, He saved me
Buried, He carried my sins far away
Rising, He justified freely forever
One day He’s coming
Oh glorious day

B. Celebrating the Resurrection

1. What Christians have been proclaiming for two thousand years
2. **“He’s Alive!”**
3. And we await his return
 - a. **“Oh glorious day”**
4. Our hope of Heaven
 - a. I Corinthians 2:9

(9) No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him

5. I can’t wait!
6. **I’m so glad you are here today!!!**

C. The book “Heaven is for Real”

1. Number one seller in America
2. The story of a boy named Colton

“Colton, not yet four years old, told his parents he left his body during emergency surgery—and authenticated that claim by describing exactly what his parents were doing in another part of the hospital while he was being operated on. He talked of visiting heaven and relayed stories told to him by people he met there whom he had never met in his life, sharing events that happened even before he was born. He also astonished his parents with descriptions and obscure details about heaven that matched the Bible exactly, though he had not yet learned to read.”

3. The touching story of his “unborn sister”
 - a. The miscarriage and grief
 - b. Her words to her mother
4. Mom can’t wait to see her in Heaven

D. Who do you want to see first in Heaven?

1. Jesus has to be number one
2. But who do you want to see next?
 - a. Carolyn and I have an “unborn child” in heaven
 - b. Don’t know whether a son or daughter
 - c. What a moment that will be

E. There will be some real surprises in Heaven

1. Those who didn’t make it
 - a. But I thought they should
 1. Good lives
 2. But never trusted in Christ
 - b. John 14:6

I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me

- c. As they faced Jesus.... “Sorry, I never knew you”

2. Those who did make it
 - a. But I never thought they would
3. Josh McDowell at the Alpha dinner
 - a. Shared a confession of what happened to him from 7 to 12
 1. Seven years of being raped
 2. Had just told his wife
 3. The secrets we hold
 - b. His father's story
 1. A wicked and brutal man
 2. Hated by all who knew him
 - c. Saved in the 12th hour
4. Not fair that they should make it to heaven
 - a. Like some of the people you know
 - b. "What's he or she doing here???"
 - c. "That's not fair!"
5. There's a guy like that in the Bible
 - a. We don't even know his name
 - b. A guy that no one thought would make it
 - c. Snuck in as the clock struck midnight
 - d. After a life of crime and debauchery
6. I'd like to sit down and talk with him

II. The Setting

A. Last Sunday was “Palm Sunday”

1. Thursday night and the “Last Supper”
2. The Trials
3. The Verdict

B. Friday and the Crucifixion

1. *The first three hours*

- a. What a horrible scene
- b. Three men on three crosses
- c. Cruel mockery
 1. The crowd’s taunts and spitting
 2. The religious leaders
 - a. “If you’re God, save yourself”
 3. The soldiers mocked and abused Jesus
 4. Even one of the thieves hanging next to Jesus
 - a. Luke 23:39

(39) One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: “Aren’t you the Christ? Save yourself and us!”

- b. Not a plea for help.... *“hurled insults at him”*
 - d. Meanwhile the soldiers gambled for his clothes
- ### 2. *The second three hours*
- a. Darkness
 - b. The mood changed dramatically
 1. Fear enveloped the crowd
 - c. Luke 23:44-49

(44) It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour, (45) for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. (46) Jesus called out with a loud voice, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” When he had said this, he breathed his last. (47) The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, “Surely this was a righteous man.” (48) When all the people who had gathered to witness this sight saw what took place, they beat their breasts and went away. (49) But all those who knew him, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.

d. I’ll bet Mary and Martha were there with the women

C. What did Jesus say while on the cross?

1. *“Father forgive them for they know not what they do”*
2. *“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”*
3. *“Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.”*
4. *“It is finished”*

D. But Jesus said one more thing...privately

1. To a very unlikely man
2. To the guy on the third cross
3. What did Jesus say to him?

E. Background (Luke 23:32-38)

(32) Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with Jesus to be executed. (33) When they came to the place called the Skull, there they crucified him, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left,

III. Text...Luke 23

A. The Scorners’ Cross (v. 39)

(39) One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: “Aren’t you the Christ? Save yourself and us!”

1. The similarities of the two thieves

- a. Both were suffering the pain of crucifixion
- b. Both were guilty of terrible crimes
 - 1. On death row
- c. Both had lived awful lives
- d. Both had heard the taunts of the crowd

(35) The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, “He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, 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.”

- e. Both saw Jesus with the sign over his head
 - a. Luke 23:35-38

(38) There was a written notice above him, which read: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.

- f. Both had heard the same words from his mouth
 - a. Luke 23:34

(34) Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”

- g. Both wanted desperately to be saved from death
- 2. Yet the one thief joined in the mockery
 - a. So close to the savior
 - b. God’s offer of forgiveness
 - c. Yet he rejected the Son of God
- 3. But what about the other thief?
 - a. The guy on the third cross?
- 4. Totally different response

B. The Sinner’s Cross (vs. 40-42)

*****what we know about this unnamed criminal**

1. He rebuked the mocker (vs. 39-40)

(39) One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: “Aren’t you the Christ? Save yourself and us!” (40) But the other criminal rebuked him.

- a. Definition of “rebuke”
 - 1. “to criticize or reprove sharply, to reprimand”
 - 2. “Shame on you!”
- b. “How dare you mock Him”
- c. He’s not the cause of our suffering
- d. He had the courage to stand for the truth

2. He feared God

(40) But the other criminal rebuked him. “Don’t you fear God,” he said, “since you are under the same sentence?”

- a. He recognized he was in the presence of his creator
- b. What he had already witnessed
- c. He heard Jesus ask God to forgive them

3. He admitted that he deserved to be punished

(41) We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve.

- a. Many don’t feel they deserve their suffering
- b. We all deserve to be punished for our sins
- c. He pled “guilty” and was acquitted by Jesus

4. He acknowledged that Jesus was righteous

(41) “...but this man has done nothing wrong.”

- a. What an admission
- b. Jesus was without sin

- c. The Centurion agreed that Jesus didn't deserve to be on the cross
- d. And so did Pilate

5. He asked Jesus to be his savior

(42) Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

- a. The sinner's prayer?
- b. He believed in Jesus
 - 1. Do you?
- c. ***"Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved"***

C. The Savior's Cross (v. 43)

(43) Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."

1. Saved Without Delay

- a. ***"Today"***
- b. At the moment of death
- c. No holding tank
- d. At his last breath
- e. His body remained on the cross...but his soul went with Jesus

2. Saved Without Merit

- a. The thief didn't deserve to be saved
- b. "Not fair!"
 - 1. "Sinned all his life and still got in"
- c. Josh McDowell's dad
 - 1. Used to tie him up when friends came over
- d. None of us deserve Paradise either

e. Romans 5:6-8

(6) You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. (7) Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. (8) But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

f. Not fair that I should be saved

3. Saved Without Sin

a. The blood of Christ covered him

b. “This is how it feels to be free!”

c. God looked at the thief and saw his son

4. Saved by Jesus

a. Today you will be with me “***in Paradise***”

1. I Corinthians 2:9

(9) No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him

2. Revelation 2:7

(7) He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God

3. II Corinthians 12:2-4....Like young Colton

(2) I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know—God knows. (3) And I know that this man.... (4) was caught up to paradise. He heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell.

b. What a change!

1. The thief’s record wiped clean

c. Our glorious hope

IV. The Rest of the Story

A. His Death

B. His Burial

C. His Resurrection

1. Matthew 28:1-8

(1) After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. (2) There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. (3) The angel's appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. (4) The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men. (5) The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. (6) He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. (7) Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you." (8) So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples.

D. The importance of the resurrection

Max Lucado in his book "Six Hours One Friday" tells the story of a missionary in Brazil who discovered a tribe of Indians in a remote part of the jungle. They lived near a large river.

The tribe was in need of medical attention. A contagious disease was ravaging the population. People were dying daily. A hospital was not too terribly far away...across the river, but the Indians would not cross it because they believed the river was inhabited by evil spirits. And to enter its water would mean certain death. The missionary explained how he had crossed the river and was unharmed. But they were not persuaded. He then took them to the bank of the river and placed his hand in the water. They still wouldn't go in. He walked into the water up to his waist and splashed water on his face. It didn't matter. They were still afraid to enter the river. Finally, he dove into the river, swam beneath the surface until he emerged on the other side. He raised a triumphant fist into the air. He had entered the water and escaped. It was then that the Indians broke into a cheer and followed him across.

Isn't that what Jesus did? He entered the river of death and came out on the other side so that we might no longer fear death, but find eternal life in Him.

O death, where is your sting?

E. Why did God include the story of the thief on the cross?

1. There's room for the worst of us

- a. The thief was the least deserving
 - 1. Death row
- b. Jesus paid for even the worst of sins and sinners
- c. Josh McDowell's father
- d. Calvary covers it all

2. It wasn't fair...it was mercy

- a. The thief didn't deserve salvation
 - 1. Not fair that God would rescue any of us
- b. Our God is a God of mercy

3. Each of us must decide

- a. What about the guy of the second cross?
 - 1. Rejected Jesus
- b. What happened to him when he died

4. Death marks a turning point

- a. Two men faced their final opportunity
- b. Hebrews 9:27

(27) Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment

- c. Now is the time to decide
 - 1. II Corinthians 6:2

(2) I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation.

V. Summary

A. The two thieves the following day

1. Where did they go?

- 2. Next week.... “All about Hell”**

- a. Hades, Hell, Gehenna, Sheol, Lake of Fire, etc.

- b. Paradise, Abraham’s Bosom, the New Jerusalem, Heaven, etc.

B. We’re like the thieves on the crosses

1. We don’t deserve salvation either

2. But it’s being freely offered

3. Salvation is possible because Christ is risen from the dead

4. Nobody is beyond the reach of His love

C. Christ calls us to awaken

1. The thief awoke a new creation

2. Jesus is not afraid of your past

3. *I will rise when he calls my name. No more sorrow, no more shame.*