

INTRO:

Alright Friends, come-on back...If ya have a Bible and I hope ya do, go ahead and make your way to the Gospel of **Luke. Ch.23**. We're looking at **vv.32-43** tonight on **pp.609-610** of you Table Bibles...Show of hands here: how many of you have been to the Grand Canyon/Anyone? Ok good/couple people! Can I ask you: What was your experience? For those of us who haven't been there, what's it like?...Awesome thanks! How bout one more person?...Great thanks!...So I haven't actually been there, but I'll tell ya: What I heard in those accounts was a number of NOT conflicting details by any means, but different ones, which is to be expected right? I mean if your description was looking out from the southern rim for example, it wouldn't conflict, but it would definitely be different than someone, who was say, looking out from the northern rim. And actually, not only would those two accounts NOT conflict, but TOGETHER they'd actually give us a more accurate picture of the OF the Grand Canyon right?...When you come to the 4 Gospels - Matthew, Mark, Luke and John - what you have are four specific perspectives on the "Grand Canyon" that is the person and work of Jesus. **Matthew**, as we saw two weeks ago, focused on **Who** Jesus is; **Mark** as we saw last week on **What** the real Jesus really did...And today **Luke**, focused on **How** Jesus did what He did...Which is WHY, the story we're looking at this evening is unique to Luke - a conversation from the Cross, that only He includes, not only to help us understand **How** Jesus died, but to get YOU to basically ask yourself tonight: **Do you really get it? Is Jesus real to you?**¹ SO...let's hear the reading of God's word...**Sharkey** Reads...

TEXT:

Thanks **Sharkey**...So stealing from J.D. Greear here, what this scene gives you is really the account of "3 Crosses" - **The Cross of Redemption; Rejection; and Repentance** - TOGETHER asking you, **Do you get it?** Cuz you see, **v.32** says that "*two...criminals, were led away to be put to death with (Jesus).*" And there's debate as to who these guys were; EITHER murdering thieves, and I say murdering, because thieving wasn't a capital offense. They wouldn't be crucified if all they'd done was steal. So they must have killed those they robbed. OR based on other places in which the word "*criminals*" is used, they could have been insurrectionists wanting to overthrow Rome.² EITHER WAY, we're talking violent, desperate men, BEING as it says, "*crucified on either side of Jesus,*" at a place called "*The Skull*" or in Hebrew "Golgotha," because the rock face on top of which these 3 crosses would've been, looked like a skull. I've actually been in Israel to where they think this was and it's true, it looks like a skull's been naturally etched into the rock...But the reason I point out WHO these men were and WHERE they were crucified is because it's Luke/like we saw Matthew do BOTH locating Jesus in historical time and space AND highlighting Jesus' identification with sinners in both His life and now His redemptive death/**The Cross of Redemption**: Cuz in **v.33**, you see Luke gives us, really, the 2 irreducible essentials to understanding Jesus' Redemption. Write these down: **First**, that it's ACCORDING to the Father's Plan...And **Second**, It's BY Jesus' Death...**According to the**

¹ Responding to Jesus - The Meaning of Jesus—Part 4; The Kingdom of God—April 27, 2003 - Luke 23:33–56 - Timothy J. Keller, *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive* (New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2013).

² Explanation adapted from insights in: You Will Be with Me - The "Amens" of Jesus; The Challenge of the Cross—April 8, 2001 - Luke 23:32–43 + Responding to Jesus - The Meaning of Jesus—Part 4; The Kingdom of God—April 27, 2003 - Luke 23:33–56 - Timothy J. Keller, *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive* (New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2013). + "Three Crosses" // Luke 23:32–43 // The Whole Story #37 - J.D. Greear

Father's plan: You see again where it says that Jesus was crucified with criminals on His right and left. If you were to go back to **Isaiah 53:12**, you'd find a prophecy stating that the Messiah would be, quote, "*numbered with the transgressors*"...And so what Luke's doing is showing you and me, not only, that THAT prophecy is being fulfilled as Jesus is literally numbered alongside these two violent men, but more importantly, that HERE, at the darkest, most unjust, wicked time in human history - God is still in control! I think a lot of us, when we think about redemption, we think only in terms of the future. That yeah one day things'll be great, but in the meantime, it's up to me. The result of which is course is all kinds worry and psychosis. But, if the **Cross of Redemption** tells you nothing, it tells you that the answer to worry, fear, depression in many respect, is not a trouble free-life or an invulnerable future, but a relationship with the God who promises that neither a hair falling from your head, nor an act of injustice like that against His Son, happens without his knowledge AND permission. **It's according to the Father's plan!**

But you also see, God's redemption is specifically **BY Jesus's death**. Luke says very plainly/ almost brutally, "*there they crucified him.*" And ya know a lot of people get confused on this - as to how Jesus got on the Cross in the first place, especially when His life was filled with miracles, healing people, and doing good. But ya gotta understand that Jesus got pretty sideways with almost everybody of His day. As we saw last week, the religious leaders became incredibly jealous and fearful of Him because His claims to be God threatened their authority. The secular leaders of Jesus' time, basically considered Him a nuisance cuz He wouldn't bow to the almighty power of Rome. Even the Jewish people were disappointed in Jesus, because they assumed that the first thing the Messiah would do would be overthrow Rome. And yet, Jesus' life was, you'd have to say characterized by, non-intervention - ya know, restoring sight to the blind, healing those born lame, cleansing lepers, and preaching good news. And so, as J.D. Greear says, in a sense, "*Jesus' crucifixion represents the culmination of the collective failure of the human race.*"³ ALL our jealousy, arrogance, disappointment and unbelief put on one person...And so you say, "*How does Jesus get to the cross/why does He have to die?*" Because you and I aren't getting better on our own. Sure maybe we've advanced technologically as a race, but can we honestly say we're less jealous, less angry, less arrogant than we were in Jesus' time? Of course not!...After his horrific experience in a Russian Gulag, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn wrote this/listen: "*If only there were evil people somewhere, insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But no! The line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being.*" That from a man who saw the worst of human evil, saying essentially, "*I'm no different/you're no different than those Russian captors*"...There was a movie that came out last year called "*Unhinged*" with Russell Crowe, who plays a psychopath exacting vengeance through road-rage and stuff. And the sub-title to the movie is this: "*He...Can Happen...To Anyone,*" meaning, given the right circumstances we could all experience/OR even become unhinged like Him.

And by-and-large, I think we understand that. Cuz the reality is, no matter where you go in the world, you'll find a society that, while it may not use the word "sin," and might even espouse

³ "Three Crosses" // Luke 23:32- 43 // The Whole Story #37 - J.D. Greear

that everything's relative; nevertheless has an understanding of things that are and are not acceptable. Even here in the US, where we pride ourselves on being "tolerant," we still find extreme intolerance of certain "sins." And so the question is not "IF" sin is our problem, but "HOW" to deal with it. And for many, that "how" simply comes down to getting people to sin less. This is why we've created correctional facilities, rehab. programs, ethics classes, and self-help books. Everything from capitalism to communism, movements for more freedom and less, have all tried to heal our sense of sin, but have fallen short because they cannot and will never change the human heart. We NEED a different kind of salvation/a new kind of Savior - one who by entering into history, does for us what we could never do for ourselves; namely, give us a righteousness that's not our own. As **1 Peter 3:18** says, "*Christ suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God.*" That's the **Cross of Redemption!** That though you are more wicked and sinful than you ever dared believe, at the very same time you're more loved and accepted in Christ than you ever dared hope.⁴

Which brings me **Second**, to the **Cross of Rejection**... and just how EASY it is for us to miss/not get/even reject that redemption. Cuz you see in **vv.35-39**, everyone from the rulers, to the soldiers, to the criminals are "*scoffing and mocking*" Jesus right? They're literally looking right at the Son of God and not getting it. And before we stand in judgement over them consider why: Their motivations, which sadly, are the same motivations WE often have... which is that they see Jesus as merely a means rather than an end! Cuz look: The religious leaders say, "*if He's the Chosen One, let Him save Himself,*" and "*Chosen One*" was a designation for the Messiah from **Isaiah 42:1**. So meaning, "*He can't be the Messiah for us. He can't even save Himself.*" Then the pagan/secular soldiers say, "*If you're the King of the Jews, save yourself,*" meaning "*clearly this guy isn't fit to be OUR king, cuz He can even help His people much less Himself.*" And then one of the criminals, "*If you're the Christ, save yourself and us,*" meaning "*I'll believe you're the Christ/the Messiah if you get me out of this.*" **So you see?** They all see Jesus as a means, and as a result ALL miss Him... Cuz of course, there's a difference between seeking God and seeking help from God right? I see this all the time: People who claim to love God/even serve God... WHEN they find God useful. But the minute He's not/doesn't give em the job or fix the marriage, or even the minute He does, they stop following Him, cuz there's no longer a use FOR Him. He was just a means to another end... But you understand, when you say, "*God, I'll be with you when you give me this or follow you if you do that,*" what've you done? You've just admitted that your real God is not GOD, but the thing you want FROM God... and you stand to miss Him!

Years ago, I was discipling a guy. He wasn't a Christian/He knew I was and we'd developed a pretty good friendship. And he calls me up one day and says, "*hey can we meet?*" I said, "*sure.*" So we grab coffee and he tells me that he's caught his long-time girlfriend cheating on him, and is just totally distraught. And so I listen and as I had opportunity just shared different things about my story and some of the hope we have in Christ, and when we left he told me how encouraged he was by meeting. So I invited him to meet again. We actually ended up spending about 6 months meeting and really just studying the Bible together. And during it, he's talking

⁴ Phrase adapted from "Responding to Jesus - The Meaning of Jesus—Part 4; The Kingdom of God—April 27, 2003 - Luke 23:33–56" - Timothy J. Keller, *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive* (New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2013).

bout encountering God for the first time and God doing all this stuff in his life...until one day he just kinda stops wantin' to meet. Ya know sorta keeps tellin' me he's always busy/cancels last minute/that kind of thing. So finally I ask him, *"hey how are you and your girlfriend?"* And he says, *"Oh yeah, we're great. Back together...Everything's good."* And it dawned on me: God was just a means to an end for him. So now that he and his girlfriend are good, he doesn't need God anymore...There's a big difference between God being a PART of your life and the CENTER of it. Ya know, arranging a kind of DEAL with Him and being surrendered TO Him.

Because ya notice lastly and very briefly here, it's that surrender that's at the heart of the ***Cross of Repentance***: Cuz if you look in **vv.40-43** we get this conversation between the other criminal and Jesus, which only Luke records. And it's incredibly significant because it includes 1 of the 2 what are called, "7 words of Jesus from the Cross" - 7 things Jesus uttered while on the Cross: the first being back in **v.34**, *"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."* And the second there in **v.43**, *"Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise."* And ya have to see that the reason WHY Jesus utters that second word there. It's BECAUSE, in contrast to the first criminal, this second one has somehow come to see Jesus NOT as a means, but an end. You see he rebukes the other criminal saying, *"we're receiving what we deserve, but this man has done nothing wrong."* And then turns to Jesus and says, *"remember me when you come into your kingdom."* /What's he saying?...He's saying NOT like the first criminal, *"Jesus I'll be with you if you get me out of this."* But *"Jesus, I wanna be with you even if you DON'T get me out of this."*⁵...And Friend, to be able to say that is nothing short of miraculous. Actually, Scripture's pretty clear that if any of us can say it, it's only because God has awakened us to a specific reality; namely that, in our search for "ends," Jesus is the ONLY end/the ONLY savior, who's willing to forgive you when you fail Him - *"Father forgive them, for they know not what they do."* BUT ALSO willing to bless you when you get Him - *"Today you will be with me in paradise"*...And I know we always think Jesus is just saying there that, *"If you believe in me, when you die, you'll go to heaven."* And of course that's true. But it's even more than that. In the Greek the prepositional emphasis is not on *"IN paradise,"* but *"WITH me."* Jesus is saying, *"today/right now you can be with ME, whether in life or in death. And by extension I'll be with YOU...precisely because I'm here FOR you on this Cross."*...I mean think about some of the implications of that: You facing some uncertainty in your life? He's with you!...You grieving a loss of some sort?...He's there with you!...You just feel like you've had a bad week/ disappointed God in some way? He's still with you! I mean the list goes on-and-on, because you see, every other so-called "savior" only ever PROMISES to bless you when you get it, but then ends up cursing you when you don't...Only Jesus blesses you when you get Him and forgives you when you don't...And like this criminal, when you really take that in, it moves you to want to move from having Jesus outside your life/or just as a part of your life, to Him being the center and end of your life! To Him being as real as possible to you...You've moved from the cross of rejection, to the cross of repentance, into the cross of redemption. May that be true for us and those around us!...***Let's Pray (NO Keys Underneath)***

⁵ Responding to Jesus - The Meaning of Jesus—Part 4; The Kingdom of God—April 27, 2003 - Luke 23:33-56 - Timothy J. Keller, *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive* (New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2013).